HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 08, 2022

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER in the Chair]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communications from Mr. Rodney Charles, MP, Member for Naparima and Ms. Anita Haynes, MP, Member for Tabaquite, who have requested leave of absence from today’s sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

CONDOLENCES

(MR. ALFONSO DE LIMA JR.)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as you may be aware, Mr. Alfonso De Lima, former Member of Parliament passed away on Saturday, April 02, 2022. Mr. De Lima served as the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/East during both the Third Independent Parliament from 1971 to 1976 and the First Republican Parliament from 1976 to 1981. I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes to Mr. De Lima. I now call upon Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular as the currently elected Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, it is my privilege and honour to share a few thoughts and words on the illustrious career and life of Mr. De Lima, Alfonso De Lima Jr.

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Mr. De Lima was born on August 20th, 1939. He was married, had five children and went to St. Mary’s College, which I was pleased to see, being an alumni myself. He also attended Belmont Boys Intermediate, now known as Belmont Boys Secondary Catholic School and Mount St. Benedict College. Mr. De Lima’s family came from Venezuela to Trinidad and Tobago and they made an indelible mark on Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular, Port of Spain, where I am sure most citizens in our country and certainly every constituent of Port of Spain is familiar with Y De Lima, the jewellers. His family were the founding members of Y De Lima. But today our celebration of his life was that in the early years of our independence Mr. De Lima served, was an elected Member first in the Third Independent Parliament for Port of Spain North/East which then became Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West and during that Parliament he served from the 18th of June, 1971, to the 19th of June, 1976.

Mr. De Lima went on to be further elected to our First Republican Parliament on the 24th of September, 1976, serving until the 18th of September, 1981. He was in the House of Representatives for the Third Independent Parliament during the years 1971 to 1976. He debated a number of Bills and I think it is important to put on the Hansard for his family and the De Lima family as we thank them here today for allowing Mr. De Lima the service that he gave to Trinidad and Tobago two quotations from former Members of Parliament who knew him. The first is from Overand Padmore who said of Mr. De Lima:

He was not a person given to flights of oratory and that sort of thing, but when he spoke, he spoke from the heart. You can tell when you are listening to somebody who is just uttering rhetoric or one who is sincere. He spoke from the heart and that was always evident. He was a man given to service virtually at all levels.
And what a glowing tribute. And then, from Mr. Errol Mahabir who said of Mr. De Lima:

A very, very, good Member of Parliament. He was very, very concerned about his constituents. In his speeches, he made it clear that he looked upon the interest of his constituents.

And today we celebrate his life as a former parliamentarian and someone who would have played a role in the formative years of the House of Representatives. We thank his family for allowing him to contribute and for supporting him during those years and I am sure after he stopped sitting, through the Y De Lima jewellery franchise he continued to contribute. In fact, in today’s *Guardian* newspaper you will see another story that is somewhat related from a former employee of Y De Lima who actually is attributed to fixing Maces that we now have in both Houses after the debacle of 1990.

So today, Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure and it is an honour as the current sitting Member for Port of Spain North/St. West and on behalf of the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago to celebrate the life of Mr. De Lima. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition we bring condolences to Mr. De Lima’s family and we would like to pay tribute to the life of Alfonso De Lima Jr., former Member of Parliament for the Port of Spain North/East in the Third Independent and First Republican Parliament.

Today we pay tribute to a man who was distinguished as he was dynamic. We pay tribute to a man who in private life while keeping his family business alive created
one of the greatest business entities in our nation. While in public life, he defined what all parliamentarians should strive to be, fighters for those they represent. Today it is important that we read his favorite quote into the Hansard because his words loudly echo the moral foundation upon which these hallowed halls are built. He said and I quote:

Do as much as you can possibly do for your constituency, and never give up on them because without them you are nowhere. They are your bosses and we are not their boss.

As an MP in our First Republican Parliament, it was individuals like Mr. De Lima who through their service ensured the wheels of democracy began rolling in our nation. For this, we stand grateful in this Twelfth Parliament. While he left our Parliament decades ago, his words should remain the inspiration for decades more on the future MPs who will one day sit within these special Chambers.

Mr. De Lima, grandson of the iconic jewellery proprietor, Y De Lima, has also had his dedicated passion firmly rooted in the economic development of this nation. His involvement with Living Waters Community showed a man who was committed to spirituality and humanity. We have lost a good man. On behalf of the Opposition, may his soul rest in peace. I thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I too would like to pay tribute to Mr. Alfonso Behrens De Lima Jr. During his tenure in this House, in the Third Independent Parliament, Mr. De Lima contributed to many debates. These included debates on the National Insurance Registration Bill, 1971; the Trinidad and Tobago Music Festival Association Bill, 1972 and the Motion to Approve the Throne Speech of His Excellency the Governor General. He was also appointed to numerous committees included: The Public Accounts Committee; the House Committee and
Condolences (Mr. Alfonso De Lima Jr.) 2022.04.08
Mr. Lee (cont’d)

the Special Select Committees on the Mechanics Lodge Bill; the Soroptimist Club (Inc’n) Bill; Bethel Evangelistic Missions (Inc’n) Bill and the Moravian Church (Inc’n) Bill, amongst others.

Mr. De Lima also served on the Public Accounts Committee and the Special Select Committees on the St. John’s Ambulance Association and Brigade (Inc’n) Bill and the First United Church of Jesus Christ (Apostolic) (Inc’n) Bill, amongst others, during the First Republican Parliament.

Throughout his life Mr. De Lima was a serviceman. He served this country on the macro level as an Army Cadet Force Officer, 2nd Lieutenant and as a Government backbencher in Parliament under the tutelage of the late Dr. Eric Williams. As an astute businessman, he used his influence as a Member of Parliament to assist those in need, both in his constituency and those visiting his business for aid.

During a parliamentary broadcast feature on the profile of Mr. De Lima many of his associates and family friends collectively described him as a humble, friendly and very approachable man. Mr. Overand Padmore, a former parliamentarian and friend, described Mr. De Lima as a man of service rather than a man of self-aggrandizement. Mr. De Lima’s focus was the people and his constituents, as he believed that the citizens were integral to the success of an elected Member of Parliament because without their support the fight would be futile. From this we can conclude that he was not haughty in his approach to politics, rather he was inclined to modesty.

Mr. De Lima dedicated his time after political life to charitable causes. His later years were devoted to working with the Living Water Community and he even engaged his family in assisting him with charitable work in and around the City of Port of Spain.
I take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the De Lima family during this time of mourning and I pray that Almighty grants them peace and consolation during this time of bereavement. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

*The House of Representatives stood.*

**Madam Speaker:** May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Members, an appropriate letter will be sent to convey our condolences to the family of the late Mr. Alfonso De Lima.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Interim Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Response of the Public Authorities to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago. *[The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh)]*

2. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Education to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA) on an Inquiry into the role of NHERST as it pertains to the development of the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) sector in Trinidad and Tobago, First Session (2020/2021), Twelfth Parliament. *[The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly)]*

3. Administrative Report of the Occupational Safety and Health Authority and Agency for the period October 2017 to September 2018. *[The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie)]*


**UNREVISED**
5. Administrative Report of the San Fernando City Corporation for the year October 2016 to September 2017. [Hon. T. Deyalsingh]

6. Annual Report on the Freedom of Information Act, Chap. 22:02 for the year 2019. [The Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Symon de Nobriga)]


JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities
(including the THA)
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
(Presentation)

Mr. Esmond Forde (Tunapuna): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Fifth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA) on an Inquiry into the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you again very
much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are 19 questions for oral answer, we will be answering 17 out of the 19. We ask for a two-week deferral for questions 143 and 144. On answers for written questions, there are eight. We ask for a deferral on questions 61, 79, and 123. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House, can I get those questions again for the deferral please?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Sorry. For oral, deferral for questions 143, 144 and for written questions, 61, 79, 123.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

COVID-19 Related Deaths
(Details of)

47. Dr. Lackram Bodoe (Fyzabad) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

With respect to COVID-19 related deaths from May 24, 2021 to present, will the Minister provide the following:

a) the number of unvaccinated persons who have died at healthcare institutions, disaggregated by institution;

b) the number of fully vaccinated persons who have died at healthcare institutions, disaggregated by institution; and

c) a breakdown of the number of deaths in ICU/ High Dependency Unit for each institution?

Taste of Carnival Events
(Details of Contractors, Vendors and Service Providers)

121. Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (Oropouche West) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:
With respect to infrastructural and operational arrangements related to the facilitation of the “Taste of Carnival” events for Carnival 2022, will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of the following:

a) a list of all contractors, vendors and/or service providers selected for said events; and

b) the process by which the contractors, vendors and/or service providers referred to in a) were selected, including the date of their selection and the persons who selected them.

**Agricultural Development Bank**
(Remuneration Details of CEO and General Managers)

124. **Mr. Davendranath Tancoo** (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:
Will the Minister furnish this House with the salary and remuneration benefits of the Chief Executive Officer and General Managers of the Agricultural Development Bank?

**Taste of Carnival 2022**
(Detailed Expenditure Breakdown of)

134. **Ms. Michelle Benjamin** (*Moruga/Tableland*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:
Will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of the total expenditure for the hosting of Taste of Carnival 2022?

**National Gas Company Supply of Gas**
(Details of Contracts)

140. **Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:
As it pertains to contracts for the supply of gas between downstream industries at Point Lisas and the National Gas Company for the period September 7, 2015 to February 1, 2022, will the Minister indicate:

a) how many long-term contracts have expired;
b) how many long-term contracts are pending renewal;
c) how many long-term contracts have expired and have been replaced with interim short-term or month-to-month contracts;
d) how many long-term contracts have been renewed or executed; and

e) the names of the entities which have received, renewed or executed long term contracts?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Ms. Anita Haynes (Tabaquite):

**Trinidad and Tobago Fire Stations**

*(Inoperable Fire Trucks and Equipment)*

143. Will the hon. Minister of National Security state how many of the fire stations servicing Trinidad and Tobago have inoperable fire trucks and equipment?

**Airspace/Territorial Waters**

*(Government’s Policy on Use of)*

144. Will the hon. Minister of National Security indicate what is the Government’s policy with regard to the use of airspace and territorial waters for transshipment and/or refuelling of vessels carrying military equipment and weapons to or from Venezuela?

*Questions, by leave, deferred.*

UNREVISED
Taste of Carnival Events
(Stakeholder Consultations)

122. Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (Oropouche West) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:
As regards the “Taste of Carnival” events for Carnival 2022, did consultations with the relevant stakeholders inform the Government’s decisions that this particular option provided the best possible value for money?

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In October 2021, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts began a process of consultation with Carnival stakeholders and event promoters including: the National Carnival Commission; Trinbago Unified Calypsonians Association; Pan Trinbago; the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival Bands Association; the Trinidad and Tobago Promoters Association; representatives of Chutney Soca; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Digital Transformation; iGovTT; the Ministry of National Security; the Tobago Festivals Commission and Corporate Trinidad and Tobago. Regular stakeholder meetings, online surveys and focus groups were undertaken to determine among other things the safe reopening of the event sector and the possibility of staging Carnival 2022, in light of the continuing pandemic and within the public health protocols.

Following several rounds of discussions, the submission of proposals by the various stakeholders and the receipt of survey responses to the Ministry’s circulated survey instrument, most stakeholders were in agreement that it would be inadvisable to host Carnival in 2022 in the way we are accustomed to with a parade of the bands and open events in light of the ongoing pandemic. And therefore, a
number of scaled down Carnival-type events would be possible and doable.

Following the announcement by the hon. Prime Minister, the Ministry convened its first Carnival working group meeting made up of the same stakeholders previously mentioned on January 19, 2022. Carnival 2022 events were therefore planned and hosted on a limited basis within the parameters of the current public health regulations, termed, “A Taste of Carnival”. These events were safe zone-type activities at safe zone venues for vaccinated persons only, safe zone-type events limited to 50 per cent capacity with controlled entry and exit points and sanitization upon entry in accordance to the Public Health Regulations and concert type shows and production such as soca and calypso concerts; calypso tents; extempo and chutney competitions; steel band concerts; Carnival King and Queen shows and Carnival theater.

While value for money was considered and it is obviously an important consideration in determining the effectiveness of public expenditure, there were further considerations involved in the decision to host “A Taste of Carnival” in February 2022. Considerations such as the safe reopening of the cultural and event sector while still in the midst of the pandemic; the economic stimulus to aid the recovery of the entertainment and event sectors; the provision of employment opportunities for many during the scaled-down festival; the provision of opportunities for artistes and cultural workers to practise their craft and earn during the period.

So the short answer to the question is, yes, the Carnival working group which includes the relevant stakeholders informed the Government’s decision to host the Taste of Carnival. And I am also happy to report that not only was the Taste of Carnival a success, but now more than 25 days following the hosting of the Carnival events there has been no significant spike in COVID-19 or disruption
to our health services.

**Hon. Members:** *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Tancoo:** Supplemental. Can the Minister then advise given the level of consultation he just described, what was the estimated cost at that time of consultation, at the end of the consultation of hosting the taste of Carnival event? What was the estimated cost?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:** There was no estimated cost with those stakeholders. Those stakeholders just indicated what types of events were doable and what they were willing to undertake at that time.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Minister, the question was not whether the—

**Madam Speaker:** No, just ask—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Sorry, sorry Member. So what was the cost then of hosting the various events under the rubric “Taste of Carnival”.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I will not allow that as a supplemental question. Your question was about consultations and I allowed the first one in the context of consultations. But having regard to the response, I do not think that this qualifies as a supplemental question. Do you have another question?

**Mr. Tancoo:** That is it.

**Mr. Young:** *[Inaudible]*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Augustine.

**Hon. Members:** *[Desk thumping]*

**Hindrances to Firefighting Efforts at Bamboo Settlement (Prevention of Future Occurrence)**

125. **Ms. Khadijah Ameen** (*St. Augustine*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:
In light of reports that low water pressure hindered firefighting efforts at a fire which occurred at Bamboo Settlement No. 2, Valsayn on February 7, 2022, will the Minister state what measures will be taken to ensure that the issue is addressed to prevent future occurrence?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, statements that were made regarding low water pressure in the Bamboo area on February 07, 2022, are unfortunately not true and perhaps misleading. The supply to the Bamboo area is a 24/7 water supply and it is derived from the Water and Sewerage Authority’s distribution system. As such WASA maintains pressure in the area of 33 PSI, pounds per square inch, which is normal for such a distribution system.

It is important to note that because of the 24/7 nature of the supply WASA’s distribution pipeline systems to the Bamboo area are not boosted and therefore may not always meet the extremely high pressures that are sometimes required by the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services for firefighting purposes. And having regard to the nature and the intensity of industrial fire, Madam Speaker, which can involve the burning of highly flammable materials in a confined space and within buildings that may not meet the requisite fire code.

However, WASA maintains—remains committed to working closely with the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services by ensuring water availability in relation to the installation of fire hydrants by the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services and to respond swiftly, as in fact it has done in such situation, in the unfortunate events which occurred at Bamboo No. 2. In this regard, WASA holds biannual meeting with the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services at which issues such as the integrity of the hydrants and mitigating strategies to meet any challenges are discussed. Post-mortems of fire incidents are also undertaken to glean lessons learnt for closer
collaboration.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Ameen:** Supplemental. Can the Minister indicate what if any mitigating strategies the Ministry of Public Utilities plan to implement following the loss of those nine businesses in Bamboo?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Madam Speaker, the question was asked with respect to the operations of WASA and the supply of water in the firefighting effort. The Ministry of Public Utilities is not responsible for firefighting efforts. WASA’s responsibility is to ensure that water is available to support firefighting efforts.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Can the Minister indicate whether or not according to the post-mortem report that he referred to, if it attributed the low water pressure to hindering the firefighting efforts?

**Madam Speaker:** I would allow you a supplemental question but having regard to the question that was asked originally and answered, I suggest, I will not allow that question, you may wish to rephrase it and ask a further supplemental question.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Ameen:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister kindly describe for us what system, if any, you have in terms of managing the existing relationship between the fire services and WASA for the maintenance of hydrants and to ensure adequate supply and adequate pressure in various areas?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Madam Speaker, I hope I can respond to the question that I believe that I am being asked. The collaboration between WASA and the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Services is a continuing collaboration and as I have explained a
short while ago, when incidents of such nature occur the collaboration continues to ensure lessons learnt to identify weaknesses in response time, et cetera. It is, clearly as I have indicated, the distribution system at Bamboo. It is not a transmission system, it is a distribution system. And therefore, the PSI level that is responsible or rather that is appropriate for the distribution system is well within these 36 PSI as I have explained.

However, there are some challenges regarding the Bamboo community and those challenges are outside of WASA’s remit. It is a development issue, there are planning issues and I expect that the Ministry of Planning and Development and all other government agencies including WASA and the fire services will continue to work with all the stakeholders to respond to those challenges.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Another supplemental?

Madam Speaker: Last one.

Ms. Ameen: Yes. So my last supplemental is, does WASA or the Ministry of Public Utilities have recommendations to the Ministry of Planning and Development concerning this situation?

Madam Speaker: Okay, so, Member, I would not allow that as a supplemental question. Member for St. Augustine.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

CCTV Cameras
(Details of)

126. Ms. Khadijah Ameen (St. Augustine) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister advise, as at February 28, 2022:

a) how many CCTV cameras are installed in Trinidad and Tobago; and
b) how many CCTV cameras are operational?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Madam Speaker, according to information received from the Commissioner of Police as at February 28, 2022, there were 1,796 Closed Circuit Television Cameras installed throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Of this number, Madam Speaker, 1,063 were fully functional with 733 considered to be either not fully functional nor indeed functional. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Can the Minister indicate what plans the Ministry of National Security has to get those 733 CCTV cameras operational and by what date?

10.30 a.m.

Hon. F. Hinds: Insofar as the date is concerned, I am unable for obvious reasons to say so, reasons that I thought would be quite obvious to our friend on the other side, but insofar as we will be doing about it, this is an ongoing exercise. As cameras become dysfunctional, for one of a thousand reasons, they are, on a routine basis, repaired and made functional to carry out the jobs that they are anticipated to do. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Young: “By one ah allyuh people.”

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Speaker, maybe if I rephrase the question—

Madam Speaker: No, no.

Ms. Ameen:—it will help the Minister.

Madam Speaker: Just one minute.

Hon. Members: [ Interruption and crosstalk ]

Madam Speaker: Members, I am standing. The question was asked and answered. If you want to ask another supplemental, you are entitled to do that. Okay?
Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Ameen:** Madam Speaker, does the Ministry of National Security have plans to install additional CCTV cameras in addition to the ones described by the Minister?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Most certainly, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Young:** “Yuh know Kamla used to install cameras outside aliyuh house?”

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Supplemental, Madam Speaker. To the Ministry of National Security, the 733 cameras that are not functional, could you describe if it is in key hotspot areas?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, I am unable to provide an answer to that question at this time. It depends of course on what is considered a hotspot area and by whom. I am unable to answer that, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Augustine.

**Mr. Young:** “I hear Kamla used to”—[Inaudible]

**Ms. Ameen:** Will the Minister be able to provide a breakdown of the areas of that these non-functional cameras are in?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, I am tempted to say that some people may consider the conglomeration of our friends “ah hotspot” but I would not say that.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping and laughter]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I know you may have intended to put some levity into the proceedings but I would like to suggest you withdraw that and just concentrate on the question. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Young:** “It’s ah bandit spot.”
Hon. F. Hinds: I withdraw that, Madam Speaker, and I must admit, the question was so banal and irritating, I cannot remember it. Would the Member repeat it please?

Madam Speaker: Member.

Ms. Ameen: Are you going to ask him to withdraw that, Madam Speaker?

Hon. F. Hinds: I did.

Hon. Members: Aye-aye!

Hon. Members: [Interruption and crosstalk]

Ms. Ameen: About banal and irritating?—Because he is very banal and irritating all the time and we do not complain here.

Hon. Members: [Continuous interruption and crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: I am on my legs in case you are not seeing. Members, order! It is just a little too early in the proceedings for us to forget the Standing Orders by which we are bound. Okay. So Member, please ask your question.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that the Minister has indicated that almost half of the CCTV cameras in this country are non-functional, can you provide this Parliament with a list of the areas where these non-functional cameras exist?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am unable to provide that answer for, again, obvious reasons at this time.

Mr. Young: “She want to know if is Carapo.”

Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Heights of Aripo
(Installation of CCTV Cameras)

UNREvised
127. **Ms. Khadijah Ameen** (*St. Augustine*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister state whether there are plans to install CCTV cameras at the Heights of Aripo where the bodies of murder victims have been found?

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** I thank you warmly yet again, Madam Speaker. According to information again received from the Commissioner of Police, in order for CCTV cameras to be installed at the Heights of Aripo, careful consideration must be given to the site compatibility including the availability of electricity supply and the connectivity challenges at this remote location. In fact, Madam Speaker, consideration must be given to these issues as regards the possible expansion of the CCTV network throughout the Trinidad and Tobago including at Aripo Heights. To this end, discussions with stakeholders are currently well underway.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Hosein:** Can the Minister indicate how long have these consultations been taking place with the necessary stakeholders?

**Mr. Young:** Go and ask Duke.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I am unable to answer that with any level of specificity, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Hosein:** Yes, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Can the Minister indicate who are the stakeholders that they are speaking to?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Obviously, Madam Speaker, it would be the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It would be the intelligence gathering agencies across Trinidad and Tobago.
Tobago, it would be potential service providers and indeed, all of the experts, none of which exist on that side, in these matters in order to advise and to provide solutions.

**Madam Speaker:** All right, so Member, you may not intend anything but there are certain innuendos and reflections injected in some of your answers and you know I would want to advise that we desist from that type of style. Member for Couva South.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the—

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, one minute. What I said just now applies to everyone. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Former Employees of Caroni (1975) Limited**

**Receipt of Residential/Agricultural Leases**

128. **Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre)** on behalf of Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

   In light of the recent protest action by former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited, will the Minister state how many former employees are yet to receive their residential and agricultural leases?

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Madam Speaker, a total of 8,855 former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited were entitled to a residential service lot as part of the VSEP packages offered. To date, 5,037 beneficiaries have been allocated to various estates and are at different stages in the process of receiving their leases. From this figure, 4,764 leases have been executed, however, 44 of these leases at Caroni are awaiting collection; 273 beneficiaries have not completed the process at Caroni or are awaiting letters of
administration. The number of persons who remain outstanding for residential leases is 3,818.

With respect to agricultural leases, a total of 7,246 persons were entitled to these parcels of lands. From this figure, 127 persons reached an agreement with the State and were compensated for their land. The majority of the remaining 7,119 agricultural leases have been completed and the number of agricultural leases outstanding is 577.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A follow-up question to the Minister, the outstanding leases, whether it is in agriculture or other, could you have a date when these leases will be finalized?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. I am unable to give you a date at this current time. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam.

Madam Speaker: Sorry, Member for Barataria/San Juan. I did not see you.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Madam Speaker, can the Minister indicate whether or not issues relating to the offices of the Director of Surveys have been causing a delaying in the processing of these residential and agricultural leases?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, thank you. That information is not with me at this time but if it is posed to the relevant Minister with the appropriate notice, I am sure he can answer.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the Minister indicate what action
has been undertaken to ensure that those leases that are currently sitting at the office reach those who are scheduled to benefit from them?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I am sure that the authorities are working diligently on it and I rest on that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Tanoo: Thank you.

WASA Water Supply Schedule
(Board of Commissioners Approval)

129. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) on behalf of Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

In light of the 2022 Dry Season Water Supply Schedule recently published by the Water and Sewerage Authority, will the Minister advise whether said schedule was approved by the Board of Commissioners of WASA?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The dry season plan is developed at the end of the calendar year and presented to the Board of Commissioners by the management of the Water and Sewerage Authority. Consequent on the approval of this plan, the dry season water schedule is approved by the Chief Executive Officer of WASA and the Director of Operations in collaboration with the various area managers across the country and is issued between January and February of the ensuing year. Further, in order to ensure that the water supply adequately meets the needs of citizens in the face of emergencies and other vagaries that may emerge during the dry season, the dry season plan and its water schedule are monitored on a monthly basis by a team with representation from the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Board of Commissioners and the management of the Water and Sewerage Authority.

North-West Regional Health Authority

UNREVISED
(Investigation into Lye Incident)

130. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) on behalf of Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South) asked the hon. Minister of Health:
In light of the incident which occurred at the St. James Medical Complex where lye was used on a patient instead of distilled water, will the Minister indicate whether the internal investigation by the North-West Regional Health Authority into this incident has been completed?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. An investigation was conducted in accordance with the reporting of adverse events as outlined by the adverse events policy and subsequently the North-West Regional Health Authority submitted a report to the Chief Medical Officer. It is well known in the public domain that this matter is before the High Court, case number CV2020-00382. In view of the sub judice rule therefore, it will be inappropriate to comment further on this matter in this forum.

Madam Speaker: Member for Baratari/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and this does not offend the sub judice rule but can the Minister indicate whether or not any disciplinary action was taken against any person involved in this incident?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, because of the sub judice rule, we are unable to comment on that issue. Thank you very much.

Long COVID
(Measures to Treat Patients)

131. Dr. Rishad Seecheran (Caroni East) asked the hon. Minister of Health:
Will the Minister state what measures, if any, are being implemented to treat with patients suffering from “Long COVID”?

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The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. According to the WHO, World Health Organization, the term “Long COVID” refers to a post-COVID-19 condition that occurs in individuals with a history of probable or confirmed COVID-19 infection, usually three months from the onset of COVID-19 with symptoms and can last for at least two months and cannot be explained by an alternative diagnosis. Common symptoms include fatigue, shortness of breath, cognitive dysfunction and others that generally have an impact on everyday functioning persons.

The following measures were implemented to treat patients suffering from “Long COVID”:

1. In October 2020, an Executive Wellness Clinic was established at the Arima General Hospital where over 215 new patients were seen with “Long COVID” and there were 361 revisits.

2. In August 2021, the “Long COVID-19” clinic was established at the San Fernando Teaching Hospital where over 121 new patients were seen with “Long COVID” and there were 99 revisits.

3. At the Sangre Grande Hospital, “Long COVID” patients are seen by the internal medicine team.

4. At the Port of Spain General Hospital, “Long COVID” patients are seen by the internal medicine team at the “Long COVID” clinic which is expected to be established by May of 2022 which is just next month.

The referral process into the clinics is done throughout the regional health authorities where patients are referred to by doctors and services are accessed immediately upon processing of the referral. Continuous physician training and sensitization on the signs, symptoms and treatment of “Long COVID” and continuous population level sensitization so patients can recognize and seek
treatment for symptoms of “Long COVID”. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could persons register for this clinic via the email address advertised by the Ministry of Health for the Arima clinic?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: There are a variety of referral processes but we would prefer if they are referred through a physician and they are quite welcome to come into our centres and register themselves. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Minister, are issues regarding persons’ mental health also being addressed at these clinics?

Madam Speaker: I think the original question related to—

Dr. Seecheran: “Long COVID” is— Mental health is a part of “Long COVID”.

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, and the answer is yes. That is part of the treatment for “Long COVID” recognizing it affects all organs of the body, including the brain, yes.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, with persons that are diagnosed with “Long COVID”, would they be regarded as being able to access a disability grant?

Madam Speaker: Member, I would not allow that as a supplemental question and particularly to the Minister to whom it is posed.

COVID-19 Vaccination Cards
(I illicit Distribution of)

132. Dr. Rishad Seecheran (Caroni East) asked the hon. Minister of Health:
Will the Minister state what specific measures are being implemented to combat the illicit distribution of COVID-19 vaccination cards to the unvaccinated?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, again, Madam Speaker. The Ministry has implemented the following measures to combat the illicit distribution of COVID-19 vaccination cards. An inventory check is routinely conducted on the amount of vaccine cards issued to health facilities and service providers with the number of first-dose vaccines administered. Also, vaccine cards are issued only upon request by the nurse manager based on the vaccine report and uptake with confirmation through the manager of the Expanded Programme on Immunization, the EPI programme. Also, at all instances when vaccination cards are issued, there is documented evidence of receipt of cards by the designated health care personnel. And lastly, persons in need of replacement cards are referred to the Manager, Expanded Programme on Immunization, for database validation on the confirmation of receipt of a COVID-19 vaccine information and only thereafter a copy is issued.

The Ministry of Health is working with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to determine the prevalence of this practice. As of March 15, 2022, seven matters are before the TTPS of which three persons were charged for conspiracy to misbehave in public office and four other matters are currently being investigated. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, what is the status of the digital vaccination card in assisting in this process of combating illicit vaccine cards?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.
Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The status of that is that the front-end processes have been finished, the website is up and completed. We are still doing some confirmation at the back end by literally calling persons, we have 700,000 persons to confirm and that process is taking place as we speak. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, could we get a time frame of when the digital vaccination card will be implemented for citizens in Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. I am working diligently with the Minister of Digital Transformation to do exactly that but there were some problems with international hosting of this issue. Thank you very much. International security, sorry..

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Minister, what is the Government’s estimate as to the number of fake vaccine cards that might be in our population?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The number of what?

Dr. Seecheran: Fake vaccine cards that might be in our population.

Madam Speaker: Paid or fake?

Dr. Seecheran: What is the Minister’s estimate?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. So the last part of my answer, you are referring to the prevalence of this practice so I will repeat the last part of my answer. As of March 15, 2022, seven matters are before the TTPS of which three persons were charged for conspiracy to misbehave in public office and the four other matters are currently being investigated. So that would give you some idea as to the prevalence.

Adult/Adolescent Pfizer Vaccine

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133. **Dr. Rishad Seecheran (Caroni East)** asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Will the Minister inform the House how many doses of the adult and adolescent Pfizer vaccine stock expired on February 28, 2022?

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, again, Madam Speaker. The number of doses of the Pfizer vaccine that expired on February 28, 2022, was approximately 260,000 doses. Thank you very much.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you. Minister, could you give an account to this House on how these vaccines were destroyed?

**Madam Speaker:** Member of Health.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Yeah. So before vaccines can be destroyed, we have to actually write to Pfizer international to get their disposal mechanism and we have done that and we are awaiting their response. Thank you very much.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you. A follow-up question. Minister, the 260,000 that were destroyed, what was the cost to the country for that 260,000 expired Pfizer vaccines?

**Madam Speaker:** Member of Health.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you very much. The cost to the country was zero because these doses were gifted to us very kindly—and I want to thank them—by the Government and people of the United States of America.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you. Minister, the stock that was destroyed, were any of these vaccines unaccounted for or stolen perhaps?

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Hon. Member: “Wah?”

Madam Speaker: Member, could you—

Dr. Seecheran: From the inventory.

Madam Speaker: Member, could you rephrase that question in a way that we could link it to the—

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, were all vaccines accounted for at the time of destruction?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So, Madam Speaker, it behoves me to state that the vaccines have not yet been destroyed. I said that clearly. We have to write to Pfizer international for their method of destruction so the question does not apply.

National Maintenance, Training and Security Company (Settlement of Debt)

109. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) on behalf of Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister inform the House as to the measures being taken by the Government to settle the approximately $600 million owed by the state to the National Maintenance, Training and Security Company (MTS)?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Finance has been advised by those Government entities that account for the largest portion of arrears to the National Maintenance, Training and Security Company that payments to MTS are being processed and made on a regular basis as cash flow permits. It must be underscored, however, that the figure quoted as arrears in the question does not take into account supplementary funding made available by the Ministry of Finance directly to MTS from time to time and a reconciliation of accounts is therefore required to establish the true picture. By way of example, over the period 2019 to 2021, apart from routine payments made by
various Ministries and Departments to MTS for services rendered, the Ministry of Finance made $300 million available directly to MTS to settle its liabilities with the National Insurance Board and to other statutory authorities to cover its operational expenses and meet its obligations to its employees. This $300 million should have been reconciled against the receivables shown in MTS’ accounts to get the actual amount owed by Government by MTS.

“PH” Drivers  
(Government’s Policy to Regulate)

110. **Mr. David Lee** *(Pointe-a-Pierre)* on behalf of Mr. Rodney Charles *(Naparima)* asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister inform the House whether the Government is actively pursuing a policy aimed at regulating “PH” drivers in Trinidad and Tobago?

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Works and Transport, the answer is yes. The Ministry of Works and Transport is aware of the challenges being experienced as they relate to the illegality and enforcement of the operations of private hire, unregulated vehicles, PHDs, in Trinidad and Tobago, more commonly known as “PH taxis”. This notwithstanding, it is imperative that the imposition of any regulating measure is done with consideration given to the need of commuters and does not go beyond what is required to achieve the aim of the proposed policy. In that regard, Madam Speaker, the Ministry has identified several issues associated with the PHD sector as follows: breaches of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50; insurance coverage for passengers, public safety and security and perceived unfair treatment of licensed taxi drivers.

In this regard, after a series of stakeholder discussions last year, a policy document was drafted in relation to PHDs. The draft document is being reviewed

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by the Attorney General at present and will be submitted to the Cabinet shortly for consideration. Thank you very much.

**NiQuan Energy**  
*(Commencement of Operations)*

120. **Mr. David Lee** *(Pointe-a-Pierre)* asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

In light of NiQuan Energy’s decision to commence operations by the end of the first quarter of 2022, after the closure of its plant due to an explosion on April 7, 2021, will the Minister provide the following:

a) whether the plant has received permission from the Environmental Management Authority to restart operations; and

b) whether the investigation into the April 7, 2021, explosion has been completed?

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The granting of approval for NiQuan to restart its plant and equipment is not within the remit of the Environmental Management Authority, the EMA. This authority rests with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the Occupational Health and Safety Agency, OSHA.

An investigation team has completed an examination and analysis of the incident that occurred at the NiQuan plant in 2021 and is working on the finalization of its report. There has recently been an exchange of request for information by the Ministry to NiQuan and I understand the provision of the information requested, or a subsect of it, to the Ministry. So the teams are working on it and working on it to ensure from a Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries point of view, that it is safe for the plant to restart.

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Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A follow-up question. Minister, to date, based on your response, the Ministry of Energy has not given final approval to restart the NiQuan plant. Is that a fair statement?

Hon. S. Young: That is in fact the current state of affairs. As I said, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries will take its duty in this aspect very seriously and when it is satisfied, from an engineering point of view that it is safe to restart, they will so indicate to NiQuan that they have permission to do so. That process is well underway.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Follow-up, Minister. With the findings of the plant of the disaster, would it be made public?

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, at this stage, I cannot provide a firm response to that because of course this is a private plant that is operating but I am sure at the time when they cross that safety hurdle, the Government will be in a position to tell the population some of the findings, et cetera. But to give a commitment at this stage with a private entity with proprietary information, confidential information, et cetera, to put that into the public domain, that is not something I am prepared to commit to.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Supplemental question. Can the Minister indicate following this incident, whether any attempts have been made to reach out to residents in the area who may have been affected by this particular explosion?

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question pursuant to the Standing Orders. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.
Mr. Lee: Just to follow up to the Minister’s response on my last supplemental question, Minister, the question: Given that the NiQuan plant is on state property, do you feel that it is not right that the public should be aware of what transpired with that blast?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: The answer, Madam Speaker, is exactly as I stated before, one must be very cautious when dealing with these types of institutions and proprietary information as to what is given to the public. I did say very carefully that once the Government is in a position to provide information to the public that does not breach confidentiality, et cetera, it will do so.

Taste of Carnival 2022
(Revenue Realized)

135. Ms. Michelle Benjamin (Moruga/Tableland) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:

Will the Minister advise as to the revenue realised by the state from the hosting of Taste of Carnival 2022?

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Taste of Carnival 2022 was successfully held in a safe-zone setting guided by the public health regulations. Events including concert-type shows such as soca and calypso concerts, calypso tents, Extempo and Chutney competitions, steel band concerts and Dimanche Gras featuring the Kings and Queens competitions.

The total revenue generated by the National Carnival Commission was $2,449,584 from the following revenue streams: sponsorship, gate receipts, venue rental and miscellaneous income which included vendor booth rental, accreditation fees and bar sales. Activities for Taste of Carnival 2022 were also held at the
performance spaces under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts namely NAPA, SAPA, Naparima Bowl and the Queen’s Hall and the revenue earned from the hosting of events at these spaces was $317,735.25.

**EXPIRATION OF QUESTION TIME**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the time allocated for questions is now spent. Questions 123, 143 and 144 are deferred for two weeks and also I have been advised by the Whip pursuant to Standing Order 29(10) that all unanswered questions are being postponed for answer to a subsequent sitting.

*Question time having expired, the following questions (136, 138 and 139) were not dealt with:*

**Reform Hindu School**

(Completion of)

136. Could the hon. Minister of Education state:

Will the Minister state when works on the Reform Hindu School will be completed? [Mr. Charles]

**Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited’s Credit Rating 2019**

(Completion and Publication of Statements)

138. Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state:

Given the recent downgrade of Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited’s international credit rating by Standard and Poor’s due to the company’s failure to submit its 2019 Audited Financial Statements, will the Minister provide a timeline for completion and publication of these statements? [Mr. Lee]

**Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited**

(Details of Asset Valuation)

139. Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state:
Given the statements attributed to the Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited that one of the reasons for the non-submission of its 2019 financials was an “asset valuation that was not represented in previous audits”, will the Minister advise as to the following:

a) whether an asset valuation has been conducted; and

b) when will it be made public? [Mr. Lee]

11.00a.m.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there is a statement, but this item is being deferred to later in the proceedings.

COMPANIES (AMDT.) BILL, 2022

Bill to amend the Companies Act, Chap. 81:01 to make provision for the role of the Chief State Solicitor as the Official Receiver [The Attorney General];

read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken later in the proceedings. [Hon. T. Deyalsingh]

Question put and agreed to.

TOBAGO COUNCIL FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN (INC’N) (AMDT.) BILL, 2022

Question put and agreed to: That a Bill to amend the Tobago Council for Handicapped Children (Inc’n) Act, 1975, be now read the first time.

Bill accordingly read the first time.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020 (Adoption)

[Second Day]

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Order for resuming adjourned debate on question [March 23, 2022]:


Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: The Member for San Fernando East, you have 27 minutes of speaking time remaining.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. B. Manning: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Where were we last time? I believe I was speaking about all of the hard work that went into the reform of local government by one Mrs. Hazel Manning, Madam Speaker. After years of consultation we came up with a Green Paper, Madam Speaker, 2004; a Draft White Paper in 2006; a Green Paper on roles and responsibilities in 2008; a Draft White Paper in 2009, Madam Speaker. All of this culminated into the Local Government Bill of 2009, which was piloted by the then Minister of Local Government. Madam Speaker, sadly this document was allowed to lapse by those on the other side when they came into office during 2010, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the period from 2010 to 2015 is regarded by many as the Dark Ages, Madam Speaker, because no kind of national development took place during that period.

Instead of national development and local government reform, what we got was a deliberate campaign of misinformation. We have Members on the other side coming here on the last day accusing the Minister of Finance of starving local government bodies. Madam Speaker, why would we starve local government bodies, and including our own local government bodies, Madam Speaker? It makes no sense. Those on the other side want to gaslight the national community into believing that we did not just come through safely, one of the sharpest economic downturns in the history of the world, Madam Speaker.
We have the Member for Naparima asking: How much did we deposit in the HSF? We have the Member for Oropouche West making public statements that simply defy belief, Madam Speaker. This Government has used our resources to navigate through extremely rough waters and preserve lives and livelihoods. For that, we should be commended.

Madam Speaker, at one point all prices went to zero, yet they are asking: Where is the funding coming from for local government? But Madam Speaker, they know full well that local government has to be funded by property taxes, Madam Speaker. And that is why they have been going to great lengths from the very beginning to obstruct both; both local government reform and also the implementation of reasonable and sensible property taxes, Madam Speaker. It would be virtually impossible to effectively finance local government bodies and grant them the autonomy that they deserve, without property taxes, Madam Speaker. And I am going to explain why in a minute.

They want you to believe that property taxes are this dreaded and draconian measure, Madam Speaker. But I want to remind the national community what the proposed structure of those taxes will look like. Madam Speaker, the Board of Inland Revenue will determine the annual taxable value or ATV using the ARV, the annual rental value, less such deductions as it sees fit for voids or loss of rent of 10 per cent of the annual rental value.

Madam Speaker, the applicable tax rate is then applied to the ATV, the annual taxable value as follows: agricultural property, Madam Speaker, 1 per cent. That is 1 per cent on the annual rental value, Madam Speaker, nothing draconian there. For residential property, 3 per cent. Madam Speaker, if your home, a residential property, can attract $2,000 monthly in rental income, that means that your annual property tax would be $720 annually, monthly it would be $60 per
month. There is nothing dreaded about the proposed property taxes. But with those taxes, Madam Speaker, local government bodies and the regional municipalities can be properly funded. Madam Speaker, it is only logical that property taxes be used to fund local government because property owners are the greatest beneficiaries of local government services.

Madam Speaker, without the services generated by local government, property owners could not enjoy the use of their property. The value of their property would also sink to zero. If you have a property, Madam Speaker, but there were no roads, no drainage, no sewerage, no spraying for mosquitoes, no water, fire services, no municipal police, you could not enjoy the use of your property. So it only makes perfect sense that property taxes would be used to fund local government reform.

Sadly, Madam Speaker, last day we had the Member for Moruga accuse the Government of seeking to have absolute control of local government bodies during the debate on a Bill which seeks to decentralize local government operations and grant the municipal corporations more autonomy.

So I am not sure exactly where that would come from. But this Bill, Madam Speaker, is going to have a dedicated fund, which will funnel revenues raised within the various municipalities so that these important and essential services can be taken care of, to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, sadly when those on the other side were in office during the Dark Ages there was a lack of vision. Madam Speaker, all we got, especially while the Member for St. Augustine was there, was a slew of box brain millionaires, Madam Speaker, and the Member for St. Augustine cavorting with her LifeSport friends from Carapo, Madam Speaker. That was what we got. We did not get any vision or any reform.

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Hon. B. Manning (cont’d)

Madam Speaker, the last time we were here, the Member for St. Augustine—

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(6), please.

**Madam Speaker:** Overruled.

**Hon. B. Manning:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the last time we were here the Member for St. Augustine asked a very strange question, which completely blew my mind. The Member for St. Augustine stood here in this Chamber and asked: What happened to EFCL? She was saying that local government funding could be used to improve schools and other facilities within the municipal corporations. Madam Speaker, for someone on the other side to have the temerity, audacity and “boldfaci” to ask what happened to EFCL is very strange to me.

Madam Speaker, I am going to give the Member for St. Augustine a reminder of exactly what this Government found when we came into office in 2015. Madam Speaker, and I read from a *Guardian* newspaper article, November 14, 2015, titled:

“New EFCL board unearths secret operation”

Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“A secret contract millhouse was discovered at the Education Facilities Company Ltd (EFCL) in Maraval, and armed guards have been called in to secure a mountain of potentially damning evidence which points to the illegal manufacturing of backdated tender documents worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

The discovery was made one day after the new board of the state-owned company suspended its Chief Executive Officer…”

Madam Speaker, it goes on to say:

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“Informed sources told the T&T Guardian that a member of the board found the ‘secret room’ on the first floor of the Maraval building, which is opposite the…”—a building in Maraval—“…and also houses…”—several corporate banks—“EFCL occupies the second floor of the building and, unknown to staff, another room was rented on the first floor.

Sources said a new board member was stunned after finding three people busy at work in the ‘secret room’ and called in security after realising they were working on EFCL business.”

Madam Speaker:

“Sources said they have already discovered that the four select employees were hired to create contracts and tender documents for several existing projects which were already paid for in full. This was being done, according to company insiders, to validate the tendering processes to make them appear transparent and legal.”

Madam Speaker, that is what we got from those on the other side at EFCL. So when the Member for St. Augustine puts the good Lord out of her thoughts and wonders what happened to EFCL, to coin a phrase from one of my parliamentary colleagues, I suggest the Member looks in the mirror and ask “yuhsel” because you happened to EFCL. Do not forget that.

Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine also went on to talk about, another crazy comment, Madam Speaker, where the Member said that UNC councillors—

Madam Speaker: I ask you to withdraw the word crazy. I am sure you can find another word.

Hon. B. Manning: I withdraw, Madam Speaker. I apologize. Sorry, another banal comment, Madam Speaker, since that is the word of the day, apparently—saying
that the UNC councillors were somehow superior to PNM councillors, Madam Speaker. That was another statement that many would consider mind-blowing. Let me again remind the Member what we have gotten from UNC councillors, since they have been dealing with local government in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, another article *Loop*, July 15, 2021:

“…UNC councillor…”—charged with—“…misbehavior in public office.”

Madam Speaker, that is what we have been getting.

“…Councillor at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation…”—was tonight—“…charged with one count of misbehaviour in public office.”

Madam Speaker, this is a fact. It is not alleged.

“The arrest followed a meeting between officers of the ACIB and Director of Public Prosecutions…”

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, if I may, Standing Order 48(2). This matter is sub judice.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so I would not allow you to go any further on it. All right, you referenced the article, please go on to something else.

**Hon. B. Manning:** Yes. Understood, Madam Speaker. Moving on. Madam Speaker, even in San Fernando East, we have an issue with a UNC councillor. It is no secret, December of last year I spent eight days at the High Dependency Unit at the COVID unit in Couva. And, Madam Speaker, from my hospital bed, I was on the phone daily with the Minister of Works and Transport dealing with an issue in St. Joseph Village where the Vistabella River had broken its banks and threatened several homes in the area. Madam Speaker, I was on the phone every single day with the Minister of Works and Transport trying to preserve the houses of those residents and constituents. And thankfully, the Minister of Works and Transport
was able to rectify the issue and for that I am extremely grateful and so are the residents of St. Joseph Village.

Madam Speaker, lo and behold I eventually see a message in one of this councillor’s chat groups where he is taking full credit for the work that was done on the Vistabella River to preserve these homes. That is the kind of representation we have been getting from those on the other side when it comes to local government, Madam Speaker. They want to reap where they have not sown. Well, Madam Speaker, I am letting that councillor know today—

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. B. Manning:**—that he will win nothing in San Fernando East going forward, because in San Fernando East we do not reward dishonesty. Let him know that.

Madam Speaker, we have hard-working councillors in San Fernando East, seeking funding for emergency projects in San Fernando East, which could have easily been funded if local government reform had taken place a long time ago, Madam Speaker, but unfortunately have been blocked and undermined by those on the other side. We have an issue in Salvia Lane, Pleasantville, Madam Speaker, and I want the residents of Salvia Lane to know that we are well aware of the issue and that we are doing all that we can and it will be repaired.

I have been in talks with the newly-minted Minister of Local Government and your homes will be saved. The land in that area is sliding, Madam Speaker, into a ditch. If local government reform had taken place at the appropriate time all those years ago, trying to find emergency funding for various projects would not be an issue. But it has been hampered by those on the other side for their own selfish reasons, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this Bill has called for the reform of local government to give these various municipal corporations a lot more autonomy, Madam Speaker.
And when I say autonomy, in its own management, its function, but also in its funding. Right now the majority of local government funding comes from central government and from a few other sources, Madam Speaker. But these other sources could be deemed inadequate, and let me list some of these other sources so you understand how difficult and challenging it has been to finance local government operations outside of central government, Madam Speaker.

We have funding coming from waste disposal, food badges, Internet fees, market dues, other rental income, services charges, tender packages, public nuisance, miscellaneous items. Madam Speaker, local government reform will ensure that these reasonable property taxes will be funneled into dedicated funds which would be directed to the various municipalities and local government bodies within Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. B. Manning:** No more having to come to the Minister of Finance asking for emergency funds, especially in a situation where those funds may be short, Madam Speaker; much like if we are going through a global pandemic like now, Madam Speaker. So when those on the other side come and say they do not have enough funding for local government, I will have to say that their cries have been quite disingenuous, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, timely access to funding is one of the greatest challenges facing municipal corporations. The absence of proper funding hampers the effective and efficient delivery of services. Local government reform would allow for a municipal corporation to collect and retain taxes on residential property within a municipality, Madam Speaker, according to section 78 of this document, which is to be deposited into the corporation’s fund. That is a fund with funding coming from property taxes that are dedicated towards services to be delivered to
the people of Trinidad and Tobago through the various local government agencies. They do not go directly to the Consolidated Fund. They go to its own specific fund for those specific purposes, Madam Speaker. This means when citizens pay their residential property taxes, these payments will remain within the municipality to be used for development projects with said community. Revenues raised within the community are used within the community. That is proper local government reform, Madam Speaker, not box drain millionaires.

It will provide for increased autonomy to facilitate a more effective and efficient delivery of services, via sustainable communities and balanced regional development.

And, Madam Speaker, I would like to close by thanking one Mrs. Hazel Manning for all of the challenging and hard work that she put into local government reform. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (Oropouche West): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to contribute to this Motion:


Madam Speaker, when I listen to my colleague opposite, the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, I am reminded of a quotation I learnt in high school, because I think it is directly relevant here. It is often attributed to Shakespeare, but I know that it is not of his origin:

What a tangled web we weave when first we attempt to deceive.

Madam Speaker, today this Member came to this honourable House and

**UNREVISED**
described the period 2010 to 2015 as the Dark Ages, in specific reference to local government reform. He said that the Members on this side were providing misinformation. But, Madam Speaker, it is very unfortunate that he does not seem to understand, the Member for San Fernando East does not seem to understand exactly what he is talking about. He does not seem to understand what local government is, what their responsibilities are, and to be able to differentiate between local government and central government. Because this very said Member referred to the importance of local government in the context of the provision for fire services, the provision of security, the provision of—Madam Speaker, those are facilities provided by central government, not local government. So if you do not know what you are talking about, why come here and try to pretend that you do?

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Madam Speaker, the Member is clearly out of his element and I mean you no disrespect. He is clearly out of his element, but he should not be trying to create the perception that he knows what he is speaking about.

Specifically, I want to go back to his comment that Trinidad and Tobago was experiencing the Dark Ages of local government during 2010 to 2015, because nothing could be further from the truth, Madam Speaker. It was during that period that substantial amendments were made to the local government legislation, the legislation governing local government, to ensure that for the first time in this country, under a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration, we were able to have substantial reform in local government so we have proportional representation at the local government level. That did not happen under any previous administration. It was under the UNC administration, the People’s Partnership administration, a Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led government that we ended up with offices. We
provided offices and support staff for councillors.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** You know, it is ironic that the Member came here today not having listened to what was said before. Because several speakers on this side indicated exactly that; that a lot of work was done under the People’s Partnership regime between 2010 and 2015, that he seems to have been totally clueless about. If only Members, when they propose to contribute in this House, would pay attention to what is being said, a lot of it, or a lot of what he said before would not have had to be said.

Madam Speaker, I want to move on, I want to move on, and I want to set the record straight at this point. Despite what a lot of Members have contributed and said, Members from the other side, the United National Congress, the loyal Opposition of this country, absolutely supports Government reform of local government. We absolutely support the need for urgent local government reform. We always have and we always did. And when the opportunity presented itself, it was a Kamla Persad-Bissessar government, a UNC-led government which actually engaged in local government reform. We did not sit by and talk the talk, we actually walked the walk.

But what is required is full, well-thought-out, practical, up-to-date, realistic legislation that is responsive to the critical shortcomings which exist today under this PNM administration. And that is what is of concern, because the problem we have today is the legislation being pushed forward by this Government does not meet that criteria. It does not address the critical issues that are being faced by local government reform. And those issues were raised during the committee meetings and were raised in fact in the actual Minority Report supplied by Members of the Opposition, Members of the UNC, and which is now part of this
Joint Select Committee Report, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I also want to refer to some comments made by my other colleagues before. We have nothing—we see nothing wrong. As a matter of fact, I think we support the need for councillors. We all have said it on both sides of the House. We see the importance of the role of a councillor. And we believe that the councillors should be paid a full-time salary because they are in fact fulfilling a full-time role. Those issues were raised in the committee report. Those issues were raised in the deliberations. But there is nothing stopping the Government, nothing that has stopped the Government for the last six and a half, going into seven years, from actually putting that in place, Madam Speaker. In fact, that is the one part of this legislation that might be salvageable, if done correctly. Instead, what the Members opposite have tried to do is create the perception that that is the primary focus of this legislation. And all this legislation is required so that councillors can be finally given their just due.

Madam Speaker, contrary to the impression that obviously pervades those on the other side, as was expressed by the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, contrary to their perception, local government councillors and practitioners generally in Trinidad and Tobago, have been providing yeoman service under the most trying times and conditions over and above everybody else to the population of Trinidad and Tobago. That is a fact and they deserve to be truly and properly recognized. Instead, what we got from this Government, in the legislation provided and proposed under the committee report, falls far short of what is required.

Madam Speaker, if you listen to those opposite you would swear that the PNM was the primary mover of local government reform. The Member for Arouca/Maloney who moved the Motion spent much of her 45-minute presentation speaking about the PNM’s respect for local government. It is ironic that her
colleague, the Member for San Fernando West, then spoke about the 63 years of old talk, 63 years of nothing happening. Because you see, that is the level of disrespect that those on the other side treat with local government practitioners and local government as a whole. As a matter of fact, even today we saw the level of disrespect being placed on local government again, when we had a local government Minister sitting in the Chair, but he, poor fella, was unable to present a report that fell in his name on this Order Paper, Madam Speaker, simply disregarded by the Acting Chief Whip today.

Madam Speaker, the report itself, the committee that was created itself, the Government did not see the need to have the Minister of Local Government chair a committee on local government dealing specifically with local government. They did not see the need to have him chair this committee. He sat as an ordinary Member. But it goes further than that. Even when that Minister moved on and there were changes in the local government Ministry, even when that Minister was replaced, the new Minister was not even allowed to present the Bill which deals with local government reform. He was not even allowed to present the Bill in the Parliament today. That is the level of disrespect that the Members on the opposite side, the PNM, continues to show to local government, even amongst their own colleagues.

Madam Speaker, I want to take you specifically to a few of the comments related to the committee, the report of the committee which we are considering here today. Several Members spoke on the need for equity. One Member, the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna recited—he asked the question here: How do you want to see local government in your community? And cited several ideals; ideals which we, in this case, subscribe to, great ideals, sounds great. One of those was equity, equity in funding. According to him he described equity as an equal
share to all.

11.30 a.m.

Madam Speaker, that citation came from the Minority Report that was attached to this report that we are currently debating today. One of the concerns raised by the Opposition in that report is that there were no provisions for equity in population, geographic size and allocation of resources to each municipality.

**Madam Speaker:** So, Member, I have allowed you a lot of leeway. The thing is that you are the 16th contributor to this Motion and, you know, this is ground that has been covered. I have given you an opportunity so that I would ask you to move on to something that has not been dealt with. All right? Because at this stage, I am invoking Standing Order 55 in terms of tedious repetition.

**Mr. D. Tanoo:** Madam Speaker, every speaker on the opposite side spoke of funding as a priority. The last Member himself, the last Member who spoke specifically complained bitterly that Members on this side were being disingenuous when we were talking about funding as an issue. He—and then turned around and said that funding is a major problem for central government, funding is a major problem for local government. We agree funding is a major problem but it is just not the number. It is the distribution of the funding that is provided to local government generally that is of concern. And that is the matter that was raised specifically in the committee during its deliberations and was not dealt with in the legislation currently before the House, Madam Speaker, in the legislation that forms part of this committee report.

Madam Speaker, we have done some analysis and what we have found disturbs me greatly because of all the issues that have been raised in this debate and in the committee stages when the committee met with during the consultations and in the reports from the various local government bodies, the fact was that many
councils were complaining that they were not getting enough money. But when they accumulated all the councils together and when you sat and you looked at the various allocations being provided to each council, what we found was graphic. What we found, Madam Speaker, was extremely concerning because that can best be described as some sort of intentional or unintentional geographic discrimination.

**Madam Speaker:** Again, I have given you some leeway because it appears as if you either did not understand or have ignored the guidance. Okay? So, I have given you some leeway just so that I could see where you are going and again, you are covering ground that has been traversed. All right? So, could you move on to a point that has not been dealt with?

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance came to this Parliament and plucked a figure from the air, claiming that an extra $30 million was going to be provided to local government bodies. The Member who spoke just previously calculated property tax and said that local government was going to be funded by property tax and on his basis, he came up with 60 to $70 per month per home, et cetera. Madam Speaker, that is in sync with what the Minister of Finance has claimed. However, that is in keeping with what the Minister has done previously, which is to pluck numbers from the sky which bears no relevance to the truth.

Madam Speaker, how do we expect a corporation in—how do we expect, for example, a corporation in Couva/Tabaquete—Couva/Tabaquete/Talparo Regional Corporation which receives—which is supposed to receive an estimated $99 million for the year, for 2022—that is what it allocated. We have no idea of what will actually be disbursed because that depends on the whim and fancy of the Government of the day and the Minister of Finance. What is of concern, Madam Speaker, is that this works out to about $557 per burgess which may sound substantial. But when you compare that with Port of Spain City Corporation and
you find out that Port of Spain City Corporation, the dollar per burgess in their allocation is $5,990, 100—what is this?—1,000 per cent?—1,000 per cent higher per burgess, Madam Speaker, and that is the difficulty I have with the Government’s plan. There is no clarity, there is no explanation as to how this legislation itself is going to fix that.

Madam Speaker, we have a situation where the Port of Spain City Corporation recently announced—I think it was last year—that they were looking at the possibility of putting turf, AstroTurf on a savannah. Madam Speaker, there are—I represent an area, Oropouche West, which is straddled by two corporations, the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation and the Siparia Regional Corporation. And on a multiplicity of occasions, we have had the situation where councillors have been crying out, their landlords are telling them that they are going to shut the offices because rents have not been paid. They could not operate equipment. And up to yesterday, Madam Speaker, I am told that the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation also had no funds allocated to it for the payment for fuel. So, this Government has been strangling some corporations but other corporations seem to be doing substantially better.

It is ironic that the corporations that seem to be doing significantly better are, in fact, smaller. They seem to have much better facilities available to them. They seem to have better roads, better drainage, better lighting, et cetera. And the irony of that is that they get the lion’s share of funding but large geographic areas in central and south seem to be victimized by this Government, seem to be discriminated by this Government and discriminated against by this Government.

Ms. Cudjoe: Madam Speaker, 48(1) and 46(6).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, I overrule on both but, Member, again, you have come back to that same geographic issue, the geographic equity or inequity or
whatever you have described it as. Please move on. You know, your body language suggests that you appreciate why I am standing on that.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** [Inaudible]—grandstanding, Madam Speaker, I am deeply concerned about the geographic discrimination—

**Madam Speaker:** Sir—

**Mr. D. Tancoo:**—that possess, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:**—let us understand the ground rules. I am sure that every Member here is deeply passionate about every issue that is debated here. I am certain of that but that is no reason to offend the rules which you, yourself have taken an oath that you will be bound by. Proceed.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, when I signed on to this Parliament and I signed the book at the front—

**Madam Speaker:** Excuse me, Member for Oropouche West, apologize or you can have a seat. Decide which one it is.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Madam Speaker, I am not clear what I am supposed to apologize for. I was explaining—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, Member for Oropouche West, I have spoken.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Madam Speaker, as odd as it seems, I will apologize profusely for what I am not too sure—

**Madam Speaker:** And please proceed.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I proceed, when I signed on to this Parliament as a Member of Parliament, I swore an oath to—

**Madam Speaker:** I again I have spoken. Please desist from that track. Proceed on another track.
Mr. D. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Members of Parliament, including those on both sides of this House, are expected to provide information to the general public when they speak. It is because members of the public do not read the legislation, they do not get exposure, they may not be able to digest the hundreds of pages that are contained in this Joint Select Committee—sorry—in this, yes—in this Joint Select Committee Report, and therefore, it is incumbent upon Members speaking to provide truthful, factual and specific information in their contributions. It is, in fact, the requirement—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Tancoo:—it is, in fact, the requirement of the oath that we all swore. Madam Speaker, when I stand here, I speak on behalf of not 120,000 persons, I speak on behalf of 1.4 million people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we all want to see an improvement in local government which affects us all.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Tancoo: Sadly, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Tancoo: Sadly, Madam Speaker, the legislation that is being proposed in this Committee Report that is being brought to us does not meet that grade. And the fact is that despite the Minority Report; despite the issues that have been put in the public domain by the Opposition; despite our complaints, even at this Chamber here, none of those on the opposite side who have stood in defence of this legislation, have been able to address any of the concerns in this Minority Report.

Madam Speaker, I am deeply troubled as an individual sitting here, as an individual who has benefited from the services of local government bodies, to hear local government practitioners being treated with such disregard. And I urge the Government, in my closing, Madam Speaker, I urge the Government to rethink
what they are doing. A lot of what has been highlighted as concerns can be addressed easily and quickly if the Government has the will to do so. Otherwise, Madam Speaker, what we are looking at is pure political propaganda from the other side. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Pennelope Beckles): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to such a timely and essential debate that seeks to adopt the Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020. And let me just join with my colleagues on this side and recognize the hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, Member of Parliament for Arouca, for piloting this Motion and let me also acknowledge and thank my former Cabinet colleague, former Sen. Clarence Rambharat, for chairing the Joint Select Committee that produced such a comprehensive, detailed and outstanding report. Likewise, I extend my congratulations to my colleagues on the Government side of the House for their robust contributions in support of the Motion before us today.

Madam Speaker, this report speaks, amongst other things, to equipping government at the local level, with the structure to operate more efficiently, for there to be more accountability and more responsively—to act more responsively to the needs of citizens in our region’s, cities, boroughs and our neighborhoods. It speaks directly to Trinidad and Tobago’s Vision 2030, National Development Strategy, as it relates to the institutional transformation and utilizing local authorities for service delivery.
From Vision 2030, the National Development Strategy of Trinidad and Tobago, 2016—2030, page 74, and I want to quote, Madam Speaker, if you would allow me:

“The enhancement of the Local Government machinery is premised on the basis that bringing services such as solid waste disposal, flood control, and public safety closer to the people contributes to a well-functioning community.

In this regard, the timely access to services and opportunities requires the devolution of certain Central Government responsibilities, such as physical planning, to Municipalities and the strengthening of local governance and involving more persons in decision-making, especially at the grassroots level. The reform of the municipalities is being led by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and will include the amendment to the Municipal Corporations Act to give greater responsibilities to the local government bodies, similar to that afforded to the Tobago House of Assembly.”

Madam Speaker, as with many of us on both sides, I would like to say that I have myself been a former local government councillor and therefore, it is with great—it is a great privilege for me to contribute to this debate since I can bring to bear some of my personal experiences as a former local government councillor.

One of the discussions or one of the issues raised by the former speaker, the hon. Member for Oropouche West, was the whole issue of the remuneration packages for local government councillors. And, Madam Speaker, I know this is a topic with which you are very familiar. But I can just say that some three decades ago when I was a local government councillor, I recall that the remuneration at that time was about $800 monthly. And notwithstanding the fact that the hon. Member
for Oropouche West is giving the impression that the Government has not addressed critical issues and has not gone far enough to deal with this issue of the compensation package, I think that the recommendation is to be commended. And one of the reasons for the persons now having to take a position where you are going to be—you cannot have alternative employment, what it actually means is that there will be a lot more dedication to the work of the various corporations and boroughs. And yes, I think the—my colleagues on the opposite side who put in place the issues of offices—and that is to be commended but I also believe that one needs to recognize that when we talk about reform, reform is an ongoing process. When we talk about local government, we are talking about several—almost 60 years plus. And if you do the research over the years, you would have seen that there have been a substantial amount of improvements.

My colleague who spoke a while ago, the Member of Parliament for Oropouche West, spoke about the fact that he straddles two corporations. And, Madam Speaker, why it is that this reform is so important, as the Member of Parliament for Arima, I also straddle several corporations. I straddled the Borough of Arima, I straddled San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, I also straddled the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and there is also a part of my constituency that straddles the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. And that is why we need to understand how important this reform is.

I do not think anyone in this House today would say that local government reform is not important and that this report has not gone a lot further than several of the other reports in trying to address the situation. I recall that I was also a member of a joint select committee of this Parliament to deal with local government reform and I think it was in 2007 elections was called and that committee ended. But looking at this report and the discussions and looking at the
consultations and the number of persons that were asked to give their views, I think this has gone very, very far.

Several of my colleagues on the other side also spoke to the challenges, whether it has to do with issues of grass cutting, maintenance of fields and I will say as a Member of Parliament that is one of the biggest concerns of your burgesses and very often they are not sure which of the corporations that they are affected by. As a matter of fact, a number of persons really do not even know who their councillors are. As far as persons are concerned, if you want a drain fixed, you want—whether a road is minor, whether it is secondary, even sometimes for issues relating to houses which do not fall under local government, persons in constituencies, as far as they are concerned, they go to what they call is their first respondent and very often it is the local government councillor. But what this legislation seeks to do, by ensuring that the persons are now permanently employed, and you cannot go and have other forms of employment, it means now that the burgesses can go and access their councillors in a much more easier fashion.

In addition to that, I think one of the most important issues for the councillors and for the burgesses is the fact that you can go to a specific place, whether it be the office or whether it be the corporation, and the chances of having your issues addressed are now a lot more easier.

One of the issues as well that is being addressed now is not just the issue of the salary or the remuneration package, but how do we deal with persons who have been councillors, sometimes 20/25 years, and leave with absolutely nothing in their hands. This legislation has now addressed that and I think that that is definitely to be commended based on the report.
Madam Speaker, I want to go and reflect a bit on the Trinidad and Tobago’s Vision 2030 agenda, and that is a culmination of several years of legal research and consultation. Now, Vision 2030 envisions Trinidad and Tobago as a place where each citizen enjoys a high quality of life and where there is proper consideration for environmental sustainability and balanced development, among other valuable ideals. Most importantly, our national strategy is consistent with the ideals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. So, when we bring local government reform, together with the reform of land use planning framework in Trinidad and Tobago, through the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, 2014, we are supporting Vision 2030, specifically about themes of:

“Putting People First”

And that is, of course:

“Nurturing Our Greatest Asset”

“Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence”

And that is by enhancing and aiming for the highest quality of life for citizens.

We are also talking about the issue of:

“Improving Productivity through Quality Infrastructure and Transportation”

I am sure that we can probably spend the whole day today talking about concerns as it relates to productivity in local government. Any Member of Parliament sitting here today would know that there has always been a concern as it relates to what time actually—there a number of the workers who work in local government—what time do they go to work and what time do they complete work, whether it is task work, or whether they are supposed to work for that full eight hours and to be compensated accordingly.

“Building Globally Competitive Businesses”
And that is improving the ease of business through improved and streamlined building approval processes.

“Placing the Environment at the Centre of...”—socioeconomic—“development”—by ensuring sustainability and all development activities and proper environmental management in varied activities. They are needed to support human lives and human settlements.

So, Madam Speaker, the reform agenda therefore supports, as I indicated a while ago, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in reference to Goal 2 which is:

Ending—“...hunger...”—promoting—“...sustainable agriculture”

Goal 3:

Ensuring healthier—“...lives and...”—promoting—“...well-being for all...”

And Goal 8:

Promoting—“...sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth...”

Goal 11:

Making—“...cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”

And Goal 13—

Taking—“...urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”

As a result, the committee, through its report, has amended nine pieces of legislation that cover a wide range of issues of national significance and the devolution of the responsibility for effective management of these issues to local government.

Now, Madam Speaker, in the context of local government reform, as covered by the report of the committee, let us therefore look at some of the benefits...
of the adoption of the report and its implementation. One of, I would first like to suggest, which is:

1. The issue of promotion of participatory planning and this entails greater local involvement and stakeholder participation in decision-making, involving matters that impact the daily lives of burgesses.

2. Decentralization of the decision-making process at the local and regional levels while promoting more evidence-based decisions.

3. Facilitation of modernized governance structures, leading to better local governments and increased transparency.

4. Enhancement of the responsibilities of local government to the establishment of spatial planning units. This will allow for the municipal corporations to operate as municipal planning authorities and that will result in:

   (a) Better facilitate and manage local socioeconomic development;

   (b) Engage in integrated planning by regulating the relationships between various types of planning, economic and social, thereby ensuring vertical linkages between planning levels and horizontal linkages among relevant technical processes within the municipal corporation; and

   (c) Enhance and strengthen process and mechanism for the monitoring and reporting of development; plan implementation and changes in land use; enforcement against unauthorized development and enforcement of building regulations; ensuring local compliance to national and regional plans, land use policies, building codes and standards.
5. Facilitation of more effective development planning for a specific municipality or in conjunction with neighboring municipalities.

6. Promotion, facilitation and regulation of local economic development in collaboration with a local business sector, NGOs, CBOs and individual community members.

7. General empowerment of municipal corporations to more efficiently manage their affairs and better serve their citizens and burgesses.

Allow me, therefore, Madam Speaker, to illustrate from a planning perspective as I draw your attention to the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, 2014, which seeks to reform the planning laws of Trinidad and Tobago by establishing a system for the preparation and approval of national and subnational development plans, and a system of planning and development approvals which are designed to secure predictability, simplicity, promptness and transparency in the treatment of development application.

Madam Speaker, the above mentioned objectives are achieved by the establishment of the National Planning Authority and the same Act also creates the municipal planning authorities. This dovetails into the Municipal Corporations Act, as it will be amended by this Bill, the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, when passed into law.

Madam Speaker, the devolution of authority from the National Planning Authority to the municipal planning authorities is prescribed in the proposed new section 35F of the Municipal Corporations Act. What this means, Madam Speaker, is that approvals for intended land use will not have to come to the Town and Country Planning Division of the Ministry of Planning and Development. The Bill spells out that some approvals and enforcement functions will be devolved to the local government authority.
Clause 3 of the Bill introduces the phrase “complex development” and this is complemented by the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, 2014, as amended, which recognizes simple developments. The net effect, Madam Speaker, is that “simple development” defined as:

“…development for which an application is made for-
(a) billboards”—and—“advertising signs;
(b) …planning permissions not requiring a Certificate of Environmental Clearance;
(c) change of use…”—under specific sizes.
And:
(d) land subdivisions…”—within specific ranges will fall under the purview of the municipal authorities and complex developments, which is anything not covered by the terms—“simply developments”—will be the responsibility of the National Planning Authority.

The consequent decentralization of the function will result in a speedier request response to request for service and, therefore, faster turnaround time and higher levels of service satisfaction by the public.

12.00 noon

Madam Speaker, this issue of applications for approvals, I think the average citizens is never certain whether or not you go to your corporation, whether you go to Town and Country. There are some approvals, at this time, that are given by the corporations, there are some approvals that are given by Town and Country, but clearly what this reform process seeks to do is to make it a lot easier and to give much more power to the municipal corporations in these matters.

So, Madam Speaker, this is yet another example of what local government
reform is intended to achieve. Suffice it to say, this Bill is a game changer in the quality of public service and representation to be afforded to the people of Trinidad and Tobago as government services move closer to them in their neighbours and in their communities.

Furthermore, it should be noted that upon the full proclamation of the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, 2014, the Town and Country Planning Division, as indicated, will cease to exist and each municipal corporation will be deemed a Municipal Planning Authority. All development applications would be submitted to the relevant Municipal Planning Authority. Simple development applications will be processed by the MPA or the Municipal Planning Authority. And as I indicated ago, as it relates to complex development applications, they will be referred to the Minister through the National Planning Authority.

Madam Speaker, as my colleagues have already illustrated and will further illustrate, the adoption of the report of this committee will have far-reaching impacts, and I am absolutely certain, based not only on the discussions, and even in relation to the concerns raised, it will benefit the people of Trinidad as this Bill becomes law, and these benefits will be in almost every aspect of their lives. Local government will play a more prominent role in service delivery and in responding to issues that affect them locally.

Madam Speaker, one of the things that the pandemic has showed us, especially as it relates to playfields, to grounds which are always a very important issue for communities, those who are fortunate enough to have whether it be cricket fields or whether it be football fields, during the pandemic, most of those fields were, in some instances, I would not say abandoned, but what we realized is that you had a situation where those places were not maintained. But you see now
where the local government, and sometimes with the assistance of whether it be CEPEP or other organizations, you see that those fields are now being properly maintained.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

And my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Oropouche West, was at pains to talk about the fact that the Port of Spain City Corporation and some other corporations, are funded much better, he suggested and argued, than some of the rural communities. You have the City of Port of Spain, you have the City of San Fernando, you have several boroughs and then you have corporations, and I think it is fair to say that it is not going to be a situation where a city, a borough and a corporation, you know, to simply argue and say that the city gets more money than the corporation, and that argument sometimes is even for a borough, like Arima, some people will argue that the Tunapuna corporation would get more funding than the borough. My colleague, the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, who has served as a chairman of that corporation would understand, of course, those corporations cover the length and breadth. Those corporations cover a large geographic area. The Port of Spain Corporation may cover a smaller area, but the responsibilities, of course, of maintaining a city, as distinct from a borough, a corporation is quite different. But the truth is that it does not mean to say that a burgess living in a rural community or living in a borough or living in a city is not important. All the burgesses are important.

I have—as the Member of Parliament for Arima, I have part of the borough, but then I also have the rural communities going way to La Fillette and Blanchisseuse and Morne La Croix that have their challenges. Because very often the concerns that I have when we have these debates is, the impression is always given that it is the rural areas in San Fernando and the accusation is always that
those are the only areas that are not looked after and that the Government takes a
deliberate decision to neglect those areas.

Those of you who have the benefit of going as well into the northern
constituencies, the constituencies of Toco and Matelot and so, I mean people have
their equal challenges, whether it be transportation, very similar to some other
communities and, as MPs, we all have to explain to our areas how do we address it
and, therefore, it is not only unfortunate that that impression is consistently given
that that is the position of this Government which is absolutely false. I know my
colleague from Point Fortin is going to speak very shortly and he too will talk
about the challenges that exist, because he also has rural communities. I think
almost everyone here in some form has some part of their constituency that
whether or not you may not have been classified as rural, but you may have some
challenges in certain communities, because you have development aspects.

One of the biggest challenges for local government is what you call a lot of
the unplanned communities. But whether the communities are planned or
unplanned, the burgesses, they want an equal representation, whether or not they
build as, in some instances, some people take decisions and they will go and build
almost on the bank of the river and that can happen in many different communities.
But those persons expect the councillor as well as the MP, if the flood comes, they
are going to call you the same way, and they expect you, as your Member of
Parliament or as the councillor, to do the best for them. So when we talk about
local government reform, and when we talk about the issue of taxes, the collection
of taxes and how can it improve the overall life of the citizens of Trinidad, because
this is specifically as it relates to this area, because we know Tobago has its own
piece of legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you know, what I always find interesting is a

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lot of us travel and we love to talk about a number of other places whether you go to Brooklyn or you go to Canada, and you see how local government functions in some of those areas. But when we talk to our family members who live in those respective communities and those respective countries, they are able to tell you the only reason why they are able to have those kinds of services and quality of services is because of the taxes that they pay. And so often we have a difficulty in being truthful about the fact that if we are to improve on the delivery of services for our burgesses, we really have no choice but to address that issue of reform and that issue of collection of taxes.

So, I would like to say, as I close, that I am in total support of this reform. I am really happy that we have gotten to the stage where this is finally being debated, that there has been the report and there has been extensive consultation and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Mayaro, and Member, you have 30 minutes.

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this crucial debate on local government reform, reform which was promised by this administration way back in 2015. Before I get into my very short but succinct contribution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to reflect on the contribution by the Member for Arima. I must say that several, if not all of the issues raised by the Member, I agree that these are issues that form part of local government, and I cannot argue with the challenges as both MPs and councillors faced.

Outside of the connection of the hon. Member’s Ministry of Planning and Development, to the parts of the local government reform that speaks to planning
and development and approval, what the hon. Member did not do was to connect the other issues that she raised to the legislation that we are looking at in this Joint Select Committee Report today, and that really is the core of my concern. When reviewing the Joint Select Committee Report, how does the legislation answer all of the questions that have been raised by Members on both sides? Because we are all affected by local government one way or the other. And I do not think anybody in this House today thinks that there is no requirement or no rationale behind wanting local government reform. And I can tell you, as a matter of fact, we on this side are fully supportive of local government reform, but we have raised some issues that we are hoping that the Members of the Government Bench would explain and, perhaps, reconsider.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the exercise of this Joint Select Committee, the Government was unable to create consensus, to the point where the Opposition Members felt morally bound to present a Minority Report. I want to commend my colleagues on the Opposition Bench for the wisdom and the purpose in their recommendations which has always, like every time we stand in this House, always in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. R. Paray:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a pity that the Government representatives failed to appreciate the insights and good judgment of the Opposition Members. The Opposition, in that committee report, advocated for five basic things, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

1. The protection of trade union representation.
2. Equity in the establishment of municipalities.
3. Protection of the rights of the minority.
4. The consideration for the postponing of the introduction of the property
Mr. Paray (cont’d)

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on that particular point, throughout this debate, I got the impression that the focus or the push for this legislation is really to justify the bringing forward or the implementation of the property tax, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are all fair and justifiable matters that should be obvious and acceptable to any reasonable government. The implementation of the property tax, as elucidated by the Member for San Fernando East, at this time, would be a bit draconian and some may even say heartless, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this point in time in the country, because of a number of factors, many of our citizens are finding it very difficult to survive the day-to-day challenges. When you have the impending inflation rates that are going with all these increases in prices and shipping costs that are coming, because of global issues and you have businesses going out of business, that may be a bit challenging at this time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, history would record that this administration is basically saying no to the recommendations that we in Opposition have provided in this local government reform conversation. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is essential to reflect on what has motivated this proposed local government reform and, in my respectful view, as tardy and as incomplete as I believe that it is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, amongst many of the promises that were made in 2015 by the administration that it would work:

...in an effective and efficient manner to remove red tape and bureaucracy from local government.

But yet in 2022, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, and I am sure other municipal bodies, complained severely to the Joint Select Committee about the inequity of the allocation of funds and the disbursement of
issues like, you know, payments for truck borne water and so on to householders. These were key things that were raised during the committee meetings. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in other words, while the Government touts local government transformation, people still cannot attend to the basics in their personal lives, because of some would say the incompetence of how the devolution of local government is being managed over the last seven years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation has protested over and over on, you know, delays in financial releases as sure as many of the other corporations. The point that I want to raise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that no one on the Government Bench has really connected the legislation to answer those questions. How would these matters be dealt with? Mr. Deputy Speaker, that type of tardiness negatively impacts the delivery of services, as you would well know, like scavenging, disaster relief, road rehabilitation and purchases of relevant equipment to deal with matters as such. In other words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these things affect matters that are crucial to life and limb of our burgesses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we now have another municipal election that is coming, and the Government has brought forward this legislation, and it seems a bit interesting that all of a sudden the election is coming, and now this Bill is coming to us, and we suspect it is primarily to prepare for the property tax funding local elections that is coming. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the best practice in local government administration requires that ordinary citizens be permitted to become a meaningful part of the process yet, again, I have not seen the legislation or even the documentation in the JSC Report connect where is the participation from your burgesses. So, without that, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and perhaps the next speaker on the Government Bench can connect some of that for us. So without that, Mr.
Deputy Speaker, I think we are anticipating more criticisms and grievances from the man on the street that local government is not servicing his need.

I would like to remind the Government contributors that they should really explain which measures would lead to transparency and accountability and would engender the public’s trust. So, firstly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which features of the legislation that are mentioned in the report would allow citizens to scrutinize the funding and priorities of the relevant municipal or regional corporation? Two, what aspects would improve efficiency and effectiveness and permit local government bodies to better deliver on their responsibilities? In essence, would the legislation provide an appropriate toolkit to local government practitioners? Three, where are the guarantees that the perceived lopsided bias in the allocation of funding would cease to exist? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not get the impression that the legislation and the explanations contained in the committee’s report addresses those matters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member who spoke before me, spent some time talking about, you know, we have rural communities that are spread both in the north and south of this country and rural communities do have some additional challenges. And I can tell you in Mayaro/Rio Claro, the entire constituency can be defined as a rural community. But what is important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a rural community or a corporation that is responsible for large rural communities, has three times the financial responsibility of some of the city areas, the borough areas and so on. It is clear that the legislation when it finally arrives, at some point in time, it may only deepen the existing inequities in the system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, based on what is before us today, I do not see this as deep-rooted and objective reform. It seems more as a cosmetic makeover in order to claim that the Government is finally doing something in terms of local government reform, and it really clears and opens the path for property tax, Mr.
Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Opposition has said it very loud and clear, on many forums that this is not the proper time. If the focus of the Government is to push this Bill just to clear the way for the implementation of the property tax we, again, make an appeal that this is not the time for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Joint Select Committee Report that is before us today, is a clear indication that the legislation cannot meet the best international practice. Best practice demands, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that citizens could meaningfully engage local government officials, and there is trust that appropriate matters will be prioritized. Again, I did not get that sense in the report that this is something that is open in terms of what will happen in terms of the reform. We do feel that the lack of funding that there is crucial need for improvements everywhere, whether at public parks, road repair, street signs and so on.

If the Government—you know, there is the conversation that because the property tax is going to put more money in the coffers of the municipal corporations, what I did not get, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the control of the funds that end up there. Where is the firewall that is going to prescribe and describe how the money is spent? How it is going to be in terms of appropriated across different, you know, types of development, whether it is in sports, arts, culture and recreation and so on. So, some of those areas are missing in the legislation that would really protect the funds as well inside of the municipal corporation.

Then there is also the issue of manpower. If one were to reflect back to the 1990 Municipal Corporations Act, I believe, in that Act, there was supposed to be about four or five CEOs in special areas of your corporation and in 30-something years, all we have done is put one CEO in charge. Now, when you look at the reform requirement and you have so much requirement for high capacity, HR, I
mean professionals in the organization, I am not seeing where the legislation is providing for that. And knowing the speed at which government hires, again, the legislation does not talk about how it is going to overcome that hurdle to make sure that the right capacity and quality of people sit in the corporation that this devolution of power into the local government happens. I have not seen that the legislation is providing that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the legislation must provide a quantum leap on these matters. It cannot be piecemeal if the Government wants to tackle issues that are being demanded from a very modern burgess, who is travelling, they are travelling to other countries, as the Member for Arima has said. They are seeing the quality of services being provided by municipalities outside and they are demanding it. So, the legislation, the reform has to make quantum leaps rather than piecemeal suggestions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in these modern times as well, the local government sector must also be on vanguard with the use of digital technology. Now, in today’s newspaper, I welcome a report that I saw where the newly minted Minister of Local Government and Rural Development has advised that the use of digital technology will be used in terms of furthering the interest of local government. So, definitely, I welcome that and I am hoping just that time will tell on the success of that. I must say that local government authorities, in a lot of progressive countries, are using technology to improve transparency and accountability to the people who local government deserves.

[Madam Speaker in the Chair]

So, Madam Speaker, the Opposition is not confident that the impending legislation would create local government reform in the way and the model that we want it to happen in terms of furthering the development of Trinidad and Tobago.
However, Madam Speaker, it is not too late for the Government to ensure that the essential elements of local government are embodied in the forthcoming Bill. The Government needs to display vision, imagination and a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of municipal governments in the daily lives of our citizens. We urge the Government to rationally examine the Minority Report, and to be reformist and forward-thinking on local government reform. Failure to do so, Madam Speaker, would render this entire exercise another dead-end project of this administration.

In closing, Madam Speaker, weak local government reform would forever have this Government’s fingerprint all over it. The Government would have wasted seven years playing with the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I urge the Government to take the issues raised in the Minority Report and reconsider some of the aspects in terms of its pushing local government reform. I thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Diego Martin Central.

The Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Symon de Nobriga): Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, firstly, let me say that I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020 and start off by offering and joining with my colleagues in offering my sincerest congratulations to the Leader of Government Business, the MP for Arouca/Maloney for her clinical presentation of the genesis of this Bill and, of course, the history of local government reform in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I recall during my contribution to the two Tobago Bills, I believe it was in June of 2021 that I said then that the proposed legislation which sought to
Hon. S. de. Nobriga (cont’d)

strengthen our fledgling democracy and deepen the powers of autonomy and strengthen the Tobago House of Assembly, at that time, would have represented what would have been amongst some of the most significant pieces of legislation that this Twelfth Parliament would debate in its tenure. Well, Madam Speaker, in this committee’s report and also in the Bill and recommendations that accompany it, I see so many similarities, not least of which is the philosophy of this Government who is prepared to trust the average citizen to do what is best for themselves and best for this country.

Madam Speaker, this sort of involvement is how democracies worldwide are strengthened. It is how citizen participation is deepened and encouraged, contrary to the words that my colleague from Mayaro would have advanced earlier. This is how ordinary citizens feel more empowered to take charge of and to take care of their communities.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. de Nobriga: Madam Speaker, the devolution of power envisaged in this report will only redound to the benefit of the wider citizenry who for years—and Madam Speaker, as a past councillor for the district of Morne Coco/Alyce Glen, I have heard this myself. They have complained about the slow pace of delivery of common goods and services. They complained about the irregular nature of their garbage collection, they complained about the inability to obtain a truck borne supply of water, at the times when WASA fails, they complained about the state of disrepair in their play parks and recreation grounds, Madam Speaker. As a past Chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, one in the House, that would have been responsible for recreation grounds in Diamond Vale, recreation grounds in Petit Valley and in Cocorite, this is a common, common argument I have heard from the burgesses, from the citizens of Diego Martin Central.
12.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, an additional common narrative is the perennial inability of regional corporations to simply fund what citizens consider to be the basic needs of their communities. So, is this Bill a panacea for all the ills of local government? Well, the reality is, it is as perfect as it can be. And in light of that, I wonder at the shenanigans of the Members opposite who participated freely in the proceedings of the Joint Select Committee, generated a Minority Report, which in itself in its five lines said precious little.

And in light of that, and I am sorry that she is not in the room right now, Madam Speaker, I was particularly confused to hear the Member for St. Augustine as she led off her response for the Opposition, in her contribution that offered little by way of substance other than to let us know what topics her colleagues would speak about when they followed her, she then wanted to offer suggestions for consideration.

**Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member.

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Madam Speaker, I apologize, the hon. Member, I apologize. The hon. Member then wanted to offer suggestions for consideration and the hon. Member was followed by her colleagues. The Member sat in the committee. Her former colleagues in local government added their voices to the process at length and coming out of that process this report was completed. It was presented and now Members are coming here to give suggestions.

Madam Speaker, this country has been consulting on local government reform for nearly a century and now with this single step we are embarking upon today will result in what will be some of the most fundamental changes to a structure that still bears vestiges of our colonial past.

Madam Speaker, I took careful note of the points of objection, as few as they
were, raised by the Opposition’s Minority Report and in particular their lament over the insufficiency of consultation which has been mirrored here today. Madam Speaker, given that we have been at this for almost 100 years, how much more consultation do they expect? How else or who else should the JSC have consulted with when all 14 municipal and regional corporations were invited to and also submitted reports as part of the process. How many more persons should the JSC have consulted with when this Bill emerged from the public consultations?

Now, Madam Speaker, I do not want to incur your wrath, so I will simply state that my colleagues have addressed this at length. I know that, Madam Speaker, and I will not bear your standing to call me on tedious repetition. I just want to point out, Madam Speaker, that coming out of those consultations, 3,600 persons attended; over 300 questions and comments were recorded addressing issues related to human resources, accountability as raised by my colleague from Mayaro, efficiency and politics in terms of how we resolve conflicts. How much longer do they expect us to engage in this process of consultation?

Madam Speaker, the Member for Arima, the Minister of Planning and Development looked at the Bill from the perspective of planning and development. It is very difficult for me to sit here and not see it through the lens of my own portfolio. And the truth is, Madam Speaker, that I see an ongoing strategy of the Opposition to stall and to stymie this Government at every turn, refusing to support legislation such as this which they fully participated in and then they come to the House and play victim, Madam Speaker. And this victim playing was carried out at the very beginning by the hon. Member for St. Augustine and followed on by the Member for Chaguanas East when they came and in their comments spoke about this Government chastising the Opposition for exercising its minority voice and that this Government had rejected their Minority Report. Reject what?

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Madam Speaker, one of the tenets of democracy is that majority rules and that we understand that in that you also need to respect the rights of the individual and the minority. However, Madam Speaker, all rights come with responsibilities and if it is that the Members opposite want their voices to be heard, if they want their voices to be respected, then be responsible with your voice. Stop using it for bacchanal. Stop using it for misinformation and for misdirection at every turn.

Madam Speaker, “ah getting worked up, eh”, but it is largely because I come to this debate, not like some opposite, as a disinterested observer, but I come to this debate as someone who has worked intimately with the local government infrastructure, both as a councillor and as chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation. So I know that of which I speak.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. de Nobriga: I have seen the highs and the lows of local government. I understand the very real financial challenges that local government has and the knock-on effects of that on the operations of regional corporations. But what is vexing to me are these circular arguments being advanced by Members opposite somehow has justification for why they do not support the recommendations of the report and they do not support the work of the committee.

The first argument, Madam Speaker, starts somewhere in the middle and “doh” end anywhere in particular. And it is that, while we are here speaking—while we are here as a result of understanding the many woes and challenges associated with local government, while we are here advancing the recommendations of the committee, which they participated in, they come here and choose to discuss at length the very challenges of local government that are the grounds for the work of the committee, the report that they generated and the recommendations arising out of that report. Madam Speaker, what other reason
could there be for that course of action other than to continue advancing this agenda of negativity in the country?

Madam Speaker, the second circular argument is this constant narrative coming out of one side of their mouth where they speak about, they understand and they support local government reform, but where is the funding going to come for all this reform? And out of the other side of their mouth, they take the position that they are not supporting property tax.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** And you know, and, Madam Speaker, we saw, we saw on the opening day where the MP for Bridgestone and Goodyear continued this with her version of how we could expect people to pay property tax when we have to drive on roads with potholes. Madam Speaker, what does the Member think the purpose of property tax is?—if not to deal with those things in particular.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** Madam Speaker, as the personal testament, I try to walk in my constituency every week and I always try to walk with the councillor for the district in which I am walking because I understand that most of the issues that impact citizens on a daily basis in this country are to be dealt with as a function of local government. But very often the same councillor has to turn and lean on me for the support needed to get the simplest things done, potholes, minor repairs to curbs and drains, minor construction like garbage enclosures and, of course, more major things like forming roads. The councillors understand, given their challenges, that it is very difficult to do as much as they can for as many as they can. These are the very issues that property tax will impact. So when we have Members opposite coming to politicize the entire thing saying that we are only bringing it because of an election coming and that is why we are bringing it to fund
an election. Of course not. This Government is committed to local government reform because this Government—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:**—is committed to delivering to the citizens of this country. Madam Speaker, some of the hardest working representatives can be found in local government. There are countless local government councillors labouring in the vineyards and this report and the accompanying Bill recognizes the immensity of their contribution.

The paradigm shifts that are contained in clause 3 of the Bill revolutionizes entirely the way in which local government and its practitioners are treated. Madam Speaker, there are scores of councillors who, having completed their tour of duty, will go home without a pension because they received an honorarium as opposed to a negotiated remuneration package. And by way of example, I think of my ex-colleague in local government, councillor Terry Rondon who, having given the burgesses of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation and the constituents of Toco/Matelot in particular everything that he has, when he decides to retire he will do so under this current arrangement. He will do so with nothing by gratis. He will do so with nothing but the wishes and prayers all of those people that he has impacted over the many years of service that he has given to people of Toco/Matelot, to the corporation of Toco/Sangre Grande and the nation in general.

Madam Speaker, we know that Terry is not alone in that scenario and there are councillors who are represented by Members on both sides of this aisle to whom this tragedy will apply. The proposed legislation before us however, at long last, provides a remedy for that injustice, Madam Speaker.

And additionally, I also welcome the move to extend the term of office from three years to four years as well because in this it harmonizes and it sort of flattens
the curve existing between the assemblymen in the THA and local government councillors in Trinidad.

Madam Speaker, there was a comment earlier, I believe, by the MP for Mayaro about how are we going to ensure that we have citizens participating? Well, by the creation of an executive council that is separate and apart to but still accountable to the municipal council, the elected members, what we have is a feature in this Bill that pushes it squarely into the realm of 21st Century politics. And in determining the composition of the executive the mayor or the chairman has the latitude to appoint persons with specific skills and competencies as secretaries to spearhead those specific divisions. And I wanted to give an idea to the House about those divisions. Now, this is something that right now is not possible and it is something when it is legislated it is going to marry accountability with that expanded responsibility and resourcing, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, each corporation shall establish divisions—this is under 35A(1) dealing with the responsibility of divisions of a corporation.

“Each Corporation shall establish...divisions with the following responsibilities:

(a) corporate services;
(b) finance, planning and allocation of resources;
(c) internal audit;”

That, by itself, reeks of accountability.

“(d) sport and youth development;
(e) recreation grounds and public spaces;
(f) public health”—and—“sanitation and”—the—“environmental..., 
(g) spatial planning and building inspectorate;
(h) monitoring and evaluation;...”

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Madam Speaker, when taken in their totality the new features of this Bill will lead even more people and quite possibly even more professionals to actually consider a career in politics beginning and in many cases remaining at the local level bringing the best and the brightest to representation. What more could we want? And it also in some cases we will have these professionals transitioning into central government. What happens there is that we will have representatives who are better equipped to represent because they understand the granular level of representation having come from local government. And when I sit here and I see my brothers and sisters from local government that would have come from local government with me in the MP for D’Abadie/O’Meara, the MP for Point Fortin and the MP for Toco/Sangre Grande, among others, because we are full of them on this side, I know that in our case that experience at local government served us well and I would expect to see more Members of Parliament coming through as a result of this reform, coming through the process, understanding representation and being able to deliver representation at a much higher level to the citizens to whom they have been or to whom that responsibility has been tasked.

Madam Speaker, one of the most momentous shifts emanating out of the proposed Bill before us is the conferring of financial autonomy on municipal and regional corporations. This ability to retain specific taxes, and we know what we are talking about, those taxes collected within the boundaries of the corporation will place regional and municipal corporations in a position to determine their own spending and saving patterns. So by carefully analysing the quantum of income that they are likely to receive from these taxes, what happens is the corporations will now be in a better position to plan their work programme, to determine how many people they could employ, to determine what projects they can undertake and, of course, how to prioritize those projects because they will be able do that
without having recourse to any form of approval from central government. You see, that level of autonomy balanced with the accountability of the executive council to the municipal council can only positively impact the delivery of services to the residents of the regional corporations. Member of Parliament for Mayaro, this is a clear example of increased accountability that comes along with an increased ability to deliver. But of course, Madam Speaker, that spending is not only going to be limited to physical infrastructure. I am particularly excited to see the impact of this reform on the municipal police across all 14 corporations.

**Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]**

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:*** I am particularly excited to see how a well-resourced municipal police infrastructure can positively impact communities with that soft side of policing that they are so well poised to deliver and to see how that impact plays out in policing and in criminality on a national level.

Madam Speaker, this level of fiscal independence will undoubtedly mute the annual cries, and we heard it today, of geographical discrimination emanating from those on the other side. And again, today’s events and in particular the participation by the MP for Oropouche West leaves me to conclude that rather than rejoice in these developments, they prefer to not see it happen, hence their refusal to support the committee’s final report.

**Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]**

**Hon. S. de Nobriga:** In the same way they do not want to support the Siparia Regional Corporation’s stated desire to join with the Diego Martin Regional Corporation in being elevated to the status of a borough under this PNM Government.

Madam Speaker, the experience from across jurisdictions around the world shows that decentralization of the decision-making process and the devolution of
authority, when properly implemented, which it will be, is one of the most powerful tools to reduce poverty and inequality, to accelerate rural development, an argument being put forward by those on the other side and enhance the participation of citizens in their own development. Multiple studies of decentralization in jurisdictions like Tanzania and Uganda and Indonesia and in India, and there are many, there are others because there are many, all highlight the positive impact that decentralized administrations can have on unlocking the potential of regions, on improving services to people and stimulating citizen participation in decision making.

You see, Madam Speaker, when administrative decentralization is matched with fiscal decentralization, Trinidad and Tobago will finally be on a path to accelerated and sustained local development bringing long-term benefits to all residents in all regional and municipal corporations. And that, Madam Speaker, in accordance with this Government’s manifesto, in accordance with our Vision 2030, in accordance with our Roadmap to Recovery is the best way to ensure that no citizen is left behind.

Madam Speaker, as I close I want to offer my colleagues on the other side a few words of caution. You see, when the history of local government reform in this country is written, their names will be recognized as those who opposed a giant step towards the modernization of governance in this country. They will be remembered as having refused to put country before party and they will be remembered—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. de Nobriga:—as having not supported the efforts to legislate this hands-on system of governance, this system of governance which will ultimately and which will definitely bring Government closer to the people.
Madam Speaker, as the person blessed with the awesome responsibility of representing the constituents of Diego Martin Central, as a former councillor and as a former chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, I am of the considered view that the legislative advancements being proposed today are best suited to actualize real and progressive change in our lives and can only redound to the benefit of the good citizens of this nation. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Point Fortin.

Mr. Kennedy Richards (Point Fortin): Thank you, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. K. Richards:—for the opportunity to contribute in this historic and most progressive Motion to adopt the report of the Joint Select Committee Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020. Indeed, Madam Speaker, as being here today—as being assembled here today, Madam Speaker, is a significant achievement for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Now, Madam Speaker, alas local government reform is here and here to stay.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. K. Richards: Madam Speaker, I pride myself to be the Member of Parliament alongside my colleague for D’Abadie/O’Meara as Members coming through all phases of local government. In 2020, I would have made it 10 years of service to local government, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. K. Richards: I was once the youngest councillor at the Point Fortin Borough Corporation in 2010 and I became the youngest deputy mayor in 2016 and in my short term I was the youngest mayor in the Borough of Point Fortin 2019.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Mr. K. Richards: So, Madam Speaker, the recommendation—so when I say that the recommendations from the Joint Select Committee on local government reform is transformational and significant in terms of advancing the cause of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I say this with authority and experience, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the local government reform Bill has three distinct features that I will develop in my contribution. The first is that local government reform expands the organizational structure of the municipalities and develops a clear separation of powers. Secondly, it offers municipalities economic security and autonomy. And thirdly, it provides legal framework for the recognition of greater autonomy.

Madam Speaker, I listened to the Members opposite, interested to hear their perspective and contributions to the development of this Bill. And in their usual way they continue to disappoint but not surprise. Madam Speaker, for an Opposition whose leader considers local government reform to be demotion and a low, shows us that they do not wish to see the municipal corporations, no matter the political persuasion, transform in a way comprehensively to serve the citizens and burgesses. Madam Speaker, local government in many aspects are held in more regard than central government because it touches and affects the daily lives and livelihoods of the people of this country.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. K. Richards: Madam Speaker, last week I launched a series of conversations called “Let’s Talk Point Fortin” where I share with the constituents the plans to transform the constituency through my collaboration with relevant Ministries and central government agencies. And I must say it was well received by the communities we attended thus far. But interestingly I noted that during the question and answer segment over 98 per cent of the questions concerned local
government, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, that goes to show the impactful nature of local government and the goods and services that they provide. And also based on the questions, the constraints and how they affect the people negatively. The analogy is that whilst I appreciate the good work my Government is doing in youth development because they may be frustrated because of the drain at the back of their home, it is a dilapidated or in a deplorable condition. And that is of great concern to them and their family, as a matter of fact, the entire community. And whilst they may be happy and whilst I may be happy, Madam Speaker, to see my Government performing exceedingly well in managing us out of the pandemic, we are challenged because the street that we may be passing on may be in a state of disrepair. What those examples tell us, Madam Speaker, is that local government addresses those issues that face the people of this country immediately on a daily basis.

In addressing those immediate challenges local government bodies, especially the elected officials responsible, are frustrated to the point that they are unable to deliver on basic necessities to the burgesses of which they have to face every day, not because they want to ignore or are lazy but because of severe limitations whether it be bureaucratic red tape or lack of resources to deliver.

Madam Speaker, this legislation recognizes those challenges and now seeks to substantially reform the local government sector from where it is now to where we have been hoping and seeking for time immemorial. All in all, Madam Speaker, this legislation will transform lives, save people, provide for the people, give opportunities for the people and substantially serve the people in a way that our citizens deserve.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]
Mr. K. Richards: So when we listen to the nit-picking from the Opposition on this Bill, when I hear the unfounded arguments raised by the Opposition on this topic, I question if our colleagues are really interested to see a better living for the citizenry, or are they concerned in being anti-PNM, which is an unfortunate that the people of this country must bear witness to baseless contributions from the Opposition, adding little to no merit to what this highly progressive legislation would bring. From their four-line contribution in the report to their disjointed contributions in the House, it is clear that the Opposition has no valuable point to discredit this Bill. And I must congratulate the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, under the vision of our Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, and all those who worked in the JSC for presenting an outstanding piece of legislation, since the Opposition is out of words, Madam Speaker,

Madam Speaker, as I move into my initial point, which is the reform—which is what the reform legislation provides, for greater organizational structure and separation of powers in local government municipalities, the local government reform established three branches of local government:

- The first is the creation of a new executive council;
- Establishing roles and responsibilities for the municipal council; and
- Clearing the duties of the administration, administrative branch of municipalities.

Madam Speaker, for the citizens that are listening to this debate, and especially the constituents living in Point Fortin, the borough corporation, or in the Siparia Regional Corporation, I want to explain what these branches of local government would mean to them. Madam Speaker, the municipal council: The
renewed mandate that has been given to the municipal council of the corporation is a progressive one, one that is built in democracy. We see a new section being added that provides responsibility of the municipal council that consists of all elected councillors and selected aldermen, with the mayor and deputy mayor. This section defines the responsibilities that include:

1. “making standing orders, bylaws...for the good governance of the Corporation;”
2. “exercising oversight over the activities of the Corporation and...Executive Council;”
3. “representing the interest and concerns of...burgesses and citizens...”—as well as—“...raising grievances and service delivery requests...”—to—“...various divisions...”
4. “approving the budget of the Corporation...”—and much more.

These responsibilities give our municipal corporation parliamentary responsibilities. It would be the local parliament of the municipalities, if we are breaking it down, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, in the current system there is no provision for that. My experience, Madam Speaker, is that within the present situation, while there exists collaboration with the council, the main responsibility for the budget submissions lies with the administrative arm of a regional corporation.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. K. Richards:** Whilst some councils it may not be an issue, for many it would mean that the plans and vision of that council for the period that they are elected for can be stymied or downright disregarded if the administrations feel like it. After all, the people voted for a councillor to represent them and he or she must have an impact on the decision-making responsibility of that municipality.
The executive council: Madam Speaker, a major highlight of this local government reform package is the introduction of an executive council that acts like a local cabinet of the municipalities. The executive council will be a smaller group of councillors and aldermen that will be assigned responsibilities of divisions of the municipality. They would be responsible for:

- Coordinating the operations of the new divisions;
- Approving plans and programmes for the divisions;
- Responsible for daily management of the corporation, et cetera.

All provided in new section 33C, the executive council would give the community a greater hand in managing local affairs.

Because, there will be the creation of divisions in a similar system to our sister isle, the Tobago House of Assembly. These divisions would be established to conduct the affairs of the corporation under the responsibility in new section 35A. We would soon have divisions responsible for finance, resources and planning, community development, youth and sport, public health, social services, disaster management, spatial planning and buildings, municipal security, infrastructure and development. This would create greater opportunities for our people in terms of employment as well as creating responsible arms of the municipality that is headed by a councillor or alderman with requisite allocations for service delivery. This is a change in system where all the needs of the local government body are centralized in a municipal council alone, which is very onerous and anti-productive. Additionally, councillors and aldermen would now have expanded capacity as those who would be on the executive council will now have to utilize their skillset, knowledge and experience in directing the affairs of the respective divisions.

The administration: The old structure of how employees are hired at a corporation is highly archaic and ineffective to the needs of the communities
within the corporation. The local government reform promises to allow the executive council to finally be the employer of persons working in every division of the corporation. Madam Speaker, there were many times, as a councillor, as an alderman, even as the mayor, when people would come to you seeking employment, “ah livin right opposite the borough and ah want a five days”. And as a councillor, as a deputy mayor, as a mayor, you could not have employed that person. You had no authority to help that person who is living right next to the corporation to even get a day within the corporation, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is how you can assist those living within your municipality.

Financial autonomy: Madam Speaker, I observed that Members opposite complained—the Member for Moruga/Tableland explained the challenges at the Princes Town Regional Corporation and the lack of funding to do projects. I saw the Member for Couva North share the challenges, in Chaguanas as well. Madam Speaker, yes, indeed, local government districts whether PNM or UNC-led are all challenged with low resources and funding. However, I seem not to understand their complaint because this Bill is addressing those said challenges and issues what we have been dealing with for years. It seems as though the argument is that they want more funding for local government, but at the same time they do not want property tax that will offer some millions of dollars yearly to the corporations. My question, my question, Madam Speaker, to the Opposition is then: what is the alternative source of funding do you as a responsible Opposition suggest for corporations to receive in the administration of their duties to the citizenry? The fact is, Madam Speaker, as mentioned by the Finance Minister, they lack the intellectual capacity to even offer one sustainable recommendation to advance the corporation’s resources.

And, Madam Speaker, local government reform would establish a
relationship directly between the Cabinet and the municipality in that when corporations present their budget it goes directly to the Finance Ministry for consideration and allocation. It will take out an old system that requires local government bodies to submit proposals for funding, to be at the graces of the public servant at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Madam Speaker, a system should not be where things close to life and death, according to the Member for Moruga, should be decided on by public officials at the Ministry, and out of the hands of the corporation and the people that were selected by the electorate to seek their interest. Madam Speaker, I am going to share a few experiences that I have had while practising at local government. We all know that local government has been under-resourced, but it just did not happen like that. There were many times as a councillor, Madam Speaker, I joined the working team. And I call them team because they used the word—some corporations still use the word “gang”, but I prefer not to use that word. So I joined the working team and I rallied the members on that team, and I put on a boots, Madam Speaker, and I asked them to outwork me. Just because as a councillor I felt it was necessary to drive the work. So I had to lead from the front from since then, but you are not going to get every councillor to do that.

Madam Speaker, sometimes we even had to get people in the community, in the local village council, in local parlance, to “chi-chi up” so that we could buy material to execute some of the works within the electoral district, that was necessary for the people living within those electoral districts or municipalities. That was necessary. Things that the regional corporation could not afford or did not have releases for, Madam Speaker. I also take the opportunity to highlight some of the things that were said by the hon. Member for Mayaro, and I took note. One of the things he said is the consideration for postponing of property tax. And
the hon. Member for Arima would have explained to him that Trinidad is one of the only places in this world that does not collect some form of rates and taxes. So whether we call it property tax, whether we call it rates and taxes, that tax is going to go right back into the system where people can see—

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. K. Richards:** That is going right back into the system, Madam Speaker, where people can see where their money is spent. The sidewalk that is needed to be fixed, that is going to take care of that. We spoke about equity in regional corporations. And if you go right back earlier into the presentation when we spoke about the municipal councils, we spoke about the equity. He said about the inequality of allocation of funds. That is going to treat with when we have the property taxes come in, you collect the money, you spend the money, Madam Speaker. He spoke also about money for water trucking, and that is a funny thing, Madam Speaker, because while in the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, they may need money for water trucking, in the Point Fortin Borough Corporation, we do not need money for water trucking. We have two water trucks, you may need money for something else, hence the executive council, the municipal council, they have the ability to create and make their own budgets from day one, from ball one.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. K. Richards:** So, you would now have the ability to input what you want into your budget, so then you could have the ability to request and spend what you have because you would have done that for you.

In Point Fortin, Madam Speaker, we may not need water trucking but we may need money under the sport and culture fund. We may need money somewhere else, so we protested the delays in releases. That is another function of
the present system. There are going to be delays in releases. Because what happens in the system, Madam Speaker, is that you identify you want to do this project, this project is then sent up, you must get approval from a statutory meeting, at the statutory meeting you get the approval, the administration now puts together that package which may take a week or two depending on how deep the package is. It may take a week or two. It is then sent to courier to the Ministry Rural Development and Local Government, it may sit on somebody’s desk for a couple of days, if they do not understand the need for it right now. Then after they review that, it may have a couple of errors so it comes back to the regional corporation. When it comes back to the regional corporation they deal with the errors, it goes back to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and that process sometimes, it sounds simple but that is three months already. So when you are given an allocation under this present system and you have to spend that within the 12 months, and every councillor would know if you “ain’t” apply for your releases by August, you are not getting that releases, Madam Speaker.

So this, Madam Speaker, this executive council will be able to treat with some of these very issues. These delays. This very issue in terms of delays, because they are no longer going to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. So three months gone, you are going straight to the Ministry of Finance, a back and forth, a direct relationship between the Ministry of Finance—Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, Madam Speaker, so the potholes—so we no longer would have hon. Members teaming up with members in various constituencies wearing black and coming out to name the street after the local government Minister, Madam Speaker. Right?

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Member:** [Inaudible]
Mr. K. Richards: Black, black. Whatever colour they want to wear. Sometimes they wear black. They are holding candlelight vigils for—Madam Speaker, this is going to create, this—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. K. Richards: Madam Speaker, this is going to create the atmosphere and the change that we want to see in local government. So they could spin it how they want to spin it, because I am born and bred out of local government. I understand this. And when you read through this legislation, Madam Speaker, it is complete. You are not going to get it perfect one time, but it must be started, and then when it starts—Point Fortin Borough Corporation, Madam Speaker, became a borough in 1980, and a series of steps, then there was in 1990 another Act, and that changed the whole dynamic of how we function. And today we are bringing now the local government reform to change the game again. To bring it light years from where it is now, and this must happen for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand, sorry, to appreciate the need for a councillor.

Sometimes as a councillor, Madam Speaker, somebody comes and says, “Councillor, you cah throw a lil something in dah hole”? And you gone down to the corporation yard and not a bucket of stone “it have” in the yard, you know, Madam Speaker. And sometimes that is not only allocation or lack of money, sometimes it is lack of foresight. Sometimes it is lack of foresight. What we must understand, allocation and resources have always been a council function, so sometimes we have councillors dancing around and blaming the Minister of Works and Transport, and the Minister of Works and Transport “ain’t fix the road, and he ain’t do dis, and he ain’t do dat, and he ain’t do the other”. “Sometimes yuh ain’t do yuh work, eh know.” Sometimes the councillor himself “ain’t” do his work, and understand that road, even though it is large, it falls under his responsibility to get
The new local government Minister said 80 per cent of the road network in this country falls under local government, Madam Speaker. He has $3 million to do 80 per cent of work under this thing. How could you do that? 80 per cent of the road network, $3 million will not fix that. That is why the property tax is necessary, Madam Speaker. And the Members opposite would say that the property tax is not necessary, and they would go on a rant and a rave and try to put things in the minds of the public, but it is necessary, to even fix the things that are right in front of you, in front of your doorstep. He also spoke about scavenging and disaster relief. But in my time as a councillor, Madam Speaker, I could tell you a little thing about scavenging. One thing you always get is money to pay—to pick up garbage, Madam Speaker. Always have money to pick up garbage. And you also always have money for workers. Sometimes you have money under Recurrent Expenditure to pay workers but you have no money to buy material.

Mr. Tancoo: Lack of funding.

Mr. K. Richards: You say lack of funding. You say lack of funding, but that is why the property tax will treat with that.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. K. Richards: That is why the property tax will treat with that. And I know you walked in a little bit late, you know, hon. Member. But it also means that I will repeat what I said, allocation of resources is always a council function, you know. So sometimes when you do not have material it is not the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to blame. Sometimes it is the council did not have that foresight that they may need a couple of loads of material down the road.

Madam Speaker, I just want to bring some of my local government, well, former local government colleagues have, some of the issues that they would have
brought to me. You always get Personnel Expenditure and scavenging money releases. Always. So that speaks to the point that the hon. Member for Mayaro spoke to. Materials and Supplies are always challenges, Madam Speaker. Another challenge they have is the quality of staff at various corporations. Because if we are trying to build something that is excellent in local government reform—with local government reform, we also have to deal with training, and the training is provided in this Bill, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, he also spoke about efficiency and effectiveness that will take care of itself in training. Participation from burgesses. The burgesses have always participated in local government, because programme of works are made because of the request from the public.

So it is a lot more could be said under reform and local government, Madam Speaker. But I here stand to represent the people of Point Fortin. I am here to represent this Government and the thrust towards local government reform. I say today that it is necessary, and I say to the colleagues opposite us, that support this and you would have to spend less time in the hot sun protesting for things that you could fix under local government reform.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. K. Richards:** And, Madam Speaker, in closing I want to say, thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to bring this. And we must understand that Trinidad and Tobago is more than politics. Trinidad and Tobago is about people. So whether you are from Siparia, whether you are from Penal, whether you are from Debe, whether you are from Point Fortin, Princes Town, Port of Spain, we are one people, and this reform, Madam Speaker, is going to help everyone. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tobago West.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]
The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe):
Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate this afternoon on local government reform in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I am the fourth speaker today, and you would note that I am the—Madam Speaker, one second. They sprayed here with—I do not know if it is Lysol or what, but it is making me want to cough, so one second please. 

Madam Speaker: Come out for a little while. Put on your mask and come out for a little bit. Come out for a little bit.

[Member returns to desk]

Madam Speaker: You will speak from there with your mask on?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Yes.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, just for clarification, I know the rule is if you are speaking from your desk you can only speak for five minutes.

Madam Speaker: Yeah.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Would that apply in this case?

Madam Speaker: It will. So, it is either she goes to the other one or we wait a little while.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Would she be able to speak with a mask on in the booth?

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Member returns to booth]

Madam Speaker: Is that a little better?

Hon. S. Cudjoe: I will do my best, Madam Speaker. It is a little better. Whatever the substance they are using to spray, it gave me a reaction.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: But I will do the best that I can.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: It is better. Better. All right. So, thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. This is a very important piece of legislation or Motion, the report that we are asked to debate on today. This matter has been on the Order Paper for quite some time, so I know Members opposite and Members of the Government have been very excited about being able to contribute. Oftentimes in this country we cry out for local government reform, putting power in the hands of the people, putting power where it matters most. Madam Speaker, you would note that I am the third consecutive speaker on the side of the Government. It is quite unfortunate that in our usual arrangement of debating where one person from the Government, one person from the Opposition, today I am speaking as the third consecutive person from the Government. The Opposition is not serious about local government in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: If they were serious, Madam Speaker, they would have found themselves here in the Chamber to participate in this important debate Madam Speaker. I am the third consecutive speaker. Where are the contributors from the opposite side for this debate? Madam Speaker, this is important business. We all represent constituents. All these burgesses that we are talking about are their constituents. But they would find time to make chaos, confusion and bacchanal, saying that there is not enough money. Local government does not have enough power. And when it is your time to come here to make contribution to legislation, to make contribution to this Motion, to make contribution to this report, Madam Speaker, you are nowhere to be found.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: That is disrespectful, not only to this Parliament but to the people
you represent.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** And then you are the same people who find the time, the energy and the resources to go out there, rally people to protest, rile up people for protest action, burning tires, and then having the nerve to come to the Parliament after in your smoky clothes with grease under your—tyre grease under your finger—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:**—to come to give people the impression that this Government is not supporting local government reform and not providing finance and resources to the people who you represent.

**1.30 p.m.**

Here is your opportunity to really make a contribution to what we are doing. This is 63 years of research, 63 years of consultation, government after government, administration after administration. This policy is going to benefit the PNM side, benefit the UNC side and benefit any other political party or person that is interested in making a useful and impactful contribution to the development of each and every district.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** This is where we are supposed to speak up and make these contributions and the Opposition are nowhere to be found on a day like this. We started in the morning, Madam Speaker, in order to facilitate sufficient speakers so that we can make our contributions and they are opposing with no proper reason, opposing for opposition sake. Because at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, these provisions are being made to bring government to the people and it is going to benefit every single body, every single representative and the people you represent. So, I see this as a disrespect, Madam Speaker, and I expect better from the
Opposition. And if there is something that you do not like then say so and have us not waste our time by having these conversations and having 63 years of work go down the drain.

Madam Speaker, it was 2014, and I was sitting in the front row at a PNM convention—I think it was Queen’s Park Savannah—and the topic of the convention was “local government reform and giving internal self-government to Tobago”. That was 2014, that was eight years ago, that became a PNM policy for us and we continued the work started years ago, decades ago and we reaffirmed our commitment to put power in the hands of the people where it matters most.

We fulfilled—when we won election, Madam Speaker, we fulfilled our promise by making it a priority, our first order of business, not just being part of Vision 2020 but also Vision 2030. And Franklin Khan, may God bless his sweet soul, went on a mission from constituency to constituency conducting different consultations and so on, and everybody, every nook and cranny—they even went to Tobago to get the feedback from Tobago. So, we all had an opportunity to make a contribution. And separate and apart from that, when it was brought to the Parliament, we had a joint select committee to allow everybody to have their say, Madam Speaker. So I am proud, I feel happy to be here.

Older than I am—I am only 40 years old, Madam Speaker, this is 63 years of hard work on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If anybody—if you believe in democracy, how dare stand up against this? If you believe in national development, if you really care and love the people you represent and you want to see them get a better life and a better future, how dare you object to putting power in the hands of the people? I am pleased to be here, Madam Speaker. This is not just about the legacy of the People’s National Movement making the hard decisions and taking the necessary actions to advance the people, the economy, the
nation of Trinidad and Tobago. This is intelligent leadership, intelligent and aspiring leadership on the part of our Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Keith Christopher Rowley. This is about vision. Because year after year, election after election, Madam Speaker, different leaders dangled in front the face of the population, local government reform.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

For some, local government reform meant putting on “dey” rubber boots and playing around, as Sat Maharaj said, “In the water, in the muddy water.”

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: That meant local government representation to them. Madam Speaker, I sat on the opposition side as a Senator when they were proposing to give each constituency $1 million and they changed up the set-up of local government. At that point in time it was towards their benefit, Madam Speaker. We supported that which was in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago, and we said when we take office we are going to do our part to empower people and empower communities through local government reform. And here we are, Tobago, I am happy to stand—here we are today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am happy to be a part of this and I am hoping and trusting that good sense would prevail and we would get the necessary support and the necessary votes today, and whenever the vote is called, in order to bring this to reality.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand here as a Tobagonian, as a Tobagonian who has seen the benefit of having a Tobago House of Assembly, where we have the autonomy and the responsibility to chart our own development, to develop our own blueprint for advancement, to look at national policy and tailor it to fit our people and our situation and our circumstances to the point where there are people who participate in Tobago House of Assembly elections that do not participate in

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central government elections because we feel a sense of pride and purpose and place by being able to influence the decision-making process. We feel like we belong, like this is our thing, like this is our Tobago. And the beauty of it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that localized, customized, decentralized type of leadership where I as an MP, I would walk the constituency and the secretaries or the assemblymen, they know the people, they know their circumstances—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1)—

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:**—they know their situation and—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1). This Motion is not about the Tobago House of Assembly.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** All right. Thank you. Overruled.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, you see—and this is it. They do not understand because section 33 of this said legislation speaks to using the Tobago House of Assembly model to give you self-sufficient regional corporations, utilizing the same type of system that was used and procedures and processing that were used to empower the people of Tobago so that we can chart our destiny and create our own blueprint to development. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they did not even read the report. They did not read the report. And they are here making all these statements and rallying up people not to support when they have no clue what this thing is all about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is unfortunate because we have a group of people who have organized themselves or who are prepared to be obstructionists and they are willing to do anything and everything that would destroy this Government and this people or people’s journey to a brighter future.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(4)—

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** It is about political aggrandizement for them, Mr. Deputy
Speaker.

Mr. Tancoo: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(4) and 48(6). There is nobody on this side seeking to destroy the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Who the cap fits, feel free to wear it.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: This is all about making services to the people more customized or should I say more people-oriented. In this decentralized type of governance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is about improving transparency and accountability. When I sat opposite as an Opposition Senator, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was a member of the Joint Select Committee with responsibility of providing oversights to local government bodies. And I could recall bringing local government bodies to the Parliament for investigation and interrogation, and often times the members of the local government body could not answer the questions being posed to them because the reports are dated. So, they are being asked questions about issues that took place 10 years ago, 15 years ago because the current system does not provide proper oversight so there is lack of transparency and accountability. And therefore, the people of Trinidad and Tobago or should I say their burgesses, our constituents do not get value for money and do not get the type of service that they deserve.

In this new dispensation or should I say this new proposal, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are putting a stop to that. We are putting a stop to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This system that currently exists creates the appropriate situation for corruption. We need more transparency, we need more oversight in local government and this is what we are set out here to do. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that what we are doing here today also provides the opportunity for people who are
not interested in being—not so much interested in being a part of the bigger political parties now but they want to make a difference within their communities, they can start right within their communities in local government. So, it provides avenues for young people to get involved, it provides the opportunity for more political competition and that could only augur well for our democracy. This is about deepening democracy and putting the power in the hands of the people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to stand here also as the Minister of Sport and Community Development because where we sit in Port of Spain, we are responsible for providing development and providing projects and programmes to over 10 administrative districts throughout Trinidad, not so much Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we have the Tobago House of Assembly in Tobago. And even as the Minister of Sport and Community Development, the responsibility for sport development in Tobago is under the Tobago House of Assembly. So, the Tobago House of Assembly is responsible for preparing athletes for competitions, for the different facilities in Tobago, for the different programmes, for the welfare of sports. So, if the Tobago House of Assembly feels like they want to open a school to promote training for young students or young athletes, the Tobago House of Assembly can go ahead and do so. They do not have to ask a question to central government because the Tobago House of Assembly has full responsibility. That is the kind of energy, that is the kind of direction that we are promoting with this legislation.

And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as central government, you see this process or this fight for more power by the local communities throughout the world. After democracy, the most revolutionary part of power sharing and so on, within, let us say, the last 50 years or so had been decentralization of administrative responsibilities, different responsibilities, devolution of power and
authority. So, we as a government—often times local communities have to fight central government to get power. Here we are as a government recognizing, acknowledging and embracing that it would redound to our benefit, even as central government, if we put more power in the hands of local government. It means better representation, it means the people get the opportunity to say exactly what they want and what direction they want to go.

This thing should be so customized, so pointed, so targeted, where councillors and aldermen know just exactly how many unemployed people are in their area; how many people are underemployed; who needs training; who needs training in what; who are really your needy families; which family have issues relating to child abuse and so on. By giving these responsibilities to these electoral districts, as we say in Tobago; as you say in Trinidad, these different regional corporation, it helps the Children’s Authority, it helps the Ministries, it helps central government to function better. Because while we sit in Port of Spain, you have representatives and people with real power, real authority and the ability to respond quickly to these issues, taking care or treating with matters in a way that best suits the people of that specific area. What is good for Penal may not be what is good for Port of Spain. Yes? Some of the processes and procedures you established for one area may not be suited for another and this is the type of customization that is taking place as we go from community to community. We can utilize different corporations or areas for pilot projects, look at skills development and employment, the development of contractors from right within your area, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This proposal or this report before us is geared towards expanding public health, municipal policing, spatial planning and building inspectorate, disaster management, repairs and maintenance of public buildings. And it goes further in
expanding their authority to economic research for your specific area, planning for your specific area, monitoring and evaluation of your performance, creating and developing entrepreneurs, building relationships with civil society. So, church groups, youth groups, women groups, sport groups all have the opportunity now to really influence the process towards improving the lot, not for central government but more so for you, the people, the grassroots.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** This is about putting power in the hands of the grassroots. So that is why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am befuddled as to why an Opposition or why Members of areas like Pointe-a-Pierre; Siparia; Naparima, who is not here; St. Augustine, who is not here; Couva, who is not here; Princes Town, who is not here; Oropouche East, who is not here—and yes, a number of people have gone to lunch but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this our business; this is our business as leaders of this country. The cry of local government has rested heavily on our hands and our heads for quite a long time. It is our responsibility as leaders from both sides of the fence to advance this cause in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago no matter which side of the political divide that they stand. So, understand my disappointment today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by the lack of participation of the Opposition and the lack of their support in advancing 63 years of hard work.

I do recall a couple years ago we had a political meeting—I think it was in Couva. And upon leaving the political meeting, a group of people gathered to protest because a road or a bridge had not been built for them to access their homes. And they were properly well organized to come out and protest because their leaders and their folks gave them the feeling or hyped them up to believe that the Government is not taking care of them. So, you set up yourself to properly pepper the Government but really that is a responsibility for your local government.
body. So, as leaders we also have a responsibility to educate our burgesses and our constituents because sometimes we know very well but choose not to educate, to promote mischief.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** You think an MP organizing a fiery protest, gets people with vehicles and tyres and fuel for the fire and rhythm section and so on—and “ah telling yuh”, Friday morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Parliament is 1.30 p.m. in the afternoon, you out there staging a fiery protest—

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:**—on issues that are under the remit of your regional corporation. But yet you are giving your constituents or your burgesses the feeling that, okay, this is central government treating you badly. We have a similar situation in Tobago, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you have some people who, while the Tobago THA was in power, they lambaste the Tobago THA—yes?—on certain issues that are under the remit of the Tobago THA.

**Mr. Tancoo:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, again—

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** And, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, 48(1). This is not about her experiences in Tobago. This is about a Motion that is specifically before the House.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Member. Overruled.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, reading is essential and a mind is a terrible thing to waste.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, what kind of comment is that? How is that
relevant?

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** So, you lambaste the Tobago THA about these issues and now you or your party is in power and these same issues that were under the Tobago THA are now under the new party’s local government—THA. So, these are your responsibilities and you came in with a fix-it mandate, so fix it. Blaming the PNM or blaming—no, you have to throw that away. This is your responsibility, you are in the seat of leadership. So, it is important for us as leaders—and sometimes the people truly do not know, so education of our systems, as it relates to our systems is really, really important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, explaining to the people who is responsible for what and how they could make their input in improving the lot for us all.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is fundamental, especially at this time. This is fundamental, this is revolutionary legislation and I am happy to be a part of the Government that has placed this before the Parliament and we are going to pass it. Come hell or high water, we are going to pass it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we owe this to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** The possibilities are many and they are far-reaching. We are talking about fiscal sustainability. Often times we hear people make noise about the Tobago House of Assembly having—using unspent balances and so on, and we have that ability to move moneys from vote to vote. We have that ability to move money from fiscal year to fiscal year. And this legislation and what is being proposed for local government in this instance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, gives them that flexibility, that access to funding so that they can run their business accordingly and be in charge of their destiny. It does not get too much more democratic than that.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Cudjoe: And it puts limits on central government. So, we as a central government, we are handing over power. Nobody has to fight us for it because we are truly about serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago and improving their lives in the best way they see fit. Moves like this help to reduce that discord between the Government and the governed because now the governed is now a part of making decisions of government. This is modern thinking, this is fresh thinking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am happy to be a part of it and we call on those who are willing to let good sense prevail, do not let 63 years of hard work go to waste.

I have seen local government councillors and aldermen—their jobs are considered part time and they are paid that way too—try to take on full-time jobs and it is just not possible because the amount of work that they have to do within their areas.

Mr. Tancoo: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Hon. S. Cudjoe: This legislation tends to treat with that—

Mr. Tancoo:—55(b), tedious repetition. Everybody on that side has said the same thing.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Different angle.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Tancoo: Same issue, same issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, one second. Can I rule now? Proceed.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is important to understand what we are doing or else we could confuse the people. This is about making the people partners in national development. It is about strengthening community input in national policymaking. It is about placing emphasis on community involvement in national development. It is about ascribing responsibility to communities that is
critical to their empowerment, it is critical to their productivity, their sense of belonging. So, I hope as we proceed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that more Members of Parliament would see the good in this legislation, not only for our side but also for theirs and most importantly for the people we claim to love, the people we represent, the people we serve—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, you have two more minutes.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** It is about making a better and brighter Trinidad and Tobago. If our people win, then we win. If our people are in a better place, then we are in a better place too. If our people get to influence government or processes, it makes government more successful. At the end of the day, the people are going to get in the voting booth and vote who they want to. Yes? So, this is going to help all of us, the PNM and the UNC, and any other party to come. This is not about us today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is about the people.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** And with that said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this is not democracy, deepening democracy, I do not what else is. And with that said, I thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for Tobago East.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** And, Member, you will have 30 minutes when you commence.

**The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):**

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make an intervention.

[Hon. A. Webster-Roy steps away from the booth]

[Pause]

[Hon. A. Webster-Roy returns to the booth]
Hon. A. Webster-Roy: I apologize.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, Member, your time commences now.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and again, my apologies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please permit me to start my brief intervention by sharing a quote from Manoj Arora taken from his book titled, *From the Rat Race to Financial Freedom*. Arora stated, and I quote:

“‘Got an idea to start’, ‘Thinking to start’ and ‘Making a commitment to start’ is one aspect of life. Actually ‘Starting’ what you truly want to do in life, is a...different ball game.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Trinidad, like the people of Tobago, are clamouring for local government reform, meaningful reform and the progress has been stymied because we failed to set off from the starting line on this leg of the relay. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not starting from scratch. We have a pretty solid foundation and a good reference point to start from and build out as we progress in the response to the needs of the people and the lessons we learn. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we simply need to start this leg of the relay and push forward. Local government reform, like greater autonomy for Tobago, is needed now.

2.00 p.m.

And I chose that particular quote to start with, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because when we come in this honourable House and we nitpick and we nitpick and we nitpick, we do not recognize that in nit-picking, the only persons that we are hurting are the very persons we are meant to serve, to empower and the people whose lives we are meant to change.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker, law by nature is not static but dynamic. As such, the opportunity for amendments to the proposed legislation that
were identified by the Members opposite exist now and the future. I have listened to my colleagues opposite arguing that you know we have things to fix when legislation is not perfect, we anchor certain ideas. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is it not better for us to at least start, give the people a change and then we work and build out as we go along? Because the time we are taking now to sit down here and nitpick, it does not bring any meaningful change to local government. It does not improve service delivery, it does not improve disaster preparedness and response, it does not improve social sector protection because that should be driven from the bottom up and it is the people who are meant to benefit should be the ones driving it. But yet we sit here and we nitpick and we debate and we argue and the work is not getting done in the time to get done to affect the lives we are meant to impact.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I fully support what was proposed in the report and the legislation. And the reason why I fully support it, I could use my own experiences as a Tobagonian but also looking at other jurisdictions and how their local government benefit their citizenry. Local government, empowered local government, when it works, it touches the people right at the core of their souls and at the heart. It touches communities in places that they should be touched so that persons’ lives are impacted so that they go on to become meaningful contributors to development. Mr. Deputy Speaker, governance at the local government level, when done right, results in vibrant, healthy, prosperous, safe and sustainable communities. When the needs of citizens are placed at the core of local government and the necessary structure and systems are put in place to facilitate effective service delivery, all of society benefits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the report notes that the Bill facilitates through expanded functions of local government, enhanced service delivery and people-driven development. This bottom-up approach, once it is not tainted by greed,
corruption, nepotism or cronyism, will result in greater care and protection of the most vulnerable, it would result in better disaster preparedness and response, it will result in a more robust monitoring and evaluation system just to name a few.

A lot of reference was made to the property tax and I want to use some of my experience from the United Kingdom. In the UK, there is something called council tax. Once you are living there, you have to pay council tax. And how does council tax benefit the citizens? I could speak from one particular council I have experience with. At the Harrogate Council, when council tax is paid by those persons living within that area, that money then goes on to empower the council to deliver services to those who are most in need in the community. I want to use child care and protection as a starting point.

In the Harringay community, we had a lot of migrants, low-income families so those families would have needed additional support for child care to ensure that while parents and the adults go out to earn an income, children are well cared for and protected. So under the council system, using the funds generated through their council tax, those families that would have needed subsidized child care would have received subsidized child care. Those families that would have needed free child care would have received free child care. Beyond that, for those families where children were at school and in the evenings, they would not have adults at home to ensure that the children are well supervised, within that particular council, arrangements were made with schools, different bodies to provide after school care service within either at a community facility or the school either paid or subsidized so that children were well cared for and protected outside of the school hours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition, under the Harringay council—I am using it to show how the local government reform can benefit our most vulnerable here in Trinidad and Tobago. At the Harringay council, as I mentioned before, it was a
community where we had a lot of migrants, low-income families and among a lot of the migrant and low-income families, swimming was not something that was heavily promoted. So, to encourage those families to get their children involved in swimming, what was done from baby, families that could not afford to go to a regular swim club, those families were offered free or subsidized swimming lessons for mummy and baby or guardian or child minder, as they call it, and baby.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Tancoo: 48(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is not relevant.

Hon. Members: [ Interruption and crosstalk]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker.


Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reason I am sharing this experience is because the report clearly speaks about social protection, so I am going to show how we can use a similar system with our empowered local government to provide services for those who are most vulnerable in Trinidad and Tobago and as the Minister with responsibility for Gender and Child Affairs, I must bring this perspective. Just recently we are seeing in the media where our children are coming under attack and I am showing how local government could put systems in place to protect them.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of further strengthening the childcare and protection system using local government, as councillors examine their communities, they could identify what is most needed to ensure families are serviced and families are stronger so that we help to reduce the instances of family violence in Trinidad and Tobago. So for example, an executive council could decide, okay, we are going to allocate additional resources in community x to
ensure that we put programmes in place in our community facilities to teach about parenting skills, to teach about conflict management, to teach about conflict resolution so that we reduce the instances of family violence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if it is determined that a particular community has a high instance of domestic violence, the Executive Council could channel the funds and the resources in that direction to ensure that the programmes are in place at the community level from the bottom up to address those matters.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am surprised that my colleagues opposite are not grasping the opportunity to jump on board and support the Government with this particular effort. As a Tobagonian, I have seen where the fact that the Tobago House of Assembly has a certain level of autonomy and we have are clamouring for more in Tobago. We want more but what we have, it has been working and it is far superior and we are seeing where in Tobago it redounds to the benefit of our communities.

Now, I want to share an example. Just after the last general election, I would have started bringing my children to Trinidad with me often just to explore Trinidad and see what is happening on this part of the nation and they say “out of the mouth of babes”. I remember my daughter telling me one time, we were going to a particular community, she said “Mummy, you know we have it real nice in Tobago”. I said “Why yuh saying that?” She said “Almost every community you pass through in Tobago, we have well maintained playgrounds”. She said “Mummy, almost every community in Tobago you are passing through, our road networks are well developed”. She said “Mummy, but you know what?” She said “Almost every community in Tobago, we have activities in place by our community development department for training and development”. Mr. Deputy
Speaker, when my daughter said that to me, it opened up my eyes because when “yuh in it, yuh take it for granted”.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** But if you really examine what we would have benefited from in Tobago because we have that level of autonomy, we do not have to wait for any Minister or anybody in Trinidad to tell us how to utilize our resources, we could see how we are driving our own development. Our Executive Council in determining the needs of our citizens in Tobago and the desire to boost business would decide, okay, we are going to put additional funds under the division responsible for enterprise development so that our young Tobagonians, entrepreneurs to get the required funding to enhance and expand their businesses. This local government reform provides an opportunity at the local level for funds to be channelled into businesses in communities so entrepreneurs could emerge, so that businesses could grow, so that local economy could thrive and then the overall economy of Trinidad and Tobago would develop and grow and we all would benefit.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a very important matter and I would like to encourage my colleagues opposite to please let us grab hold of the baton and continue the race. We have a very solid foundation that has already been laid by successive administrations and Parliaments. It is incumbent on us in this Parliament, it is incumbent on all of us in this time to put our heart and our spirit and our soul into the race and continue this journey of development.

Local government reform can only change the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the better. It may not be perfect but as I said at the start, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the law is not meant to be static, changes can be made,
amendments can be made, we can improve as we go along but we must start. As Arora said, we must take that critical much-needed step and start when we indicate that we are going to start. We have been talking for far too long, now is the time for action. Now is the time for us to ensure that we put the systems in place to deliver to the people of Trinidad, and by extension the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the type of Government and governance that would help to transform our society for the better.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to lend my voice, to bring a different perspective, to demonstrate how we could help our families, our children, our most vulnerable, by making the right step today and starting our leg of the race in ensuring that local government reform does occur. I thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, at this time, I would just like to announce that we will have a slight delay due to the consecutive speaking on one side so we will have “ah lil” probably one to two minutes delay in entering the booth to safeguard any situation. All right, so I will call on you shortly, Member.

**Hon. Members:** [ Interruption and laughter and desk thumping]

[Pause]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting is still in progress. I now recognize the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande and Member, you have two minutes.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Roger Monroe** *(Toco/Sangre Grande)*: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to present in this very important Local Government Reform Bill, 2020. It is my understanding that this is intended to bring the Government or its services closer to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Let me put
on the record my experiences in local government. I had a short stint in the local
government arena and my colleagues on this side who were in local government
would want to agree with me on some of the experiences that I would like to share
and put on the record here for the national public about local government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, local government reform, I must say eh, I
am very grateful and excited and full of joy for the people that I represent, the
people of Toco/Sangre Grande.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. R. Monroe:** We are a rural constituency starting from Valencia entering into
Sangre Grande, Matura and all the villages all the way to Matelot, far north east of
Trinidad and Tobago and I want to say that local government reform will bring a
great deal of relief to all those communities and persons in the constituency of
Toco/Sangre Grande. At this point in time, I would like to thank the Member for
Arouca/Maloney for bringing this Motion before the House and I would really like
to express my gratitude to her today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Members who are in this honourable House and were a part
of local government would want to agree that some of the terms that are used
within the council are not terms that may sound fruitful to the members of the
public and I would like to share some of those terms and express what some
council members may go through from time to time although making every effort
to represent their burgesses or on a wider scale, the constituents that make up a
constituency. Terms such as “no funding”, terms such “investigate and report”,
term such as “not the function of the corporation”, “limited resources”. One that is
regularly used by all corporations throughout this country is that your response
when you request a project or some sort of assistance, they often respond and tell
that “it is not vested”, “unable to assist”, “your requests are noted but we will look
into it”, “you have requested a project that goes beyond our capabilities”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please permit me to do a comparison of the present local government or Municipal Corporations Act that is present and what will be implemented with the reform. Under the present Municipal Corporations Act, there provides for the appointment of Standing Committees to deal with four matters and those matters are:

(a) Finance, Planning and Allocation of Resources;
(b) Personnel;
(c) Public Health;

And:
(d) Physical Infrastructure.

This new Bill will provide for the Standing Committees no less than eight persons to mandate and I will now list the committees:

(a) Infrastructural Development and Maintenance;
(b) the Public Health Sanitation and the Environment;
(c) the Finance, Economic Planning and Allocation of Resources;
(d) Audit;
(e) the Community Development, Social Services;
(f) the Sports and Youth Development;
(g) Recreation Grounds and Public Services;
(h) the Spatial Planning and Building Inspectorate;
(i) Disaster Management; and
(j) the Corporation Services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill will provide for more efficiency and accountability by corporations because in addition to committees now, the corporation will be expected to operate more effectively as the various committees will allow for faster
processing and implementation of the requests and needs of our burgesses in the various electoral districts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me the opportunity to touch on the significance and importance of a few of these committees. Road and infrastructure. With the amendment of the Highways Act, the municipal corporation would be responsible for not only side streets but also local roads and development of roads within the electoral district. This would allow for faster road works in the different areas which would allow us to now have the authority to make representation and repair roads in the community effectively and efficiently.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Monroe: These responsibilities would include construction and maintenance of orphan roads, agricultural roads in addition to the existing responsibility of local roads and bridges. No longer would our citizens, burgesses, constituents of this nation be told the old age excuse of this road is not vested in the corporation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Local Government Reform Bill will also provide assistance to schools, government-assisted schools and government schools, within our electoral districts and constituencies. They will be maintained by the council or the local authorities. Once again, this opens access for immediate assistance to be provided to our nation’s children. No longer will schools have to be awaiting ministerial intervention for general maintenance work. This decentralization process is a major step in the way forward for local government and the reform framework.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the committees that is added in the new reform Bill is the Audit Committee. It would be responsible for providing independent assurance and advice to the council in the following areas: risk management,
internal control, financial statements, compliance requirements, internal audit, external audit and other relevant functions including the review of the corporation’s governance arrangement. The establishment of the Audit Committee would have a significant impact on local government reform where accountability and transparency is concerned. This is a step in the right direction by ensuring all municipalities or municipal bodies are provided with information in order to make competent decisions with true transparency being the order of the day.

With respect to community development and social services, local government is supposed to be people-centred. Currently under the existing local government framework, corporations are not mandated to partake nor exercise in community development and social service programmes. With the implementation of this reform, we would now see where the local government will fulfil the mandate by becoming people-centred. We can now look forward to the promoting of local and cultural community events, sporting activities, facilitating local and community development, developing and securing heritage sites in the community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, right now presently in Toco/Sangre Grande, we have the old post office, a heritage site that is just barred around with galvanise and left at the mercies of street dwellers and anyone who chooses to enter upon and vandalize. Local government reform would assist the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation to take care of that issue.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Monroe: Mr. Deputy Speaker, facilitating local tourism. When we speak about local tourism, Toco/Sangre Grande is the constituency for local tourism.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Monroe: Best set of beaches, rivers, trails, hiking could take place. Local tourism to enhance the lives and livelihoods of our very own burgesses and
constituents. This could now be taken care by our very own Sangre Grande Regional Corporation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to mention something. Being a member of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, at the council there, I often heard members of the council, councillors make mention that they do not have sufficient time in their term, especially the new ones, to really grasp the job and the understanding. By the time second year into third year, they are now understanding the roles and functions and getting a hang of it and it is election time again. The point of full-time employment for representatives and an extension from three years to four years is not only a blessing to those representatives but to the people in every electoral district.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. R. Monroe:** It seeks to remove the old age saying that persons do not see their councillors. Representatives will now have an opportunity to effectively serve their burgesses.

Organizational structure. The corporation will have a full autonomy over its hiring and firing. Mr. Deputy Speaker, being at that council, I would have known about issues where we had persons who were not being effective but because of the arrangements and the type of employment and method that they were employed by, it was very hard for us in the council to make any moves to have them removed because of not being effective. So organizational structure and hiring and the firing being in the hands of the council will aid in rectifying the issues of poor performance by employees of the corporation as they will be able to hire competent officers to replace those who are not competent.

Currently, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in some regional corporations, they may be experiencing similar issues that we may be experiencing in Toco/Sangre Grande. I
have information that from time to time, we have vacancies and are unable to fill those vacancies for important and critical officers. Officers such as financial officers, workshop foremen, WS III supervisors, et cetera, which leaves the corporation at a significant disadvantage. This results in the organization’s failure because they are unable to competently perform their duties. No supervision leads to a lack of proper productivity on the day-to-day job.

And if persons or Members want to be honest you know that corporation workers and staff members, if not supervised properly, would not give us our just due for our dollar, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

2.30 p.m.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Monroe: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to touch on a very important topic before I come to a close. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is with respect to recreational grounds and public spaces. Mr. Deputy Speaker, just a few weeks ago we had a big issue in the national public and in the media about grounds in the Sangre Grande area. I was involved in trying to rectify that issue as Member of Parliament. Being a former person at the local government arm, where grounds are not properly well maintained, it is inaccessible to the constituents and burgesses within the Sangre Grande area, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[Madam Speaker in the Chair]

The corporation, under this new reform, would be responsible for developing and maintaining, managing public facilities, recreation grounds and public spaces, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, construction and improving sporting and exercising facilities would now be something that the councils or corporations could take care of, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, as I am on the topic of recreational grounds and public

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spaces, this reform Bill which all 22 of us on the Government Bench intend to put into effect, would see that corporations are now able to develop policies for the usage and rental of sporting facilities and other functions as the councillors and corporations see it fit. With the responsibility vested in these committees, Madam Speaker, they will have the ability to quickly respond and develop maintenance of recreation grounds and the ability to upkeep and maintain public spaces that will allow for provisions from a day-to-day management for the facilities itself.

Madam Speaker, I want to put on the record that local government reform is an avenue for true development, self-reliance, sustainability to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Monroe: Madam Speaker, I would also like to put on record that with the implementation of this Local Government Reform Bill, the council would have the ability to shape their developmental plan and expenditure, fit for purpose according to constituency, electoral district and most important our burgesses and constituents, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Monroe: Madam Speaker, because of all that I would have mentioned and all that my colleagues before me on this side of the Government Bench would have mentioned before, I would like to put my 150 per cent support and once again publicly thank the Government, the Prime Minister, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, for really putting forward local government reform.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Monroe: This would help the people of Toco/Sangre Grande, the communities, the rural communities, those that believe that they were forgotten for how many years before. This local government reform is going to help us. It is
going to move us in a direction where communities that never saw paved roads, box drains, who are still using earthed drains and earthed roads, this is going to put us in a direction, Madam Speaker, and put us in a position where we in rural communities would benefit just as other communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like to once again put my support 150 per cent behind local government reform and I saw a hashtag circulating in this country as of this morning. It may have been around a few days now, and I would like to say, as a man of the people, and as a representative of my people in Toco/Sangre Grande, I am local and I would stay local and I support local government reform. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Joseph.

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the privilege and honour as a Member of Parliament representing people, to speak on this Joint Select Committee Report on Local Government Reform. Madam Speaker, the word Parliament is derived from the French word *parlais*, to speak. We are speaking on behalf of people. But why is the Opposition not speaking? Why is the Opposition silent, mute, and disengaged from local government reform?

It was earlier this week that the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Kamla Persad-Bissessar MP, SC was asking: When is Parliament going to meet? She has questions to ask, the Member that is. Well, here we are. Parliament has been convened but the Opposition is totally disengaged and disinterested in local government reform. What a travesty of the Oath of Office that we as representatives of the people have taken to represent people’s interest. And what is
most dear, Madam Speaker, to the individual than local government? Garbage collection, roads, maintenance of grounds. What is more important to them? And may I ask and say as all MPs, one of the major concerns that constituents come to MPs about is local government issues. And it is not because their councillors are not performing, whether they are PNM or UNC councillors. They want to do their best. But if they do not have the resources, they do not have the organizational structures, how are they to deliver goods and services?

Madam Speaker, I would be speaking on behalf of the good people of St. Joseph that is represented by two corporations: San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation to the west and Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation to the east. But the constituency of St. Joseph, like most constituencies along the East-West Corridor, where the Eastern Main Road is the boundary between hilly areas to the north and flat plains to the south, the local government issues are different. Because in the hilly areas, you have much more need for delivery of goods and services for local government.

I want to congratulate all speakers on the side of the PNM who spoke, who let their voices be heard. We came here to speak and represent people, not to be silent, not to be mute and not to be disengaged.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 48(1), if the Minister could bless us by referring to the report.

Madam Speaker: So, Minister just giving you a little leeway but, you know, let us centre on the report. Many, many other speakers have gone. Let us centre on the report.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So let us get to the report. The aspiration as expressed in our national *Vision 2030* plan is based on five overarching themes of which Theme II focuses heavily on local government reform, which is that this Joint Select
Committee Report is based on. Theme II: Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence. That is the heartbeat. That is the core. That is the DNA of this JSC Report. It speaks about devolution of certain areas of central government authority, example, physical planning to, local government. Madam Speaker, what could be more crucial to 1.4million people than local government reform? And why would 19 persons, Madam Speaker, why would 19 persons decide to be in the way of 1.4million people achieving their dreams for better local government, 19 versus 1.4?

Madam Speaker, on page 85 of the report, and it is about a 400-page report, in reply to a question on the 2016 transitioning of local government draft policy, the tenets of local government reform talk about a decrease in bureaucracy. Madam Speaker, that is one of the key areas of the report I want to focus on. Whenever a country is faced with extraordinary challenges, it demands compelling responses. And this report is a compelling response and a bold step towards the aspirations of 1.4million people which are being held hostage today by 19 people.

The centre of this development is a citizen-centric approach to decision-making process.

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(6). The Member is imputing improper motives. This is a simple majority Bill. They can stand up, wind up this debate, and vote for it.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Please continue.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. We want citizens, under this report, to decide for themselves. Let me give you some examples with St. Joseph. St. Joseph has many small side streets and the report speaks to that, Campo Street, where large garbage trucks cannot go in. We need smaller trucks to go in to pick
up garbage. Why not vote for that? Why not vote for that? Because in this report it talks about key functions like planning permissions, greater municipal policing authority, streamlining of financing of corporations, including social responsibilities to do all of these things. We want direct funding for local government. And, Madam Speaker, I want to refer, with your permission, because you see Members opposite like to quote the papers.

“Couva North MP:
Fix market now”

And clause 35A of the report where you look at page 86 of the report, they need to change the source of funding. May I please quote, Madam Speaker? Here Couva North MP Ravi Ratiram is speaking about the deplorable condition of the Chaguanas Market, the freezers not working, the chillers not working and:

“Questioned on his claim of political vindictiveness, Ratiram said geographic discrimination is taking place.”

Well, why not give us local government reform so the Chaguanas Borough can raise its own money and fix the freezers in the Chaguanas Market? But no, you want an opportunity to protest. You want an opportunity to burn tyres so that you can cause mayhem and distress in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: “He called on newly-appointed Rural Development and Local Government Minister Faris Al-Rawi”—

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker, would the speaker give way?

Madam Speaker: Member.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, sure.

Mr. Ratiram: Would the hon. Member give way for me to clarify?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: No.

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Hon. Members: Noooo.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: He called on newly-appointed—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: This is a direct request from the Member of Couva North to the Member for St. Joseph. All right? So that—

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I decline, but thank you very much. You had your say in the papers. You had your say in the papers.

“He called on newly-appointed Rural Development and Local Government Minister Faris Al-Rawi to get working and immediately make the necessary releases available in order to swiftly resolve these issues.”

Well, vote for local government reform so that your burgesses can pay their property taxes and the money goes into the coffers of the Chaguanas Borough and you could fix the freezers, you can fix the chillers, you could fix everything in the Chaguanas Market. Why are you opposing this? This is your own statement.

[Members holds up newspaper]

This is your own justification for local government reform my friend.

Madam Speaker: Member, we have a rule against display.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Right. Madam Speaker, I want to speak specifically about local government reform and St. Joseph. Things would not only be done differently, but they will be done better. They will be done more efficiently. They will be done quicker.

One of the burning issues in this country that affects burgesses that needs a functioning, well-oiled local government machine is that of recreation grounds. Sangre Grande had to protest, “de grass too tall”. Well, vote for local government reform. We have grounds in St. Joseph, Riversdale, Bamboo No.1, Aranguez. We want all those grounds kept good. But it is not the fault of the councillors. Whether
it is the UNC councillor that has to see about Riversdale ground, which services Bamboo—no Bamboo, Bangladesh, St. Joseph, Maracas St. Joseph it is the fault of the system of local government. Why not give your own UNC councillor, your own UNC councillor the capacity and the resources to treat with the Riversdale ground, so the people of Bangladesh, St. Joseph, and Maracas St. Joseph can have a ground to play football. That ground where Alvin Corneal used to coach football, produced many good footballers.

Madam Speaker, I want to spend some time talking about section 35A of this Bill, which is focused on the report, 35A, which outlines the responsibilities of divisions of a corporation with new responsibilities including, and no one spoke about this as yet, corporate services and developing and implementing information technology business solutions. For what? Networking, digital connectivity and e-government. Why would you object to that? Why would you object to that? Internal audit, why would you object to that?

And now I come to one of the major issues, Madam Speaker, in speaking on behalf of the people of St. Joseph, infrastructure development and maintenance of a new category of roadways. Madam Speaker, in St. Joseph, Mt D’or Extension, Maitagual, Lovers Lane, Caiman Road from Elizabeth Gardens, Thompson Lane, all of these roads need repairing and fixing. With a new programme of local government reform, we can see about and treat with these minor roads in a very cost-effective manner. So Madam Speaker, I want to recommend to my colleagues opposite be vocal.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS
The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, at this point in time, in accordance with Standing Order 50(3), I beg to move that the debate on the Motion to adopt the Report of the Joint Select Committee on the
Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020 be adjourned.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, we shall now revert to the item of business, which was deferred earlier. Leader of the House.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 126 and with your leave, there has been agreement to allow the Minister of Finance to speak until the conclusion of his statement. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Chief Whip. The Minister of Finance.

Adjustment to Fuel Prices

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just one minute. Madam Speaker, I am authorized by the Cabinet to make this statement on fuel prices. At the time that the 2022 budget estimates were finalized in September 2021, the price of oil was just over US $70 per barrel. This price subsequently dropped to $65 per barrel at the end of November 2021.

Accordingly, using forecasts from international agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF, the credit rating agencies, the US Energy Information Administration, and data from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the 2022 Budget was based on an estimated oil price of $65 per barrel and an estimated natural gas netback price of US $3.75 per MMBtu. It is to be noted that a netback price is not an actual price in the gas market and is calculated by deducting from the estimated LNG export price the costs associated with producing and shipping LNG. However, global concerns arose in the first quarter of calendar 2022 about disruptions in the supply of oil arising from the war in Ukraine and the
associated international sanctions on Russia. It is noteworthy that Russia normally produces 11 per cent or 10.5 million barrels per day of world oil production. In addition to the fallout from the war, there were climatic and global economic factors that pre-dated the conflict in the Ukraine. As a result of the combination of these factors, Brent oil prices averaged US $97 per barrel in February 2022 and US $106 per barrel in March 2022, increasing by over 60 per cent from US $65 per barrel at the end of December 2021.

It should also be noted that oil and gas production levels, although increasing, are somewhat below the levels estimated by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in September 2021 for the calculation of revenue from petroleum in the 2022 budget. Any increases in revenue from petroleum as a result of higher than expected oil and gas prices, therefore, will be offset by shortfalls in oil and gas production. However, at this time, all things being equal, it is expected that the net effect of increased oil and gas prices and reduced production in fiscal 2022 will be positive.

By contrast, the situation is not favourable on the expenditure side. One of the adverse effects of the current low levels of oil production and high oil prices is an increase in the fuel subsidy, which must be paid out of tax revenue. The prices of motor fuels, that is to say premium gasoline, super gasoline, diesel and kerosene, are all affected by the price of oil, and the price of cooking gas or LPG is affected by the price of natural gas. At current commodity prices, contrary to persistent misinformation from some quarters, all of these fuels are still heavily subsidized, even as we have already reduced the levels somewhat, at an earlier time. The highest subsidy levels are on LPG and kerosene at this time but there remains substantial subsidy on fuels used in transportation.

By way of example, if unsubsidized, the retail prices of premium gasoline
should vary from $6.18 per litre at an oil price of US $80 per barrel to TT $7.58 per litre at an oil price of US $100 per barrel. Similarly, using the same range of oil prices, the unsubsidized prices of super gasoline vary from TT $6.09 per litre to TT $7.46 per litre at these oil prices between US $80 and US $100. Unsubsidized diesel prices vary from $5.35 per litre at an oil price of US $80 per barrel to $6.58 per litre at an oil price of US $100 per barrel.

The current retail prices of motor fuels in Trinidad and Tobago per litre are as follows: premium gasoline $5.75 per litre, super gasoline $4.97 per litre, kerosene $1.50 per litre and diesel $3.41 per litre. However, to keep fuel prices at these levels requires a substantial amount of government subsidy, this to be obtained from general tax revenues or from loans.

It should also be noted that motorists in Trinidad and Tobago consumed in excess of one billion litres of fuel in 2019, and more in prior years, before the arrival of the COVID-19 virus, dropping to 950 million litres in 2020 and 2021. However, as the economy continues to open up, it is expected that fuel consumption will once again cross one billion litres per year.

Accordingly, the fuel subsidy liability for the Government, that is the money that must be found from general tax revenues to subsidize the one billion litres of fuel consumed annually in Trinidad and Tobago varies from $922 million at an oil price of US $80 per barrel to $1.94 billion at an oil price of US $100 per barrel.

The Ministry of Finance has been reviewing this situation for the last two months as oil prices began to accelerate with the conflict in Ukraine. In order to determine a reasonable estimate of the price of oil going forward in 2022, the Ministry of Finance has looked at a number of published forecasts made by reputable international agencies, including the US Energy Information Administration (USEIA), the International Energy Agency (IEA), the IMF, World...
Bank and the credit rating agencies among others. Among these, the USEIA is considered to be one of the most reliable and its March 2022 short-term energy outlook, in that the USEIA raised its calendar year 2022 Brent spot price forecast up from the February outlook by more than US $22 per barrel, to US $105 per barrel.

In its latest outlook, the USEIA highlighted that Brent crude oil spot prices averaged US $97 per barrel in February 2022, which the organization outlined was a US $11 per barrel increase from January. The USEIA noted that daily spot prices for Brent closed at almost US $124 per barrel in the first week of March as the further invasion of Ukraine by Russia and subsequent sanctions on Russia, and other actions, created significant market uncertainties about the potential for oil supply disruptions.

Based on all usable available information and advice therefore, the Ministry of Finance is of the view that it is reasonable to estimate that oil prices will average US $95 per barrel in fiscal 2022.

3.00 p.m.

At US $95 per barrel, the total fuel subsidy cost to be paid will be $2,122,350,212 or $2.12 billion, with a direct government subsidy liability of $1,686,668,041 or $1.69 billion. It should be noted that the direct cost to government of this $2.12 billion fuel subsidy will be reduced by the application of the petroleum production levy, which is a levy payable under section 9(1) of the Petroleum Production and Subsidy Act by producers of oil in Trinidad and Tobago. This Act was enacted in 1974 when world oil prices first began to escalate and requires oil companies operating in Trinidad and Tobago to contribute to the subsidization of the prices at the pump for motor fuels in the event of high oil prices. At an oil price of US $95 per barrel, the levy collected from the oil
Adjustment to Fuel Prices

companies would be $435,682,170, making the actual fuel subsidy liability that the Government has to pay from its general tax revenues in fiscal 2022, a total of $1,686,668,041 or $1.69 billion.

This level of fuel subsidy is unbudgeted and unsustainable. The expected fuel subsidy liability for government in fiscal 2022, after taking account of the petroleum production levy, at the budgeted oil price of US $65 per barrel was $216,632,514. However, the rapid increase in oil prices has created an additional unbudgeted fuel subsidy expense in 2022, for the Government of $1,470,035,527 or $1.47 billion if no adjustments are made.

In the 2022 Budget Statement, the Government signalled that the liberalization of fuel prices was planned for 2022 utilizing a process whereby the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries would post the market-based wholesale prices of premium gasoline, super gasoline and diesel on the first day of each month, with, however, a continued subsidy on diesel. We also said at that time in October 2021, that LPG will remain under the subsidy mechanism for the time being. This process of liberalization of fuel prices was scheduled to commence in February to March of 2022. However, in October 2021, it was not expected anywhere that oil prices would increase by over 60 per cent in five months.

Members should note that unlike in Trinidad and Tobago, the prices of gasoline with various octane levels in other countries are close to each other and in Europe, diesel is almost the same price as gasoline. In Italy for example, because motor fuels are viewed as a source of tax revenue, and thus fairly highly tax, the cost of diesel at the pump on the 4th of April, 2022, just a few days ago, was €1.83 per litre or the equivalent of TT $13.57 per litre, or four times the price of this fuel in Trinidad and Tobago, while gasoline retailed at virtually the same price. Indeed,
Adjustment to Fuel Prices

Hon. C. Imbert (cont’d)

Trinidad and Tobago is one of the few countries in the world with artificial differentials between the price of premium gas, super gas and diesel.

Further within the Caribbean, the price of fuel is far higher than in Trinidad and Tobago. In Barbados, for example, the price of gasoline was raised on the 3rd of April, 2022, to US $2.07 per litre, or TT $14.07 per litre and the price of diesel in Barbados was raised to US $1.72 per litre or TT $10.32 per litre, completely invalidating recent advice from the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union that we should follow Barbados in its approach to the price of fuel. Clearly, it was not appreciated that in addition to pricing fuel at levels that are more than twice those in Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados had little choice but to adjust the price of fuel upwards when the price of oil increased again. This they immediately did.

In Jamaica, the price of gasoline on the 4th of April, 2022, was US $1.53 per litre or TT $10.40 per litre and Members should note that the average price of gasoline in the world on the 4th of April, 2022, was US $1.36 per litre or TT $9.25 per litre.

There are many competing demands for scarce resources in Trinidad and Tobago at this time and the Government is of the view that it is not productive, equitable or prudent to spend an unbudgeted $1.69 billion or $1.47 billion more than planned, subsidizing fuel in 2022. This money could be far better utilized in the social services sector, in the health sector, in our capital development programme, on VAT refunds, and on clearing off unpaid bills to contractors and suppliers of goods and services, just to name a few areas. However, the Government is cognizant of the effect of an increase in the price of fuel on consumers, notwithstanding the fact that a fuel subsidy is a regressive measure. Accordingly, the Government is of the view that the liability for any fuel price adjustment should be shared more or less equally, that is, the public should be
asked to pay half the cost of the increased market prices of fuel while the Government absorbs the other half of the increased cost.

Therefore, at its regular meeting yesterday, the Cabinet decided that there should be a partial adjustment of the prices of motor fuels, not to the full market prices but sufficient to allow an equal distribution of the cost. The adjusted prices for motor fuels will therefore be as follows.

The prices of premium gasoline and super gasoline will be adjusted by $1 per litre to $6.75 and $5.97 per litre respectively, while the price of diesel will be adjusted by 50 cents per litre to $3.91 per litre. It should be noted that the adjustment to the price of diesel at 50 cents per litre is half of the increase in the price of gasoline. In the recognition of the fact that diesel fuel is widely used in public transportation, and in the transportation of goods.

The cost of LPG will remain fixed at $21 for a 20-pound cylinder of cooking gas for domestic consumers, which is less than 25 per cent of the true market price and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has been tasked to look at an appropriate price of LPG for commercial customers. The price of kerosene will be adjusted to $3.50 per litre, which is a little over half the true market price.

It must be emphasized that these price adjustments will still require a government subsidy of approximately $840 million in 2022, or half the total cost of the true market prices of fuel, thus sharing the burden of adjustment more or less equally with the population. It should also be noted that at these prices, fuel prices in Trinidad and Tobago will still be less than half the fuel prices in Barbados and less than two-thirds of the fuel prices in Jamaica. Further, in the Eastern Caribbean the current price of gasoline is TT $8.30 per litre. Cabinet has also agreed that the price increases will take effect on Tuesday the 19th of April, 2022.
Before I close, Madam Speaker, I wish to point out that we in Trinidad and Tobago consume far more fuel per capita than other countries in the Caribbean. For example, using 2018 data, the average consumption of gasoline per capita in Jamaica is of the order of 175 litres per year, whereas, in Trinidad and Tobago we consume 445 litres per year in gasoline per capita, more than twice as much per person than in Jamaica. Similarly, Barbados consumes 343 litres per capita per year in gasoline, 102 litres per capita less than Trinidad and Tobago, while Guyana only consumes 139 litres per capita per year in gasoline, less than one-third of the Trinidad and Tobago consumption per capita. There is no doubt therefore, that the heavily subsidized prices of fuel in Trinidad and Tobago are a contributory factor to this pattern of high fuel consumption.

As the price of oil escalates, therefore, we must strive to change our approach to fuel consumption. Accordingly, I wish to report that the Cabinet also agreed yesterday that in order to encourage motorists to conserve fuel, and to alleviate the effect of increased prices of fuel on our citizens, the Ministry of Finance has been authorized to make in or around the middle of May 2022, the necessary arrangements to allow for the waiver of taxes and customs duty on suitably sized imported hybrid motor cars, both new and used. These tax concessions would be designed to cater for typical car owners and will not be available for owners or importers of high end luxury hybrid cars.

For example, a typical hybrid car that would fall into this new category of tax exemption would have an engine size not exceeding 600 CCs—1600 CCs, an electric motor generating 45 kilowatts, and a total power output in the vicinity of 78 kilowatts and would not be more than three years old. Let me repeat that, Madam Speaker. A typical hybrid car that will fall into this new category of tax exemption would have an engine size not exceeding 1600 CCs, an electric motor
generating 45 kilowatts, a total power output in the vicinity of 78 kilowatts, and would not be more than three years old. Further details of the exempt category of vehicles will be announced in due course.

It will also be remiss of me, Madam Speaker, not to address a fallacy that has been promoted and repeated in the public domain regarding the effect of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery on fuel prices and on the fuel subsidy. In this context, it is necessary to remind commentators that in 2014 when the refinery was in full operation, the fuel subsidy liability to the Government in that year was $7 billion. This is what it cost taxpayers of this country to maintain fuel prices at subsidized levels in 2014, $7 billion. Over a three-year period, this country spent $16 billion on fuel subsidy, while the then Government flatly refused to make any adjustment to this travesty simply because to do so would have been to expose the then Government to the anticipated criticism for taking any action like this. Madam Speaker, there was never a worse example of putting office and party before and above national interests.

Further, before its closure, the daily throughput of crude oil through the refinery was of the order of 140,000 barrels per day, while Petrotrin’s production from all its fields was barely 40,000 barrels a day. This meant that every day that the refinery operated, it was required to purchase 100,000 barrels of imported oil at world market prices, which at today’s prices would require foreign exchange of US $10 million per day to purchase oil.

Moreover, it is a matter of public record, as reported by the broad-based team appointed in 2017 to review the operations of Petrotrin and make recommendations for its restructuring, that between 2012 and 2016 the refinery lost up to US $15 on each barrel of oil that it processed with consistently negative refinery margins. Using an average loss of US $8 per barrel of oil processed during
this period, this meant that the refinery lost over US $1 million per day. Let me repeat that. Using an average loss of US $8 per barrel of oil processed during this period, this meant that the refinery lost over US $1 million per day in its operations. If the refinery were still operating, therefore, not only would there be a huge billion-dollar fuel subsidy liability to contend with, but there would be leakage of US $1 million in foreign exchange every day and a requirement for Petrotrin to find US $10 million every day to purchase oil. This is what we evaded by the closure of the refining business through the restructuring of Petrotrin. These are the indisputable facts, Madam Speaker. Instead, Heritage Petroleum is now selling its oil at premium prices and earning valuable foreign exchange.

I trust these facts correct the misconceptions being propagated in the public domain about this issue by self-interested or deliberately misinformed individuals. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 24 (4). Minister, just to elucidate based on the new fuel prices you mentioned that will go into effect on the 19th of April, how long will these new fuel prices remain in effect, these increases?

Hon. C. Imbert: The Government has not taken a policy decision on that yet, but the general principle is that the population and the Government will share the burden of adjustment equally. So it depends on the price of oil. If the price of oil goes down for example, a decision will be made to make adjustments. Okay.

COMPANIES (AMDT.) BILL, 2022

Madam Speaker: The Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Companies Act, Chap. 81:01 to make provision for the role of the Chief State Solicitor as the Official Receiver, be now read a second time.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Madam Speaker, as stated, the purpose of this Bill is to amend the Companies Act, Chap. 81:01. The amendment proposed is a discrete one, which is necessary to fill a lacuna in the law created by the repeal of the 1916 Bankruptcy Act as amended, when the current Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, Chap. 9:70, entered into force. The appointment of the Official Receiver was formally made under section 73 of the 1916 Bankruptcy Act now repealed. That section provided as follows:

“73 (1) There shall be in the public service an Official Receiver of debtors’ estates. Such Receiver shall be an officer of the Court in its jurisdiction of bankruptcy, and judicial notice shall be taken of any appointment of a Receiver pursuant to this section.

(2) A person acting as Receiver shall, during his tenure of office, have all the status, rights, and powers, and be subject to all the liabilities of the Receiver, and all the estates, rights, and powers vested in the Receiver shall, during the tenure of office of an acting Receiver and without any conveyance or transfer, vest in such acting Receiver.”

Madam Speaker, in 2019, the Companies (Amendment) Act was enacted to effect miscellaneous amendments to the Companies Act. Section 10 of that 2019 amending Act, amended section 42 of the principal Companies Act by way of a new subsection (4) which provided that:

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“...For the purposes of this section”—that is to say section 462—“and section 463, the Official Receiver shall be the Chief State Solicitor.””

However, that amendment did not sufficiently take into account section 36—366—

I beg your pardon—of the principal Companies Act which provided as follows:

“For the purpose of this Act, ‘Official Receiver’ means the Official Receiver attached to the Court for bankruptcy purposes, and includes any Assistant Official Receiver.”

I stress “attached to the Court for bankruptcy purposes” because we will appreciate, Madam Speaker, that that was a reference back to the repealed 1916 Bankruptcy Act, section 73(1) and section 73(2) which I have just referred to.

The 2019 Act, therefore, created a lacuna, did not cure the lacuna in the law created by the repeal of the 1916 Bankruptcy Act and made only narrow provision for the Chief State Solicitor to be the Official Receiver under two sections of the Companies Act, that is to say sections 462 and 463. The 2019 amendment did not cover the other sections of the Companies Act which make provision for the Official Receiver to act without of definition of who is the Official Receiver other than the Chief State Solicitor.

The Bill before the House today is intended to address the existing lacuna by amending section 4 of the Companies Act, the definition section, to expressly designate the Chief State Solicitor as the Official Receiver throughout the Companies Act. With this amendment, “Official Receiver” will be properly defined to apply consistently throughout the Companies Act, and sections 366 and subsection (4) of section 466 are no longer necessary, and so are to be repealed.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]

*Question proposed.*
Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Dinesh Rambally (Chaguanas West): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on this short Bill. Let me first start off by of course, welcoming to the Chamber—welcoming to the Parliament, our new Attorney General. I have to say that I have enjoyed working with him in the courtrooms albeit we were on opposing sides, and that the last matter that I recall doing with Mr.—well, our hon. Attorney General, I think was in 2019 before the Caribbean Court of Justice, and I think we had some wonderful times in that particular matter. So, let me just say a polite welcome to him, and we certainly appreciate and look forward to his contributions.

Now, Madam Speaker, whilst this particular piece of legislation that is being proposed, it looks very simple, what we find is that in its simplicity there is some sophistry in it. And why I say that is that when we look at the pieces of legislation, the Bill as presented speaks to curing a lacuna, but the explanatory notes speak to a lacuna as arising out of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, that what you had was the previous Chap. 9:70, the old Bankruptcy Act, making reference to, “the Official Receiver shall be the Chief State Solicitor”. What has been proposed now, by way of this Bill, is that we are curing a mischief arising out of the fact that there was the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act which repealed the old Bankruptcy Act and in this new piece of legislation, there is no reference to the Official Receiver. At least that is how I read the Explanatory Notes and the Bill that is presented to the House.

Madam Speaker, why is this important? It is because as we have heard from the hon. Attorney General, in the Companies Act, apart from 366, you really did not have a definition for the Official Receiver and so we accept that. In the
Companies (Amdt.) Bill, 2022

Mr. Rambally (cont’d)

Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act—and I do not say this as though it is a fatality, I say it because it is something that I think the hon. Attorney General may need to take on board. If the lacuna arises out of the fact that you have this Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, it is 2007, proclaimed in 2014, from what I have—what I recall and looked at, there is no reference to the Official Receiver at all. So what happens is that while section 23 of that Act makes reference to provisions of the Companies Act, in instances where the Bankruptcy Act is silent, it is limited to section 290 to section 303. And so what happens as a result of that, is that you have a situation, Madam Speaker, where under the Bankruptcy Act it is not really going to avail that particular Act by—sorry, sorry—

Madam Speaker: I am hearing a lot of noise and, you know, distractions, in the Chamber.

Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you. So Madam Speaker, I was just making the simple point that what would be the result, and I am of course using the explanatory note of the Bill that is presented here today, what would be the end result is that you would have the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act being an enabling Act in terms of having set out at section 23, that you may have recourse to sections 290 to 303 of the Companies Act, but in sections 290 to 303, of course, that makes reference to “receiver” simpliciter. So, even if it is and what I am hearing today, hon. Attorney General, is that you are saying that in—by including in the definition section, the receiver shall be the official—sorry, “the Official Receiver shall be the Chief State Solicitor,” I am saying that there will still be some work to be done in relation to that piece of law, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act itself, because there is absolutely no reference there to “Official Receiver”.

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So, when we look at the amendment, whilst we may be amending the Companies Act, there may be some repercussions or continue to be this lacuna in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, which may need some foot works just to get it, you know, reconciled. And I know that the Proceeds of Crime Act and there are a couple others but certainly that is one that I recall, we may need to harmonize the definition for “receiver” because the role of the receiver is very important in winding up and in realizing assets on behalf of creditors, et cetera. So, I just want to make that point at the outset that we may need to look at reconciling the definitions across different pieces of legislation, namely Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and I have made reference to the Proceeds of Crime Act.

3.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, one of the matters that I wanted to touch on is that what you have in—now, it used to be under the old Bankruptcy Act that you can have—and that is what took place. You would have the appointment of the Chief State Solicitor or drawn from the Chief State Solicitor’s department, the Official Receiver. So that is granted. But what you have is that sometimes you may have—and this is something we have to take on board in light of advancement of the law itself, namely the Companies Act and the new Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act.

Once the winding up order is made, Madam Speaker, by the court, one of the Official Receiver’s principal responsibilities is taking on an investigative role, to establish the circumstances that led to the company’s insolvency and determining whether there was misconduct or fraudulent activity that caused the company to fail. And they are required to also scrutinize the company’s financial records, et cetera, interviewing directors, making other enquiries of third parties, such as companies, bankers and accountants.

So, even when you have an insolvency practitioner—I am assuming that you

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have an actual insolvency practitioner being drawn from the Chief State Solicitor’s department—they have been appointed to administer the liquidation process, the Official Receiver’s role as an investigator continues. And what is important in this is that—and we cast no—I want to make that clear—indictment on any officer or the Chief State Solicitor’s department, but there is the potential for conflict of interest. There may be occasions where the general functions of the Chief State Solicitor, remembering that the principal function of the Chief State Solicitor’s department is to provide legal services to Government Ministries and Departments as well as to members of the public, including acting as the administrator general and public trustee.

Now, at this juncture, Madam Speaker, I want to say that—and this is something that I know. Certainly, the lawyers will appreciate that attorneys in the Chief State department, when we examine their roles, they already operate on different levels. I do not think that that would be disputed. They are not simply attorneys working in the public service nor are they public servants who happen to be attorneys at law. So, what you have is that they are functioning in a role which their duties are cast higher than the ordinary attorneys at law and because of the different functions and levels at which they operate, Madam Speaker, the nature of the demands being cast upon them, there are unique tensions, problems and responsibilities that are dawning on them, and we need to keep that in mind, and I am saying that in the context of you have potential conflicts of interest that may arise.

Now, Madam Speaker, I do not want to dwell on it too much for the purposes of the piloting of this Bill but it is important that we register it that we can bear in mind that there may be infrastructure, proper resourcing that needs to be implemented in the Chief State Solicitor’s department. And, again, when we look
at the present definition—this is the 366 now that is being sought to be repealed by way of this Bill—I want to say that the Official Receiver was attached to the court. Certainly that was the contemplation in that piece of legislation, that the Official Receiver was attached to the court for bankruptcy purposes. This suggests that the Official Receiver was an officer of the court and clearly considered to be part of the Judiciary or at least a judicial arm of the State.

So, now that we are repealing it, the decision to appoint the Chief State Solicitor as the Official Receiver, we have to look at the potential for conflict because the Chief State Solicitor answers to the Solicitor General or they instruct the Solicitor General, I should say, and sometimes the instruction comes from the Attorney General himself in terms of certain matters. So, I am saying this not because we are seeking to cast any aspersions, but that there are real potentials that we may need to take on board. That being said, Madam Speaker, I would like to turn to a matter of when we take into account that we are saying that the Chief State Solicitor will now be the Official Receiver, the demands cast upon them in terms of what they have do to function as Official Receiver, I would like to think, Madam Speaker, that we have to be careful that we are properly resourcing them. So, I would just say that in reference, that we have to be sure that they are being properly resourced.

And as it is now, the Chief State Solicitors, most people agree that they are overburdened, they are overworked, they have a lot of public law litigation, they have a lot of litigation demands cast upon them and as a result of that, it is what we call burning the candle on all ends. And therefore, it is something that we just need to bear in mind that if it is that we are going to be giving them additional responsibilities, they already fulfil certain duties in terms of the Official Receiver. They already fulfil certain functions. It is not the first time. I am not saying that.
What I am saying is that we have to bear in mind that a codification like this, if it is going to add or put additional burden on that department, we will have to take on board what is required by them in terms of, at least, proper training because this an area of law that requires a certain level of expertise and therefore, they would probably need to have the investment of resources in their department.

So, in principle, there is no objection to this Bill and I am just simply saying, Madam Speaker, by way of reference, that there may be the need to look at those other areas that I have referenced. And I almost forgot, Madam Speaker, that there is also the need to bear in mind—through you, Madam Speaker, the hon. Attorney General, when I spoke about harmonizing the definitions across different pieces of legislation for the appointment of a receiver. Also, when we look at the Official Receiver under the Companies Act, the term “Official Receiver” is still defined in rule 181 of the Companies Winding Up Rules. So there may be the need to look at that. Well, not there may be the need, there is the need to look at that. This is made under the Second Schedule to the Companies Act as meaning, and this is what it says:

“The—“…Official Receiver attached to the Court for bankruptcy purposes, and includes any Assistant Official Receiver,…”

So, in the winding up rules itself, there is reference to what is being repealed in the primary legislation at 366. So that has to be taken on board as well to make sure that we have consistency.

So, Madam Speaker, there are other matters which I wanted to raise but I think it is fairly captured in terms of simply saying that we should look at the demands being cast on the Chief State Solicitor’s department. So, I thank you, Madam Speaker and, of course, I thank the hon. Attorney General for piloting this, and I hope he takes our suggestions on board.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

Mr. Young: No.

Hon. Member: He is going out. He is going out.

Madam Speaker: The Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. May I first of all, with your leave, Madam Speaker, accept the kind sentiments and best wishes that I have received from—Madam Speaker: AG, one minute. I am sorry. If you are going to speak for more than five minutes, then I will have to invite you to go into the booth.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Perhaps I should, Madam Speaker. I am sometimes accused of being a tad verbose.

[Pause]

[Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC goes into the booth]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was in the process, and may I just say for the record that I very much appreciate the kind remarks of the Member who just responded to whom, in another place, I would refer to as my learned friend. And I appreciate the remarks which have been made, as indeed I appreciate the very helpful and constructive remarks which were made with reference to the amendment to the Companies Act which I have the honour and the privilege to pilot today. And I can assure the hon. Member that such of his concerns as he has expressed have been considered. I do not, frankly, for the moment, anticipate that there will be any conflict of interest such as he has indicated.

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However, I do accept, and I can give him the assurance that in the piloting of the Bill and in the anticipation that this honourable House will pass the Bill before it today, I have already engaged in a conversation with the Chief State Solicitor and invited him to speak with me further on the undoubted need which will exist for resourcing the Chief State Solicitor’s department to take on the harmonized and holistic function of Official Receiver which is already being performed by the Chief State Solicitor under those sections of the Companies Act which, today, if we pass this legislation, this Bill, will be repealed.

It is my honour, Madam Speaker, to say that the purpose for which we are assembled here today is to pass legislation for the good order and governance of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a high purpose and I welcome the constructive support which we have received from the hon. Member on other side because that is in recognition of the high purpose which we serve.

Indeed, the amendment which is being proposed is to do no more than to give a holistic and consistent role for the Official Receiver which is already contemplated piecemeal in some of the sections of the Act which are to be repealed by this particular Bill before you today. And, indeed, as we engage in the discussion today, I would pay tribute to the fact that we continue the legislative reform journey which Mrs. Sheila Teelucksingh, one of this country’s most respected corporate attorneys, hailed as a radical departure from outdated colonial statutes, embracing an international perspective to modern corporate principles and practice.

Madam Speaker, in all of those circumstances, I thank the hon. Member for his contribution. I am privileged and proud to have piloted this Bill today, and I beg to move.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]
Question put and agreed to.
Bill accordingly read a second time.
Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.
House in committee.
Clauses 1 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.
Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the House.
House resumed.
Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to highlight that this is the maiden contribution by the Attorney General. I congratulate you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday 20 April—that is Wednesday 20 April, at 1.30 p.m. On that day, we will debate the Report on the Joint Select Committee on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as you all know, we are in the midst of the Easter season and before I put the question on the adjournment of the House, I will now call upon Members to bring greetings on the occasion of the Easter. The Member for Diego Martin North/East.

EasterGreetings

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Easter celebration is the most important festival in the Christian calendar, the second most important being the Christmas celebration.
Easter Greetings  
Hon. C. Imbert (cont’d)

of the birth of Christ. But the Easter celebration is deemed to be the most important because it celebrates the resurrection. In the Easter period or the Pascua as it is called in Aramaic, the Easter period starts on Holy Thursday, moves into Good Friday, which commemorates the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ, and then moves on into Saturday into Sunday for the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And it might be interesting to learn a little known fact because it is said that Jesus died on the cross at 3.00 p.m. on Good Friday, and then he rose on the third day. And in the normal calendar, one ascribes a day to 24 hours. So, it is somewhat counterintuitive that Sunday would be the third day after Friday. In most calendars it would be the second day. But in the old Jewish tradition, a day was counted from 6.00 p.m. in the evening. So that 3.00 p.m. on Good Friday was, in fact, one day. The second day began at 6.00 p.m. on that same day, Good Friday, and went to 6.00 p.m. on Saturday, Holy Saturday, and the third day then began at 6.00 p.m. on Holy Saturday and took us into Easter Sunday. So, Easter Sunday, using the Jewish tradition of counting days is, in fact, the third day.

And in this tradition, all of the glory of Jesus Christ is celebrated, his humanity is celebrated, his descent into hell, his victory over the Devil, his sacrifice on the cross for the sins of mankind, all foretold and predicted in the Old Testament, and we Christians, Madam Speaker, those of us who are regular churchgoers, would attend a church service on Thursday and on Friday, for those of us who go to church on Friday, the church is kept in darkness. Sometimes, traditionally, the statues are covered up and so on. And then we would also attend church on Sunday to celebrate the glory of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a very, very important festival. It is the core of the Christian religion. And therefore, on my own behalf and on behalf of the People’s National Movement and on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, led by Dr.
the hon. Keith Rowley, it is my distinct pleasure to give Easter greetings to all Christians and all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago as we all will come together over the Easter period to celebrate the glory of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this evening I rise on behalf of the Opposition, also the United National Congress, not only to offer greetings to the Christian community for the upcoming celebration of Easter, but also to congratulate those who have been undertaking the spiritual journey of the holy Lenten season.

While many see Easter as just three days, culminating on Holy Thursday, when Jesus was captured to Good Friday, when he was crucified, and then Easter Sunday when he was resurrected, Easter in itself represents a journey. On Sunday, a significant part of that journey is celebrated as we observe Palm Sunday, which marks the jubilant celebration of Jesus entering Jerusalem where the people laid palms on the ground for him to ride on. Palm Sunday, which beckons the start of Holy Week, should symbolize the joy Christians have as they welcome Jesus into their hearts.

As Holy Week progresses, it is a time when the Christian community must engage in its most critical form of introspection where we ask ourselves: What is the meaning of Easter? What is the meaning of Jesus dying on the cross? That meaning has been repeated so many times in what we called the passion of Jesus Christ. From the moment he was arrested in the garden to when he was crucified on the cross. That meaning is selfless, sacrifice and love.

On Holy Thursday, as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane before he
was arrested, he said to the Lord:

“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless not my will, but Yours be done.”

Jesus puts his salvation of humanity above his own fears. On Good Friday, on the cross, as they crucified him, he said to the Lord:

“...forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Jesus puts the forgiveness of others above his own pain. Even more important, God himself chose to sacrifice his own son who resurrected on Easter Sunday to save the world. Therefore, Easter is a time which offers us Christians as well as other faiths, an opportunity to welcome God into our hearts with joy as was done when Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Easter is a time for us all to follow the selfless sacrifice and love that Jesus demonstrated when fearful in the Garden of Gethsemane. He chose the salvation of humanity over his own being. Too many times we focus on the joy of welcoming God, but never focus on his demands of becoming humans that sacrifice for the benefit of others. Today, the message of selfless sacrifice and love must echo throughout every community, every home and every heart as we live in times when so many are broken.

Life in the last few years has changed so rapidly but as a people it is time we change to meet these demands and more so, save our fellowmen. Families are broken by crime and poverty. Young people are broken by lack of opportunities, many are broken by mental health, others broken by loss of loved ones. Easter teaches us that we must sacrifice selflessly and love selflessly to help rebuild the broken lives around us. As we offer Easter greetings to all throughout our nation, on behalf of the Opposition Leader and all Opposition MPs, I urge us all to become selfless as we work towards a better nation. Happy Easter, Madam Speaker.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Easter is one of the principal feasts of Christianity. It marks the resurrection of Jesus three days after his death by crucifixion. For many Christians, Christmas is the joyful end to the Lenten season of fasting and penitence, but the celebration of Easter carries a greater message which is that of death which was conquered and mankind redeemed from sin.

Hon, Members, on another level, the commemoration of Easter symbolizes the corresponding duty we as human beings have to one another, that is to sacrifice our individual riches, our wealth, our talents for the benefit of others who are in a less advantageous position. In the present context of the global pandemic, we all ought to reflect on the personal sacrifice of those men and women who offered and continue to offer yeoman service in the face of the unseen enemy, COVID-19. So, as we gradually revert to business as usual, let us resurrect ourselves from the anguish of the global pandemic and move forward cautiously, but yet with hopeful expectation informed by the lessons garnered from the experiences of the last two years. Therefore, as Christ conquered death and rose again, so it is my hope our nation and the world triumphs over the adversity experienced as a result of the pandemic.

On behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of my family and on my own behalf, I take this opportunity to wish you, Members, and all of Trinidad and Tobago a very happy, holy and safe Easter 2022.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.58 p.m.
WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Dr. Lackram Bodoe (Fyzabad) earlier in the proceedings:

COVID-19 Related Deaths

(Details of)

47. Dr. Lackram Bodoe (Fyzabad) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

With respect to COVID-19 related deaths from May 24, 2021 to present, will the Minister provide the following:

a) the number of unvaccinated persons who have died at healthcare institutions, disaggregated by institution;

b) the number of fully vaccinated persons who have died at healthcare institutions, disaggregated by institution; and

c) a breakdown of the number of deaths in ICU/ High Dependency Unit for each institution?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):

a) As at March 18, 2022, the number of unvaccinated persons who have died at health care institutions, disaggregated by institution is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>COVID-19 Deaths among Unvaccinated Persons after May 24, 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area Hospital Point Fortin</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arima District Health Facility</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arima General Hospital</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital Name</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Augustus Long Hospital</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caura Chest Hospital</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaguanas District Health Facility</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couva District Health Facility</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couva Field Hospital</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debe Academic Facility</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWMSC</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hospital Port of Spain</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeport Health Facility</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage Facility</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayaro District Health Facility</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Associates</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Hope Women’s Hospital</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Scarborough Regional Hospital</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point Fortin Hospital</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port of Spain General Hospital</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princes Town District Health Facility</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rio Claro Health Centre</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Ann’s Hospital</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangre Grande Hospital</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough General Hospital</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siparia District Health Facility</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
b). As at March 18, 2022, the number of fully vaccinated persons who have died at health care institutions, disaggregated by institution is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>COVID-19 Deaths among Unvaccinated Persons after May 24, 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area Hospital Point Fortin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arima District Health Facility</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arima General Hospital</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustus Long Hospital</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caura Chest Hospital</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaguanas District Health Facility</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWMSC</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Hospital Port of Spain</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point Fortin Hospital</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port of Spain General Hospital</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

St. James Medical Complex 206
San Fernando General Hospital 354
Tacarigua Stepdown Facility 5
TREC Isolation 4
TRHA COVID Facility 1
Total 2,781
Princes Town District Health Facility 3
Sangre Grande Hospital 8
Scarborough General Hospital 2
Siparia District Health Facility 7
St. James Medical Complex 31
St. Augustine Private Hospital 1
St. Madeleine Health Centre 1
San Fernando General Hospital 26
Total 227

c). As at April 6, 2022, the breakdown of the number of deaths in the ICU/High Dependency Unit disaggregated by health institution is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>COVID-19 Deaths in ICU/HDU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area Hospital Point Fortin</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arima General Hospital</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustus Long Hospital</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Point Fortin Hospital</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port of Spain General Hospital</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangre Grande Hospital</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James Medical Complex</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>840</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following question was asked by Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (Oropouche West) earlier in the proceedings:

**Taste of Carnival Events**

(Details of Contractors, Vendors and Service Providers)

121. **Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (Oropouche West)** asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:

With respect to infrastructural and operational arrangements related to the facilitation of the “Taste of Carnival” events for Carnival 2022, will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of the following:

a) a list of all contractors, vendors and/or service providers selected for said events and

b) the process by which the contractors, vendors and/or service providers referred to in a) were selected, including the date of their selection and the persons who selected them.

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

**The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell):**

A “Taste of Carnival 2022” was held on a limited basis and activities during the period were safe zone type activities for vaccinated patrons only. The majority of events were managed by the National Carnival Commission (NCC) and Special Interest Groups, including Pan Trinbago, Trinbago Unified Calypsonians Organization (TUCO) and the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival Bands Association (TTCBA). Events were concert type shows and included soca and calypso, extempo and chutney competitions, steel-band and Carnival King and Queen Competitions.

Taste of Carnival served to signal the re-opening of the events and entertainment sector and stimulate economic activity among cultural stakeholders.
Benefits accrued to other service providers who play a key role in the execution of events within the entertainment industry and associated ancillary sectors. The Ministry will continue to work towards the safe re-opening of the sector for the benefit of stakeholders and our citizens and visitors.

The National Carnival Commission has advised on the following: With respect to part (a) List of all contractors, vendors and/or service providers selected for said events, Table I below identifies the contractors, vendors, service providers, procurement process and date of selection for events associated with “Taste of Carnival 2022”.

Table I- List of Contractors, Vendors and Service Providers selected for events associated with the hosting of the “Taste of Carnival 2022”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>National Carnival Commission List of Contractors for Infrastructural Works &amp; Operational Arrangements</th>
<th>Process of Selection</th>
<th>Date of Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tropical Tent</td>
<td>Provision of Tents at QPS and Other Venues</td>
<td>Board approved</td>
<td>Jan, 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Carnival Commission List of Contractors for Infrastructural Works &amp; Operational Arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provision of Tables &amp; Chairs at QPS and Other Venues</td>
<td>Single source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationwide Waste Disposals</td>
<td>Provision of Trailers and Portable Chemical Toilets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding &amp; Civil Engineering Services Ltd</td>
<td>Refurbishing of Grand Stand Flooring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Construction, Assembling &amp; Dismantling of POD Platforms at the QPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent-A-Amp Sound Co.</td>
<td>Provision of Stage Lighting Services at the QPS</td>
<td>7th Feb, 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provision of Sound and PA Services at the QPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vistrac Limited</td>
<td>Provision of Audio-Visual Services at the QPS</td>
<td>14th Feb, 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAS Events Services</td>
<td>Provision of Sound and PA Services at Queens Hall.</td>
<td>7th Feb, 2012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricky Raghunanan Limited</td>
<td>Provision of Stage, Ramps and Decks and Towers at the QPS</td>
<td>26th Jan, 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Install and Dismantle Temporary Fencing, Aisles and Gates at QPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provision of Stage and Stage Lighting Services at Queens Hall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birdsong</td>
<td>Provision of Grounds Maintenance &amp; Janitorial Services at the QPS</td>
<td>14th Feb, 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Provision</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel Crisko Construction Company &amp; Services Ltd</td>
<td>Provision of Armed, Unarmed and Canine Security Services</td>
<td>14th Feb, 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAS</td>
<td>National Carnival Commission List of Contractors for Infrastructural Works &amp; Operational Arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWAT</td>
<td>Provision of Sanitizing and Temperature Kiosks with servicing incl.</td>
<td>Procurement Department – General Purchasing Process via Authorized Requisitions February to March 2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfor</td>
<td>Provision of Signage – HSE &amp; COVID-19 Signage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double X Workshop</td>
<td>Laminating Machine – To Laminate Signage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy Business Systems</td>
<td>Care Kit Packages with Mask &amp; Hand Sanitizer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward Industries</td>
<td>Safety Reflective Directional Arrow Indicators, Signage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laser Cuts</td>
<td>Disinfectant &amp; Sanitizer Concentrate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novaquan Enterprise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Time Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeus Marketing</td>
<td>KN95 Protective Face Masks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Moses</td>
<td>Multi Gas Vapours – For Sanitizing Personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akhenaton Simmons</td>
<td>Voice Over Recordings – Safety Briefing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Cable</td>
<td>Software &amp; Hardware supplies for VOC and troubleshooting of Security Cameras</td>
<td>Procurement Department – General Purchasing Process via Authorized Requisitions</td>
<td>February to March 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribel</td>
<td>Portable Radios for Security Dept.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Services</td>
<td>Fire Services for Taste of Carnival Events</td>
<td>Fire Services for Taste of Carnival Events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Services</td>
<td>Police Services for Taste of Carnival Events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaliedoscope Paints</td>
<td>Painting of Grand Stand Flooring</td>
<td>Procurement Department – General Purchasing Process via Authorized Requisitions</td>
<td>February to March 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&amp;TEC</td>
<td>Major works for servicing of Flood Lights – QPS – For Carnival 2022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagwansingh’s</td>
<td>Hardware Supplies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Chai Trading</td>
<td>Hardware Supplies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammed’s Electrical</td>
<td>Hardware Supplies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Carnival Commission</td>
<td>List of Contractors for Infrastructural Works &amp; Operational Arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Services Provided</td>
<td>Procurement Department – General Purchasing Process via Authorized Requisitions</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel Moses</td>
<td>Polo’s &amp; T-Shirts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screen Stars</td>
<td>Polo’s &amp; T-Shirts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamara Williams</td>
<td>Voice Over – Kings and Queens Competition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio 96.7 FM Gem Radio</td>
<td>Radio Advertisement for Taste of Carnival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More FM 104.1</td>
<td>Radio Promotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vibe City 105</td>
<td>Radio Advertisement for Taste of Carnival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i95.5 FM Gem Radio</td>
<td>Radio Advertisement for Taste of Carnival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103 FM</td>
<td>Website/Social Media Package to promote Taste of Carnival 2022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eldon Pernell Productions</td>
<td>Television Commercial</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNC3 Guardian Media Ltd</td>
<td>Television Advertising Package</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCN TV6</td>
<td>Television Advertising Package</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad Express Newspapers</td>
<td>Ad Bookings – Taste of Carnival Events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signwave Caribbean</td>
<td>Banners, Billboards, Artwork,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signwave Caribbean</td>
<td>NCC QPS Entranceway Cubes – Artwork &amp; Installation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With respect to (b) the process by which the contractors, vendors and /or service providers referred to in a) were selected, including the date of their selection and the persons who selected them”:

- A recommendation and justification for Single Source Awards for the Carnival 2022 was put forth due to the extremely compressed timeline for the hosting of the “Taste of Carnival 2022”. Board Approval was subsequently granted for the above recommendation on January 30, 2022.

- Pre – Qualification Exercise
  
  This process was waived for Carnival 2022 in accordance with the following and as per the Board’s approval of the recommendation provided:

Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Procurement Methods and Procedures) Regulations, 2021

12. (1) For the purposes of this Part “Single Source Selection” means a non-competitive method of procurement whereby a procuring entity engages one supplier or contractor for a procurement even though other suppliers or contractors are available.

2) Single Source selection may be appropriate under the following circumstances

a) Where the procurement represents a natural continuation of previous procurement and
(i) The previous procurement was based on a competitive process;
(ii) The work was carried out by the supplier or contractor within the twelve months immediately preceding the decision to engage;
(iii) The supplier or contractor have performed satisfactorily under the previous procurement;
(iv) The contract is reasonable; and
(v) No advantage would be obtained by the procuring entity by engaging in a competitive procurement method.

- Selection of Major Contractors
  Contractors for Carnival 2022 were selected from the last Carnival’s listing of successfully pre-qualified contractors for major works across the NCC.

- Issuance of Solicitation Requests
  Solicitation Requests for Quotations (RFQ’s) were issued for each respective RFQ in order to obtain contractors pricing.

- Receipt of Quotations
  Quotations were received from each supplier and evaluations and assessments of such commenced.

- Negotiation of Quotations
  In conjunction with Senior Management, the NCC’s Infrastructure Committee was engaged, with part of its role being to assess and determine fair and reasonable pricing for all major works and infrastructure. This Committee was in a position to determine and negotiate fair and reasonable pricing that afforded the best value for money.
For Carnival 2022, the NCC engaged in three sets of negotiations with all major suppliers, in order to conform to set budgets and ensure that the NCC received as favorable a pricing as possible in accordance with a Taste of Carnival.

- Review and Approval by Board
  All pricing for all contracts are submitted to the Board for their review and approval prior to the issuance of any award.

- Award of Contracts
  Letters of Award and Final Contracts are issued to each supplier.

STAGES IN THE PROCESS FOR GENERAL PURCHASES

The following guidelines relate to the Purchasing Procedures for public bodies in achieving the principles included in the objects of the Act in the procurement of the goods, works and services and have been applied to the National Carnival Commission’s (NCC) processes for general purchasing in order to fulfil its required organizational mandates.

The General Purchasing over the Carnival 2022 period would have been in alignment to such.

STAGES IN THE GENERAL PURCHASING PROCESS AT NCC – CARNIVAL 2022

Below are the guidelines and sequential procedures for the purchase of goods and other supplies by the National Carnival Commission. A summary of these include:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs Assessment – User Department</th>
<th>Sourcing-Procurement Department</th>
<th>Supplier Negotiation/Selection</th>
<th>Preparation of Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User Department determines need.</td>
<td>Authorized Purchase Requisition (PR) is received by Procurement from Finance or CEO’s Office.</td>
<td>Procurement Department receives supplier responses.</td>
<td>Purchase Order(s) (PO) is/are now prepared by Procurement Department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User Department prepares Purchase Requisition (PR). Manager User Department signs PR.</td>
<td>Verify needs request with User Department regarding supplier selection and items to be purchased.</td>
<td>Procurement Department evaluates supplier responses in conjunction with User Department and makes appropriate recommendation.</td>
<td>PO is approved according to the procedure as per the respective Purchasing Technique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR is sent to Finance Department for 1) Reconciliation of needs with funds 2) Authorization from Finance Manager.</td>
<td>PR is analyzed and Request for Quotations (RFQ’s) are sent to respective suppliers from the Procurement Department’s list of eligible, credible and appropriate suppliers.</td>
<td>Based on quote estimates, the Purchasing Technique will be decided.</td>
<td>PO is issued to supplier and a copy of PO is sent to User Department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR is then sent to the attention of the CEO for review and 2nd authorization</td>
<td>If approved, PR is held by either Finance Manager or Chief Executive Officer if need is not justifiable or if further clarification is required from User Department.</td>
<td>Purchasing Technique is then executed.</td>
<td>Procurement will monitor and manage supplier relations, lead times etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR can be rejected or held by either Finance Manager or Chief Executive Officer if need is not justifiable or if further clarification is required from User Department.</td>
<td>If approved, PR will be signed by Finance Manager and Chief Executive Officer.</td>
<td>Supplier is selected based on a transparent process and procedures set in conjunction with the Purchasing Technique.</td>
<td>Communicates any delays or follow ups to the User Department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorized Purchase Requisition is now submitted (with three signatures) to the Procurement Unit</td>
<td>Terms of conditions are negotiated and finalized by Procurement.</td>
<td>Terms of conditions are negotiated and finalized by Procurement.</td>
<td>Supplier delivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation of Order</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase Order(s) (PO) is/are now prepared by Procurement Department.</td>
<td>PO is approved according to the procedure as per the respective Purchasing Technique.</td>
<td>PO is issued to supplier and a copy of PO is sent to User Department.</td>
<td>Procurement submits ORIGINAL PO, PR ORIGINAL Invoice/Delivery Notes along with GRN or SRN to Finance Department.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following question was asked by Mr. Davendranath Tanoo (Oropouche West) earlier in the proceedings:

**Agricultural Development Bank**

*(Remuneration Details of CEO and General Managers)*

124. **Mr. Davendranath Tanoo (Oropouche West)** asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

Will the Minister furnish this House with the salary and remuneration benefits of the Chief Executive Officer and General Managers of the Agricultural Development Bank?

*The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:*

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat):** Madam Speaker, the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) remains committed to the development of the sector through the implementation of initiatives designed to stimulate primary agricultural production and all other activities along the agricultural value chain.

The success of the ADB is as a result of a focused Board of Directors and Executive Management. The Bank is managed by the Chief Executive Officer and six Corporate Managers (CM).

The salary and remuneration benefits are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXECUTIVES</th>
<th>Basic Salary $</th>
<th>Travelling $</th>
<th>Housing Allowance $</th>
<th>Entertainment Allowance $</th>
<th>Total $</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>35,500</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>44,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM Finance &amp; Administration</td>
<td>23,200</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>26,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Madam Speaker, I also wish to advise that these compensation packages are subject to taxation.

_The following question was asked by Ms. Michelle Benjamin (Moruga/Tableland) earlier in the proceedings:_

**Taste of Carnival 2022**

(Detailed Expenditure Breakdown of)

134. **Ms. Michelle Benjamin (Moruga/Tableland)** asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:

Will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of the total expenditure for the hosting of Taste of Carnival 2022?

_The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:_

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell): The National Carnival Commission has advised that the expenditure related to the hosting of a “Taste of Carnival 2022” totaled twenty-one million, seven hundred and seventy-three thousand, one hundred and ninety dollars ($21,773,190). The detailed breakdown of the total expenditure for the hosting of Taste of Carnival is provided at Table I below:
Table I- National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago
Expenditure - A Taste of Carnival 2022

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCC Hosted Events</td>
<td>1,155,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGs Hosted Events</td>
<td>8,189,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts-Infrastructure/Rentals</td>
<td>9,402,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naparima Bowl/Queens Hall Logistics</td>
<td>228,578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security &amp; Gate Management</td>
<td>638,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitisation/Janitorial</td>
<td>319,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fees</td>
<td>355,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Short-term Labour &amp; Carnival Committee Expenses</td>
<td>496,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&amp;TEC/WASA Services</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing &amp; Communications</td>
<td>690,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticketing Expenses</td>
<td>78,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Décor-Grand Stand</td>
<td>75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vendor Booths &amp; Additional Material</td>
<td>83,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenditure</td>
<td>21,773,190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to the total expenditure, the National Carnival Commission (NCC) has advised that the total amount expended was $21,773,190.00 as detailed above. Additional funding was generated through sponsorship, gate receipts, venue rental, rental of booths, bar sales and accreditation fees.
The following question was asked by Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) earlier in the proceedings:

National Gas Company Supply of Gas

(Details of Contracts)

140. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

As it pertains to contracts for the supply of gas between downstream industries at Point Lisas and the National Gas Company for the period September 07, 2015 to February 01, 2022, will the Minister indicate:

a) how many long-term contracts have expired;
b) how many long-term contracts are pending renewal;
c) how many long-term contracts have expired and have been replaced with interim short-term or month-to-month contracts;
d) how many long-term contracts have been renewed or executed; and
e) the names of the entities which have received, renewed or executed long term contracts?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young):

(a) For the period September 7, 2015, to February 01, 2022:

Eight (8) long-term contracts have expired. See list below:

1. TTMC GSC which covers 2 methanol plants
2. CNC GSC which covers 1 ammonia plant
3. PLNL GSC which covers 1 ammonia plant
4. PCS 01 and 02 GSC which covers 2 ammonia plants
5. PCS 03 GSC which covers 1 ammonia plant
6. PCS 04 GSC which covers 1 ammonia plant
7. N2000 GSC which covers 1 ammonia plant
8. M5000 GSC which covers 1 methanol plant

The following contracts expired during the period in question but were not long-term contracts – they were all contracts for a period of circa five years:

- CMC GSC – 1 methanol plant
- Tringen I GSC – 1 ammonia plant
- Tringen II GSC – 1 ammonia plant
- Tringen GTG GSC – (Gas Turbine Generator for electricity)
- Yara GSC – 1 ammonia plant
- PSC Urea GSC – 1 urea plant (31 December 2019)
- Methanex Titan GSC – 1 methanol plant

(b) One (1) long-term contract is pending renewal. See below:

1. T&TEC GSC

The Methanex GSC is also pending renewal but would be considered a short-term contract. Methanex also opted to shut in its plant.

(c) No long-term contracts have expired and have been replaced with interim short-term or month-to-month contracts.

(d) Five (5) contracts long-term contracts have been renewed or executed. See list below:

1. Consolidated MHTL GSC which covers 4 methanol plants
2. Consolidated PCS GSC which covers 4 ammonia and 1 urea plant
3. N2000 which covers 1 ammonia plant
4. PLNL which covers 1 ammonia plant
5. CNC which covers 1 ammonia plant
The aforementioned GSCs have been renewed for a shorter term of circa five years.

(e) No entities have received, renewed or executed long term contracts.