

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 23, 2022

The House met at 10.00 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, MP, Member for St. Ann's East, who has requested leave of absence for the period May 20th to 26th 2022, and from the Hon. Stuart Young, MP, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Mr. Rushton Paray, MP, Member for Mayaro, and Dr. Rai Ragbir, MP, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Report on the Operations of the Strategic Services Agency for the year 2019. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
2. Annual Report on the Operations of the Strategic Services Agency for the year 2020. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
3. Annual Report on the Operations of the Strategic Services Agency for the year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
4. Annual Report on the Operations of the Interception of Communications Act, Chap. 15:08 for the year 2018. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
5. Annual Report on the Operations of the Interception of Communications Act, Chap. 15:08 for the year 2019. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

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6. Annual Report on the Operations of the Interception of Communications Act, Chap. 15:08 for the year 2020. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
7. Annual Report on the Operations of the Interception of Communications Act, Chap. 15:08 for the year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

Altered Collective Bargaining Periods

(Reasons for Change)

Madam Speaker: The Member for Couva North.

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Member for Couva North is caught up in some traffic, so he is running a little bit late. To the Minister of Finance on behalf of the Member for Couva North: Given the serious concerns expressed by the leadership of several trade unions that the Government has unilaterally altered the collective bargaining periods without any discussion or consultation, will the Minister state the reasons for this unilateral change?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): The question is based on a false premise, which is typical for the Member for Couva North, and in fact for Members opposite. The Industrial Relations Act—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, that is imputing improper motives, 48(1).

Hon. C. Imbert: What?

Madam Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you Madam Speaker. For the benefit of the hon. Member for Couva North and his colleagues and people who might be misled by their misinformation, the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01, section 43(1) indicates that a collective agreement shall be for a minimum period of three years and can be

for a maximum of five years. So, therefore, there is no unilateral change to anything this is entirely within the law and, Madam Speaker, I wish to make it clear, as I made it clear in the other place, I do not intend to negotiate collective agreements in public, certainly not with the Opposition, and what has been published in the public domain is simply a counter-offer from the Government in response to a request from the trade unions. There is no unilateral anything.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you Madam Speaker, to the Minister. Minister, given your recent track record, could you assure—

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, that is not a question. What track record is he talking about?

Madam Speaker: Just a minute Member, let the question be asked.

Mr. Indarsingh: Could the Minister give this House the assurance that any agreement realized between unions representing public servants and the Office of the CPO, can you undertake this House, or give this House the undertaking that you would not order any investigation into any agreements realized bilaterally between the CPO and the recognized majority union?

Madam Speaker: Okay so, Member, 15 seconds to ask the supplemental. I rule that question out of order. It does not arise from the question asked and the answer given. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you Madam Speaker, Minister, given that you have made a case for the— You are not legally required to engage the trade unions, do you not think that it would be good industrial relation practice to engage them so that there is a consensus rather than a bitterness and an animosity?

Madam Speaker: Member.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, that is a typical attempt of misinformation by the hon. Member for Naparima, typical of the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: I never said anything about not being legally required to engage anyone. That is just a falsehood.

Monkeypox

(Measures taken to prevent)

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you Madam Speaker, on behalf again, on behalf of the Member for Couva North, to the Minister of Health. Will the Minister state what precautionary measures have been taken by the Government to prevent the rapidly spreading monkeypox, which is already present in some fourteen countries, from entering Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, before I begin my answer, may I, on behalf of all of us, greet the students of the Standard 5 class of the Sangre Grande Hindu School. Welcome to the Parliament to you and your teachers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, monkeypox is a virus of the member of the Orthopoxvirus family. To deal with this emerging public health threat I, as Minister, convened a meeting on Friday 20th May, 2022. Present were Ministry of Health's personnel, PAHO and CARPHA. The following mitigation measures were implemented: One, a press release went out because the first defence is an informed, educated, and updated public, where we informed the public about signs and symptoms, what to do if you have a suspect case, we gave them a hyperlink to

PAHO's website to the countries that are continually "uplisted" and increased are there. We told members of the public what to do if you were in close contact with a person from a listed country.

Further mitigation strategies. Our high alert at the port health, we have revisited that, put them back on high alert at port health for screening. The CMO also wrote to all RHAs on the 20th of May to alert all RHA physicians how to diagnose, isolate and treat suspect cases of monkeypox. We are also working very proactively with CARPHA to ramp up regional testing, not only for Trinidad and Tobago, but, as you know, CARPHA is the reference lab for the Caricom. So to ramp up testing for all Caricom countries. I also had discussions with the University of the West Indies to ramp up genomic sequencing capacity, so we would know which virus we are dealing with.

In addition to that, we are proactively reaching out to all of our local and international partners, to acquire the vaccination Jynneos. The vaccination strategy at this point in time, if we get the vaccines is not a national vaccination drive like COVID-19 but a—

Madam Speaker: Minister your time is up.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you again Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are seven questions for oral answer. We will be answering all seven. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Paria Fuel Trading Company Berth No. 6 Incident

UNREVISED

(Commission of Enquiry Commencement Date)

175. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Will the Minister inform this House of the proposed commencement date of the Commission of Inquiry into the incident at Paria Fuel Trading Company's Berth No. 6 offshore platform at Pointe-a-Pierre?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am advised that the commissioners were sworn in on the 22nd of April, 2022, and the commission took effect from that day. Since the commissioners were sworn in, steps have been taken and are being taken to put the administrative infrastructure of the commission in place, including the establishment of the secretariat for the commission to commence its hearings. The commissioners are currently involved in the prehearing stage of the enquiry, which is also known as the investigative stage. During this stage, the relevant evidence is obtained and identified and the relevant witness statements are prepared. This investigative stage of the enquiry is regarded as lifeblood of the enquiry and prepares the way forward for the evidential stage of the enquiry at which witnesses would be called to give evidence. The procedural hearing of the commission is proposed to be held in August of 2022 and after the procedural hearing stage of the enquiry is concluded an announcement would be made by the commissioners as to the proposed commencement date of the evidential stage of the enquiry.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Paria Fuel Trading Company Berth No. 6 Incident**(Coast Guard Seagoing Duties)**

176. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni*

Central) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister state whether the Coast Guard crew that was on duty during the incident at Paria Fuel Trading Company's Berth No. 6 offshore platform has been relieved of seagoing duties?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of National Security, the team of coast guard officers that was on duty during the tragic incident at Paria Fuel Trading Company's Berth No. 6, Offshore Platform, was and remains a shore-based dive team and as such cannot, by definition, be relieved of seagoing duties. Thank you Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Discovery of Guns at Warehouse, Mc Bean Couva

(Status of)

177. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security.

Will the Minister state whether any arrests have been made with respect to the discovery of guns at a warehouse in Mc Bean, Couva on April 26, 2021 and March 9, 2022?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. These matters remain under current, active, investigation by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. No arrests have been made to date.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Gun Violence and Gang Activity in Kelly Village and environs

(Stemming the increase of)

179. Dr. Rishad Seecheran (*Caroni East*) asked to the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister state what is being done by the TTPS to stem the increase in gun violence and gang activity in Kelly Village and environs?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, according to information received from the Commissioner of Police, the area of Kelly Village on the South Bank Road has been identified by police analysis as a hot spot zone. In this regard, the Central Division Task Force and the Emergency Response Patrol Unit have been given particular responsibilities in relation to this area. Moreover, in order to alleviate the incidents of violent crime in that area, intelligence officers on special patrols have been assigned. In this regard, support is being provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Services Air Support wing. I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you Madam Speaker. Minister has the TTPS considered a mobile police post in the Kelly Village area to give additional support to the residence under siege?

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you Madam Speaker. Very experienced outfit the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service takes all of the circumstances into account and I am satisfied that it applies its best thoughts to these matters, but I cannot say in particular whether it has considered a police post in the circumstances.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you Madam Speaker. Minister, what proactive measures are being taken to combat the drug trade in Kelly Village?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. F. Hinds: When I spoke a while ago, I spoke, Madam Speaker, as the area identified as a hotspot zone and severe criminality taking place. That of course includes drug dealing, arms trafficking and other serious crimes.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you Madam Speaker. Minister is a gun amnesty being considered for the central region or perhaps even the nation at this time?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. F. Hinds: Quite recently, Madam Speaker, the Commissioner of Police, quite properly in my view, and in the view of the majority of right thinking people in this country, like Jamaica and like other countries in the world, has implemented a very active, ongoing, illegal firearm retrieval programme. That envisages going out there on the basis of intelligence and finding illegal firearms and bringing them into the hands of law enforcement, as opposed to them being in criminal hands. That programme is ongoing and only recently the Commissioner demonstrated for us all to see a host of these illegal firearms recently collected and, Madam Speaker, that programme continues.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, when can the residents of this area expect to see a significant reduction in crime?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. F. Hinds: I “doh” have a magic wand but I can tell you, I am satisfied as Minister of National Security on the basis of the information I received from the police organization led by Mr. Mc Donald Jacob, and on the basis of the answer

provided here today, that work is ongoing to deal with the problems as highlighted in that other hotspot zones across Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

ECCE Centre, Avocat

(Opening of)

182. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Will the Minister indicate when the Early Childhood Care and Education Centre at Dabie Avenue, Avocat will be opened?

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Madam Speaker, the Avocat Early Childhood Centre, Care and Education Center would be completed as part of the wider school construction completion initiative. Thirteen incomplete schools have been completed to date at a cost of \$400 million. Another seven incomplete schools have recently been approved for completion at a further cost of another \$400 million. Subject of course, Madam Speaker, to the availability of funds, this pattern of completion will continue until the construction of all unfinished schools are completed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister for that response. Minister, can you give us a tighter time frame as to when you anticipate completion?

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, as I said, subject to the availability of funds this pattern of completion will continue until the construction of all unfinished schools are completed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Construction of Siparia East Secondary School

(Update on)

UNREVISED

183. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Will the Minister provide an update on the construction of the Siparia East Secondary School at La Brea Trace, Quarry Village?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Madam Speaker, the employment of the contractor on the incomplete Siparia East Secondary School was terminated in December 2015 and was yet another incomplete project that was part of the multi-billion dollar school construction contract liability created by the previous Government in 2015 in an election year without a source of funds. Madam Speaker, this project will be completed as part of the wider school construction completion initiative. Thirteen incomplete schools have been completed to date at 400 million. Another seven will have recently been approved for completion at the cost of a further 400 million, subject of course, Madam Speaker, to the availability of funds. This pattern of completion will continue until the construction of all unfinished schools.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, thanks again for that answer. But again, I have to ask, can you perhaps put a tighter time frame on the completion of this particular school which is in the high risk area of the constituency?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, again, subject to the availability of funds, this pattern of completion will continue until the construction of all unfinished schools are completed. I will also, through you, Madam Speaker, would

like to tell the Member quite recently we visited that particular school and as I stated, subject to the availability of funds.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker, hon. Minister, would it be possible for you to provide a listing of the prioritization of schools so that individuals will be aware, citizens will be aware, of which schools they can expect to get addressed, subject of course, to the availability of the Minister of Finance releasing funds to you?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, of course, a list can be provided and I just would like to say, Madam Speaker, that all schools will be provided subject to the availability of funds.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Speaker, just to belabour the point to the hon. Minister, can you give us a timeline as to when that information will be provided?

Madam Speaker: Well, Member, I think in substance that is the same question that was asked and answered.

Mr. Tancoo: I am looking for a date on which that information will be provided to the House?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow it.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Vandalism of TSTT Cables

(Measures implemented to address)

184. Dr. Lackram Bodoie (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

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Will the Minister indicate what measures are being implemented to address the issue of vandalism of TSTT cables in Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular the constituency of Fyzabad?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, over the recent past TSTT has been experiencing increased vandalism of its copper plants. In this regard, it is to be noted that copper vandalism and theft is a problem that has impacted not just TSTT and other utility companies in the country over many years, but is a worldwide phenomenon, with copper thieves targeting electrical substations, cellular towers, telephone landlines, railroads, water wells, construction sites, and vacant homes for lucrative profits. Such incidents have intensified with a significant increased experience in the commodity price of copper on the international market recently. I join with TSTT in denouncing the act of those vandals as they are very disruptive to customers. In addressing the problem, Madam Speaker, TSTT has advised that it has identified the main target areas for these copper thefts, and has increased its security patrols in these areas, and has intensified its collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, which continues to play a critical role in the detection and apprehension of cable vandals.

In this regard, it has been reported that for this year thus far, 184 persons have been apprehended and taken before the courts for such offenses. TSTT has advised further that the copper network is outdated and is no longer future proof in terms of providing the necessary speeds and bandwidth required by customers. As such, Madam Speaker, TSTT is moving all of its customers on the old copper network to the new advanced wireless or fibre network. In the circumstances, it has accelerated its timeline to fully migrate consumers from its copper network to the new advanced wireless fibre network. TSTT has reported that to date, it has

migrated over 100,000 customers to one or other of these networks, and has also commenced the removal of the disused copper plant. TSTT expects to migrate all its customers by the end of August 2022.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you Minister for that answer. My follow-up question relates to the removal of the overhanging cables which are all over the country. Can you perhaps give a time frame for that to be accomplished?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to inform the hon. Member that the process to remove those cables has already started. And I am advised by TSTT that given the spate, and the increase in vandalism has been taking place over the last couple months, that it intends to complete this process within the next three to four months.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Miscellaneous Provisions

(Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020

(Adoption)

[Third Day]

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

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the debate on the following Motion which was in progress when the House adjourned on Friday, April 8th, 2022 will be resumed. Hon. Members, 24 Members have already participated in this debate. I now call upon the Member for St. Joseph. Hon. Member, you have 18 minutes left.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to once again speak on behalf of the constituents of the wonderful constituency of St. Joseph on this most important Joint Select Committee report.

Madam Speaker, when last I was here just before the adjournment, I was raising a matter that appeared in the *Daily Express* of Monday, 4th April. I was going to deal with two matters, I dealt with one and then the adjournment came so I will now deal with the second one. And this has to do with the Couva North MP, headline in the *Express*, “Fix Market Now.” I will deal with the second item. And I quote:

“He called on newly-appointed Rural Development and Local Government Minister Faris Al-Rawi to...”—meet the—“releases”—now.

And that is the crux of this matter. The proposed local government reform envisages our modern local government system. Let us admit the current system is outdated, it is ineffective, it is unproductive, and I think all our citizens deserve better out of local government, all 1.4 million in all the municipalities. But we have been hamstrung by 19 Members opposite who have different views. And Madam Speaker, when I converse with even UNC councillors and UNC chairmen, they are quietly in support of this Bill. They are quietly in support of local government reform.

Madam Speaker, with a few minutes I have remaining, I want to anchor my contribution in the Joint Select Committee Report in the matrix that talks about new clause 33B to be found on page 12. And it is a concern raised by the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. And I quote from the report:

“Clarification on the use of the term ‘determining broad strategies.’”

This term determining broad strategies will then enable corporations to really attend to the needs of people as they see fit in their municipalities. Because, what are the needs in Port of Spain will be different to Penal/Debe, will be different to Sangre Grande, will be different to San Fernando will be different to San Juan/Laventille and to Tunapuna/Piarco where the constituency of St. Joseph lies.

Madam Speaker, this was brought home to me personally in a very serious way this weekend when the clean-up drive launched by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the hon. Faris Al-Rawi, Member of Parliament for San Fernando West, launched a national clean-up campaign, and for that he must be thanked. For that he must be congratulated.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Local government. We went just to the south of the St. Joseph Police Station on Saturday to clean grass. Why should that be a part of a national campaign? Why should that not be part of the normal operations of a corporation well-resourced with good equipment and a productive work force?

10.30 a.m.

And I want to continue on this issue, because local government, as we see it, is not only about garbage collection, road and control and these things which are important. But as society develops, local government needs to evolve to cater to the emerging needs, and I am going to speak about one, determining broad strategies, as I said, the new clause 33B. Let us think big. Let us think big. We have children here today. Let us talk recycling. Why in this day and age somebody like me, who likes to recycle plastic, has to gather all their plastic bottles in two bags and drive to find a bin to put it? I drive to the bin at the bottom of Edward Street, I believe, where the old CSO building used to be, to put my plastic waste there.

We always hear the Member for Naparima talk about First World countries. In First World countries, Madam Speaker, you have days dedicated—today is garbage day, today is cuttings day, today is plastic day, today is paper day and you have different coloured bins. That is thinking big, so that the average householder can have an avenue for depositing waste and recycling, set up a recycling industry and create economic opportunity. That is what determining broad strategies, in my view, as envisaged by the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, the new clause 33C talks about. Why are we resisting change for political purpose? Madam Speaker, local government reform and local government has the opportunity to touch positively every household and every person in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, it can bring back community pride in not only clean surroundings, but in loving your country and not throwing things in a river, not throwing things in a drain, clogging up the drain and then asking: What is the Government going to do? Because we have a role to play in the solution? Civic pride, Madam Speaker, this is what this Bill is about. This Bill is not about petty politics and opposing for the sake of opposition.

So, Madam Speaker, I do not want to delay this House any longer, but I think all 24 speakers who have spoken, especially those on the side of the Government, have made the case for local government reform. What we are missing is the reaching out across this two-swords length divide that separates the Government from the Opposition. And I will close by saying: Why should the dreams, hopes, wishes and ambitions of 1.4 million people be stymied by 19? Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate. As I join this debate, and I listened to the Member for St. Joseph, and you, Madam Speaker, that 24 Members have already spoken on this Joint Select Committee Report, I do not think I will take my entire 30 minutes, but I just want to anchor my debate in respect to the mover of this report, the Member for Arouca/Maloney and also the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance, because they raised some points and some concerns in their debate, and I am looking and seeking for clarification when the mover winds up, that is the Member for Arouca/Maloney.

So, Madam Speaker, just before I start, I would just want to—I listened to the Member for St. Joseph, and he sounded good in his five-minute wind up in continuing his speech from the last debate, and I just want to say to the Member, I agree with the issues he raised about the plastic bottles and the wastage and so forth and the clean-up campaign and those issues, Madam Speaker, and I agree and the Opposition agrees with him. And I think, really and truly, as a population, we really need to be mindful of how we go about getting rid of our waste, Madam Speaker. Because whoever is in government has always had that perennial problem of issues of the population, how we dispose of our waste, Madam Speaker. So I agree with the Member for St. Joseph.

The Member for St. Joseph also praised the new Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, the Member for San Fernando West, about his clean-up campaign and I just want to say, Madam Speaker, and that is fine. I admire the Member for San Fernando West. I saw him on TikTok several times since he became Minister of Local Government and Rural Development. And every new Minister of Local Government and Rural Development always does a clean-up campaign. So, it is nothing new that the Member for San Fernando West is doing,

but it is good for the population, it is good for the country, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I listened to and I read over the *Hansard* of my colleague for Arouca/Maloney, and I just want to start off on page 46 of the *Hansard* when the Member for Arouca/Maloney moved this report, and I just want to quote on page 48 of the *Hansard*, and I quote:

“Madam Speaker, analyses have revealed that the major impediments affecting local government bodies include, but are not limited to: inadequate funding; inadequacy of the current legislation; sluggish administrative structure; unnecessary bureaucracy; lack of productivity; and interference and manipulation.”

And, Madam Speaker, I think on both sides, we agree on that. We agree that local government, which impacts and touches the people, a lot more could be done in respect of bringing it to the people, Madam Speaker. So, I agree with the Member for Arouca/Maloney in her opening where she indicated that these are the issues that have been plaguing local government for a long time.

And the Member for Diego Martin North/East mentioned in his debate, he has been a Member of this House for over 30 years and he has been, in the past, at some point in time in an incarnation, he has been a past Minister of local government and he knows the issues, and I agree with him. There are several issues in respect to local government that affects the people, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, I also listened carefully. I read in the *Hansard* my colleague—and I would get to it—where on page 53 of the *Hansard* the Member for Arouca/Maloney, and I quote, Madam Speaker:

“Madam Speaker, one does not have to be a snake charmer to understand the language of serpents and therefore we categorically reject that accusation as dishonest, tactless and fact-less. Madam Speaker...”

And I will come back to that, Madam Speaker and that is in the *Hansard*, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, when I go through the *Hansard* and I listed to the—reviewed the YouTube on the Member for Diego Martin North/East, he raised four critical points. The four points that, in my view, that he raised were remuneration of Councillors, Executive Council, which is good for local government. He also raised property tax. I mean, that has been talked about a lot. I would not get into that. And he also raised another issue about funding, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, when I listened again—and I am going back and forth—the Member for Arouca/Maloney, when she moved the report, the Member for Arouca/Maloney mentioned Sangre Grande Corporation, which is controlled by the Opposition, and the Member also mentioned Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Madam Speaker. And the Member gave the impression—and the Member is correct—that they made some statements that it sounded like they are in favour of this report. And there are some good things in the report, Madam Speaker, and I will discuss that as we continue.

Madam Speaker, I want to raise some issues in the report by other corporations, Madam Speaker, that have not been raised before, Madam Speaker. In the Point Fortin Borough Corporation, Madam Speaker, in the report, page 72—and there are several areas in the report that it was raised—and it was raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East in respect of the Salaries Review Commission. Now the Point Fortin Borough Corporation, which is controlled by the PNM, had an issue in this report in this Committee and their concerns about the Salaries Review Commission, Madam Speaker, and I want to just comment on their concerns, and I would read it out in the *Hansard*.

So the Point Fortin Borough Corporation submitted some concerns, and one of their concerns on page 72 of the report, and I quote, their comment is:

“The Salaries Review Commission should also be involved in the process to ensure its independence, the SRC possess the experience and utilize key tools like job analysis and market comparability in determining compensation.”

Now, that is the concern coming out of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation as a stakeholder to the Committee members, Madam Speaker. And when one listens to the Minister of Finance, in his debate he talked about the issues with the Salaries Review Commission and the pittance that the present councillors are paid, and this Bill and report would revolutionize the way things would be done for councillors as far as compensation and remuneration. It sounded good, Madam Speaker, coming from the Minister of Finance. And the Minister of Finance, in his debate, talked about the lack of and the poor compensation for councillors, aldermen, et cetera, Madam Speaker. We agree with that. I agree with that wholeheartedly that compensation needs to be adjusted, Madam Speaker. But the Point Fortin Borough Corporation, along with other corporations, their concern is about the independence, because the compensation based on this report, based on the new Bill, based on the debate by the Minister of Finance, talked about Cabinet through the Minister of Finance, would now be responsible for setting the compensation for councillors and aldermen, mayors and deputy mayors, Madam Speaker, and, in our Minority Report, we had a concern with that, Madam Speaker, we had a concern with that.

We are asking now—and the Minister sounded good. This is the same Minister that is talking at 0-0-0, that is talking now about good compensation for councillors, aldermen, mayors and deputy mayors, Madam Speaker. We are asking: Does the Minister of Finance have a figure of compensation when this Bill is passed, because it is a simple Bill, for councillors, aldermen and deputy mayors?

And if he does, I would hope that the mover of the report, in the Member's wind-up, would state what is, at least, the target compensation that is proposed by the Cabinet, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, because everybody is concerned about that, Madam Speaker. They are concerned about the independence that no longer will be there, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I also want to turn to page 103 in this report, and it is coming out from the Port of Spain Corporation, Madam Speaker. The Port of Spain Corporation, again, is controlled by the PNM and they have some concerns with this report, Madam Speaker, and I quote their comment:

“If the Executive Council will now be required...”

And they are talking about the Executive Council, which our members who sat on this Committee in their Minority Report had an issue with Executive Council. So the concern of the Port of Spain Corporation, Madam Speaker, on page 107—103 sorry, and I quote their concern:

“If the Executive Council will now be required to hire and discipline staff, what then will be the roles and functions of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission, the Personnel Department, the Union and by extension the Industrial Court?”

So, Madam Speaker, the Port of Spain Corporation had a concern. What will happen to the public servants that are presently in the system under the local government? Because when you listen to the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Finance, in his debate, talked about the THA model, a new model using the THA, and the issues about the bottlenecks, the red tape, the bureaucracy that is presently there, and the issues of public servants, that you are at the behest of the public servants. And the Port of Spain Corporation now is asking, in their concern, what will happen—how do you now discipline? What will happen to the public

servant staff that is presently in the system. And we, as an Opposition, has a concern also with what will become of these public servants over time. You know, are you now going to terminate them? Are you going to put them back into the public service at somewhere in some other Ministry, Madam Speaker? And these things were not properly answered by the Minister of Finance or even the mover of this report, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, again, in the Port of Spain Corporation, when they submitted their concerns, they had a host of concerns about this Executive Council, which was part of our Minority Report. So that when the Ministers and the Members on the opposite side who spoke and chastised us for issuing a Minority Report and, you know, we are not in support of legislation, Madam Speaker, I always say, the Opposition has always said we will support good legislation once it impacts for good on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: So we are not in opposition, we are not opposed to legislation, Madam Speaker. We are opposed to legislation that it is wanting, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, when I review this entire report and I listened to the Members on the opposite side piloting or debating this report, it is really, in my view, a public relations that they are doing, Madam Speaker.

I want to tell this House that this report, the operationalization of this Bill, will not happen in the near future, because we have seen the track record of this Government, whether it be the procurement legislation or other legislation that they passed here, that it has not been operationalized to really put the teeth and give the effectiveness that is required for the population and the citizenry, Madam Speaker.

So, this report, and the way the Members on that side spoke, Madam Speaker, it is

really a public relations that is coming here, because we know local government election is around the corner, Madam Speaker, so they are putting their house in order. So, when they talk about this local government reform is like a THA model, Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Finance: What is the percentage that these corporations would be getting if they are utilizing the THA model? What percentage of the budget that each corporation would be getting, Madam Speaker? That is still in the dark, Madam Speaker. So it sounds good when they talk, Madam Speaker, but in reality it is far from action, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn to funding, Madam Speaker, or lack of funding, Madam Speaker, and I will just raise in respect of the property tax, when the Minister of Finance talked about when property tax is instituted and the residential taxes would be paid to the corporation and the corporations would utilize that residential property tax to assist them in running their corporations, Madam Speaker. The Minister of Finance threw out a figure of about \$30 million. The Member for Tunapuna mentioned it. I think the Member for San Fernando East also mentioned it. Madam Speaker, now, \$30 million in assisting your corporations sounds good. Now, we are asking, is it additional funding or is it will be less whatever allocation is made to the corporation, Madam Speaker? That was not clear. So the question I am asking, if a particular corporation—I just throw out a figure—is accustomed getting \$100 million, Madam Speaker, and you are now collecting property tax, residential property tax, is it now that it is going to be \$30 million less or \$30 million additional, Madam Speaker? Because we are not sure about that.

Madam Speaker, I also have a concern with the role of the Ministry of Planning and Development in this entire local government reform, Madam Speaker, because we have seen so many indiscriminate buildings throughout this country, Madam

Speaker. I am not too sure of the role and function of the Ministry of Planning and Development to mitigate and eliminate indiscriminate building that would affect the survival of corporations and so forth, or even putting extra financial burdens on these corporations, Madam Speaker. Because, I mean, I have seen first-hand where people build indiscriminately, and after they build their building, with no approval, they now come to the corporation asking for financial assistance, whether it is for drainage, whether it is for proper infrastructure and so forth, Madam Speaker. And I am saying that should stop, just like the Member for St. Joseph talked about wastage. We should nip that in the bud before that happens, Madam Speaker. For too long in this country, indiscriminate building have taken place and that must come—because it affects the lives of our citizens, Madam Speaker, through flooding, et cetera, et cetera, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, one of the concerns that I also have is that when you listen to the Minister of Finance and also the Member for Arouca/Maloney, and they talked about when this Bill is passed each corporation will have their revenue stream, Madam Speaker, and one of the revenue streams that they mentioned was property tax. And I ask the question: What is envisaged for the corporations raising extra revenue, Madam Speaker? Is it new taxes will be coming on board with respect to the corporations, Madam Speaker? And I also ask: Would it be uniformed throughout corporations, Madam Speaker? Would Diego Martin Corporation have the same organization structure like the Siparia Corporation or Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation? Would there be uniformity?

Because I noticed in a clause that the organization chart, when this Bill is passed, that each corporation has to be approved by the Minister of Finance first, Madam Speaker. So, the Minister of Finance has to approve the org. chart and the structure of each corporation before it goes forward, Madam Speaker. When I listened to the

Minister of Finance, the Minister of Finance gave the impression that his only role was about assisting or giving each corporation a block of funding and then they will see about themselves, Madam Speaker. But when you check in the report and in the Bill, the organization chart has to be approved by the Minister of Finance. So I ask the question: Would each corporation be unique, different, from another corporation, Madam Speaker? And I also ask: Would compensation—it might sound a little bit, you know, I have a word but I would not use it—if compensation for councillors or even mayors and aldermen in different boroughs would be different, because it is now being set by Cabinet and via the Minister of Finance, Madam Speaker?

So, Madam Speaker, we have some concerns as an Opposition. We had mentioned it in the Minority Report. Again, we had concerns about the Executive Council. We have concerns about property tax. We have concerns about the funding allocation. We have concerns about the public servants and the recognized unions, Madam Speaker. And, I want to say, Madam Speaker, while there are some good stuff in this reform, we want to believe that some more work could be done if they listen to some of the concerns of their corporations in respect of Executive Council, in respect of the public servants, in respect of funding, Madam Speaker. So, it is not only UNC corporations that have issues. Their own corporations, when they commented as stakeholders, have raised some valid concerns, Madam Speaker, and I do not know if those concerns were really addressed, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, I know I did not prepare to stay long. I just wanted to raise those concerns, Madam Speaker, and with those few words, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for La Brea.

The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie): Madam Speaker, I thank

you for the opportunity to join this debate. Like my colleagues, I shall not stay long and prolong the debate unnecessarily, but there are some things that I would like to raise in this Chamber with regard to the Bill before us. I have heard from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, his concerns with regard to the issues raised by the various corporations, and while I sat there listening, I wondered to myself, all these concerns that were raised in the Joint Select Committee, I have not heard, as yet, a proposed solution to any of the issues raised.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Hon. S. Mc Clashie: And that concerns me a bit, because I know the retort from the other side would be that is not their job to find solutions, but to raise them. But I feel in this day and age, Madam Speaker that when we get into joint select committees and we do Minority Reports, we ought to, at least, give some idea of how these things should be fixed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Hon. S. Mc Clashie: So, I am a little always taken aback by that. The implementation of this Bill and the operationalization will, in fact—is a work in progress. And if we try to find every solution to everything before we move forward, I am afraid we will never move forward. So, I just have three points I would like to raise, Madam Speaker, and the first point has to do with property tax and the collection of property tax by the Municipal Corporations.

What that represents for me is maybe something different to most people. When we look at Trinidad and Tobago and we look at the municipalities, we note that we have a mix of rural and urban areas, and what happens in the urban area where there is 25 houses in one street and you build a box drain and it affects 100 people in rural areas, like my own, the constituency of LaBrea, where one house is 500 metres from the next house, it takes on a totally different perspective. So, there is

always the argument about impact and the spending of money to get the most impact. That may be true, but it presents particular problems for rural communities like mine.

What the collection of property tax and other taxes mean for me is that with more money, we have more programmes; with more programmes, we have better infrastructure; with better infrastructure we have more employment; with more employment we build more competencies and capacities among our local contractors and the people at large. So, many of our areas still depend on CEPEP and URP to do work and to provide employment. This Bill, Madam Speaker, to me, gives us an additional tool to create employment throughout the length of breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

I note that in 34A(1) that it is envisaged that with the creation of a new structure that there is the:

“...the establishment and maintenance of a pension scheme for its contracted, permanent and daily rated employees.”

That, Madam Speaker, in and of itself shows that some consideration was given to the longevity and the terms and conditions that workers must always be—or, I should say it gives credence that we should always look after our workers in a way that takes them not just during their days of employment, but thereafter well into retirement.

11.00 a.m.

I note in 34B in the Twelfth Schedule there is a grievance procedure that speaks to employees having the right to be heard and to be dealt with in a particular way and that gives me comfort, Madam Speaker. So when I look at what property—how we are integrating property tax with the works on the ground, when we look that we have taken consideration, in fact, to provide for our workers during their

retirement, and we have also brought into the fray the issue of grievance procedures, I have no doubt that the Bill is moving in the right direction. I also have no doubt, Madam Speaker—and I am not burying my head in the sand—that this Bill, though it is a good Bill, may not be a perfect Bill, and in time there will be amendments and/or changes, not necessarily now but in the future, with regard to making it better. But we have to take the bull by the horn, Madam Speaker, and implement this Bill and do all the work and make the difficult decisions that no doubt will come into play.

So, Madam Speaker, those are just my three points. I think the 25 or 26 speakers before me would have dealt with significant clauses in other parts of the Bill and, therefore, I thank you for this opportunity and look forward to the passage of the Bill and the support of the other side. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Lackram Bodoie (Fyzabad): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on what I believe to be a very important Bill. I take note of the fact that many have spoken on this Bill, Madam Speaker, but I just intend to take another angle of the Bill with regard to the public health aspect. But before I go on to the meat of my contribution, Madam Speaker, I just want to, in response to the Member for St. Joseph, say that we are not resisting change for the sake of opposition. We are not here to oppose purely for the sake of opposition but to make contributions in terms of improving legislation, and also to agree with my colleague for La Brea that it is a work in progress and therefore that is the reason we are here to debate and to make some suggestions going forward, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, I want to commend my colleagues who

have already spoken, and especially those who would have sat on the Joint Select Committee. It was indeed quite a document and I do agree that local government plays a critical role in the daily lives of citizens and that reform is long overdue.

The 25,000-plus constituents of Fyzabad depend on the Siparia Regional Corporation to provide for their needs and in this regard, Madam Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to thank the councillors of the Siparia Regional Corporation for taking their job very seriously. So it is my intention to focus a bit on the amendments with regard to the public health functions of cities, boroughs and regional corporations. In particular, Madam Speaker, I want to look at the new section 33I, which is to empower the municipal corporations to exercise the powers given to the local authorities under the Public Health Ordinance; a very important link between the Ministry of Health and the local government bodies. I also want to look at the amendment to section 36 of the Municipal Corporations Act which replaces the position of Medical Officer of Health with the Municipal Director of Health.

There is also in a new section 43(2), which outlines the powers of this new position of Municipal Director of Health. There is also a section 35E, which I want to address with regard to the creation of a division of the corporation charged with public health, sanitation and the environment. And just a little bit about sections 43A and 43B which treat with vector control and its new relation with the Insect Vector Control Division of the Ministry of Health. And last but not least, there is a small section which relates to occupational disease, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, just before I go into these, I just want to say that, you know, when I first entered office in 2015, I was surprised to see how many local government issues were being brought to my attention by constituents, and for a moment, you know, it crossed my mind that perhaps my colleagues in the Siparia Regional

Corporation, the councillors were not doing their job.

That crossed my mind very fleetingly, Madam Speaker, until I picked up the phone and enquired from each one of those councillors as to whether those issues had been addressed, and in fact they were. And then I realized that the councillors was challenged by constraints in the corporations; not the least of which was funding, and that is an issue that has been spoken about at length here in this debate, Madam Speaker, and hopefully it is something that will be addressed. And, you know, Madam Speaker, I was even told that because the SRC was UNC-controlled, that the PNM central government has been starving the SRC for funding. I have been told that, Madam Speaker, but, be that as it may, I would just leave that point there, Madam Speaker. But I am hoping that and trusting that these reforms that we are debating today will fix this in some meaningful way, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I would like to put the Government on notice that all of these sweeping reforms will come to naught if proper implementation is not supported and I look forward to funding and proper implementation. So, Madam Speaker, let us move on to the public health function as it relates to these amendments in this very important Bill. So these municipal corporations have important roles in protecting the health of the population, whether it is to deal with vector-borne diseases such as dengue, rodent infestation disease such as leptospirosis or food poisoning from the conception of bacteria-contaminated food from public outlets.

So, Madam Speaker, the new section 35E speaks of a division of the corporation, and this is in the context of the Executive Council and divisions being created with responsibilities for different areas for the local government corporations. So this one speaks to the division of the corporation with responsibility for public health, sanitation and environment, and this—so this division has quite a bit of responsibilities, Madam Speaker. In fact, there are quite a bit listed here. I will not

go into each of them but I just wanted to look at the first one, and I am on page 279 of the report; 35E, section 1(a), which speaks to it, says that:

“The Division of the Corporation...shall be responsible for-
(a) developing and promoting strategies for community hygiene;”

And community hygiene, of course, a very important aspect, Madam Speaker, but my interest was raised by the fact that, in addition to this new section 35E(1), there is the additional section 35(2), on page 281, which says that:

“...a Municipal Corporation shall employ persons to be Litter Prevention Wardens.”

Very interesting, Madam Speaker, because I am taking it that the litter prevention wardens will have the same power and authority as the litter prevention wardens who are mandated under the Litter Act, Madam Speaker. And I took the opportunity to do a little bit of research on the Litter Act in preparation for his Bill to realize that, Madam Speaker, it is a powerful piece of legislation passed in 1973. It is 50 years old. It has a lot of teeth and yet we live in dirty cities and municipalities, but I ask myself the question why. And to me the answer was that we had limited enforcement, law enforcement. And I think this is one of challenges and issues that local government faces, Madam Speaker, in terms of the enforcement. I mean, municipal corporations, for example, have the power to remove derelict vehicles under sections 9, 10 and 11 of the Litter Act and yet we see the environment is strewn with so many derelict vehicles, Madam Speaker, but the powers are there.

So, Madam Speaker, if we look at sub (f), again, and this speaks to the registering and inspecting the premises of food handlers; a very, very important area, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, WHO's survey revealed that in the year 2010 about 600 million or one in 10 people fell ill after eating contaminated food, and 420,000

people died that year. It is a very important public health function of these authorities, Madam Speaker, to ensure that food that is sold to the public is safe. In fact, it is estimated that US \$110 billion is lost annually in productivity and medical expenses from food poisoning. So, Madam Speaker, I say this in the light of the fact that as we return to work as the pandemic subsides, we are cooking less at home, we are eating out more; mobile food vans, street food stalls and take-away have always been part of our lifestyle, especially on a weekend, Madam Speaker. And one wonders over the weekend, on a Sunday, how many people actually suffer from food poisoning that may or may not go treated, Madam Speaker, and of course we have a right to protect the public.

In fact, Madam Speaker, in-house dining, once feared for its ability to spread COVID-19 recently, is less inclined to do that now as opposed to getting food poisoning. So this is an important issue and I raised that, Madam Speaker, in terms of the inspection. The powers are there but we have to be innovative. And I just want to raise, bring to the attention of the House an initiative called DineSafe, D-I-N-E, S-A-F-E, DineSafe, which is something that was implemented and available in many of the provinces in Canada. And I speak to the situation in Toronto in the province of Ontario where they have separate legislation for food safety, separate and apart from the Public Health Regulations and the local government regulations, and this is where every establishment that serves food or beverage has to have an inspection done. In some cases, as many as three times per year, as opposed to what I think is maybe random inspections that are done here.

So we can look to sort of put in some sort of structure, Madam Speaker, to the food inspection and of course you have infractions. In fact, interestingly, the infractions are reported in the newspapers, and even so, for diners who are looking for safety, safe eating places, they have access to a website where they can go and see

whether places are inspected. But more than that, Madam Speaker, the particular establishment is issued with a badge or notice which they have to affix to their restaurants saying that they have been inspected and they have been found as a safe eating place. So it is something that we can aspire to, Madam Speaker, in terms of providing safe food when sold to the public.

Madam Speaker, I also want to look at the issue of abattoirs, and the reason I looked at that is because I see that section 207 is being amended to allow for the slaughter of animals intended for human consumption to also be done at private slaughter houses which are registered by the Ministry of Health. So, Madam Speaker, I really did not know too much about slaughter houses so I took the opportunity last night, Member for St. Joseph, to read a little bit about this and what it entails, and there are two aspects of activity related to a slaughter house, Madam Speaker. The animals are supposed to be stunned into some sort of unconsciousness before they are killed or bled to death. This is termed, ironically, the humane aspect, and then there is the aspect of the actual inspection of the meat to ensure it is fit for human consumption, what I call the human aspect. It is morbid stuff I admit, Madam Speaker, but I think it is essential information. And again, I raise this in respect of these private slaughter houses now coming under the Ministry of Health and I trust, of course, that the proper regulations and so on, and checks and balances will be put in place to facilitate these new entrepreneurs.

Madam Speaker, on page 280, with regard to (g), speaking about “environmental sanitation”; again, I am happy that the Public Health Ordinance is being linked with the Local Government Reform Bill because it gives now the local authorities the full remit and ambit of the public health, the wide-ranging Public Health Regulations to allow them to work in this area, especially with regard to environmental sanitation. Under, again the same page, sub-heading (h), it says:

“undertaking initiatives for health education or health within communities;”

So, Madam Speaker, I was hoping that maybe the Member for St. Joseph would have provided a little bit of clarification when we spoke on this.

I can understand a bit on health education; again the question will arise in the minds of the Executive Council, and so on, as to whether they are actually going to be asked to provide health care as well, or whether this will be in conjunction with the health centres, and so on. But I just raised that; I just flagged that, Madam Speaker. Another thing of interest here is the investigating public health complaints and the abating of nuisances under (i); that is sub-item (i). We are still on page 280. And, again, the original Public Health Ordinance, Madam Speaker, again, this is a powerful ordinance and it speaks to nuisances. It does not include the word “noise”. At that time, perhaps that was not a big issue, but now we know it as a big issue. In fact, my colleague for St. Joseph recently, a couple of weekends ago had an issue with noise pollution, and this is something that I am happy is being addressed. We know that if it is to be a local government and monitoring function and perhaps the EMA could get involved in this. And one suggestion, Madam Speaker, is perhaps the EMA should or could train the police officers with respect to the use of the laws and the use of decibel metres to measure the noise levels at public events and so on. And this of course, if this happens, it will end the nonsensical situation of people having to call the police and then the police telling you to call the EMA to report the violations. And, of course, by the time all of that happens, you know, the damage has already been done to the ears, Madam Speaker. So perhaps we can look at empowering the police in the same way that the Litter Act empowers them to be Litter Prevention Wardens.

So, Madam Speaker, I had mentioned the new section 33I, page 272, which gives the municipal corporation the power, the ability, to exercise the same powers; I

think it creates a valuable link between the Ministry of Health and local government. It creates a platform for the collaboration, especially in the situations of the pandemic, Madam Speaker. And therefore, the question in my mind is will this provision facilitate better cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the municipal corporations in terms of battling future pandemics leading to a more coordinated approach as opposed to some of the chaos witnessed in the height of the pandemic in terms of surveillance and supervision of home quarantine? I am just asking, Madam Speaker, because we really have to learn as we move forward and therefore this is a good link to provide that collaborative platform.

Madam Speaker, I would just want to move on and comment briefly on the new section 43A, which is linking the Insect Vector Control now to the Ministry of Health; again, it is a good move, vector-borne diseases can be life-threatening. We have the issue of mosquitoes, of course, and the relationship with dengue, malaria, chikungunya, and recently Zika; we had that Zika outbreak a few years ago. And of course, Madam Speaker, dengue is always life-threatening; fortunately we have seen less cases in recent years but we have to remember that each year an estimated 390million people worldwide get dengue infections and it results in up to about 36,000 deaths annually. So it is a serious situation. And now in situations in 2007, Madam Speaker, we had reported as high as 15 deaths. So we have to remember that the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is not our friend and surveillance needs to be maintained. And I am happy to see this link and I see that standards are going to be developed by the Chief Medical Officer and approved by the CMO prior to implementation. I look forward to those standards, but I just have a few questions to ask, Madam Speaker. Again, we have to define how will the collaboration work in practice because now you have two agencies, two state agencies being responsible for this function. Will there be shared resources of terms of this

function? You know, one has to be careful that the personnel is not duplicated. And the new requirement to report infectious disease, which is on page 283, 43B, it is a progressive step. I am in agreement with that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the new section 42A which is the “Notification of occupational disease”, I thought this was a progressive step in the legislation, Madam Speaker. Now, this whole issue of occupational health and occupational disease, Madam Speaker, is a very important one. According to the International Labour Organization, there are more than 2million deaths every year from occupational accidents or work-related diseases. Madam Speaker, just recently of course we had a tragic occupational-related accident; I do not want to go into that. I know that the matter is subject of a court matter. But this legislation speaks to occupational diseases as opposed to occupational accidents, and I will focus on that, and these occupational diseases account for some 160million cases each year, worldwide. Now, this linking of the introduction of the occupational health disease led me to look at the Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act. You know, again, Madam Speaker, it is quite comprehensive in terms of defining “occupational disease”, however, I found that the local data was very hard to come by in terms of numbers and so on.

According to the International Labour Organization and the Ministry of Health’s own website, there is an Occupational Health Unit within the Ministry of Health which is charged with conducting surveys to assess occupational health and safety conditions in industrial establishments. I am thinking that the linking here where the local authority has to report any cases of occupational disease to the CMO, that information will be passed on to the Occupational Health Unit. But, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to ask—I believe that the unit is still in existence. I just wanted to ask, you know, have any surveys been conducted on occupational

disease? Again, the data is somewhat limited. I am told that the unit is staffed by all of two people and not getting the support of those at the top. Maybe I am misinformed, Madam Speaker, I do not know. Have any high-risk industry situations been identified? These are all important questions, information that the public will benefit from. Is there any public health education programme that is taking place with regard to occupational disease?

So, Madam Speaker, as I said, it is a progressive move, but before I leave that section, Madam Speaker, which is 42A, it is a new section, it speaks to the medical officer forming an opinion based on an examination, but occupational health—the diagnosis of occupational health diseases is important and requires resources, Madam Speaker; in addition to a clinical diagnosis based on history and examination, other resources are required. You have the resources required for blood tests, lung function testing, hearing testing and so on, and my question is whether these checks will be based on requests or will persons in high-risk environments be offered some sort of screening, Madam Speaker, and whether the resources will be available and provided for these very nice-sounding amendments to become part of the law, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I just wanted to look at two other clauses, clause 8, which seeks to amend the Highways Act, Chap. 48:01. I see that the municipal corporation under this amendment will have an additional responsibility not only for streets but also local roads and developmental roads. This is important, Madam Speaker, because in many instances when constituents come to you and try to address, you have to figure out whether it is the Ministry of Works and Transport or it is the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government responsible, and hopefully this will clarify who is responsible for which. And of course the question is, will the funding follow this demarcation, Madam Speaker?

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to close by saying that, you know, there are many amendments in this legislation which if properly implemented can provide for good local government. I am excited about the public health aspects of it. There has always been a little bit of dichotomy between the public health function of the local health authorities and the Ministry of Health, and now I am seeing that this legislation is creating some sort of link in terms of these two, the Ministry and the local government bodies. So, you know, I look forward, Madam Speaker, to see how that would work in terms of the collaboration. I thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to give my full support to the Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020. Madam Speaker, I think as we approach our 60th year of independence, here we have again the People's National Movement leading the charge to continue to empower the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—and to deepen our democratic principles and our democratic traditions. Here we are discharging our responsibilities as legislators under the Constitution to provide and to pass laws for the good governance for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1962, Madam Speaker, we gained independence; in 1976, we gained our republican status, and here again, Madam Speaker, another watershed moment in the democratic life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago that

we are now passing a Local Government Reform Bill that will empower our people and empower our communities across Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I have listened to my colleagues on the other side. If you look at the bench on the other side it tells you how they feel about local government reform. It seems as though they have no interest in local government reform. We would have heard and we have seen on numerous occasions, Madam Speaker, that the UNC prefers to burn tyres all over their constituencies, they prefer to go to the media and claim racial and political bias, they prefer to come to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and block progressive legislation like these—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—opportunities that they have as legislators and elected representatives of the people to advance the interest and the cause of the people of Trinidad and Tobago by pursuing progressive legislation as we are debating here this morning in our capital city.

11.30 a.m.

Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation will benefit every Member of Parliament, because when we walk our constituencies the complaints and the cry that we continue to hear from the people that we represent, each and every Member of Parliament in this House can tell you that those issues are local government issues. Be it the patching of potholes and the maintenance of our roadways, be it the cleaning of drains and the cleaning of open spaces, be it the maintenance of our lighting fixtures, the maintenance of our schools, all these things impact the lives at the community level, and we are quite familiar with the dysfunction that exists at our local and regional corporations.

We hear of cries of lack of funding. We hear of cries of lack of resources. We hear issues being faced by our councillors who, on numerous occasions, would serve

several periods on councils and not having access to salaries or gratuity payments. Madam Speaker, so much of our councilors all over, both in UNC and in PNM corporations, they get stipends for working 24 hours, not being paid a salary, not being paid a gratuity. Here today we are advancing a Bill that will provide security for some of the people and some of our councillors who would now advance and come forward to serve their people and serve their burgesses, a Bill and a report that will address some of these fundamental concerns.

Not in this debate, but very recently, and I do not wish to offend the Standing Orders, but you would have heard on numerous occasions complaints about lighting fixtures and the lack of maintenance of some of our recreational spaces. These things you would expect that with a functioning regional corporation—as we are trying to achieve in this debate and in this report—that a functioning regional corporation would be able to respond to some of those maintenance issues in our lighting and our recreational spaces. But these things cannot be done if you do not have funding. These things cannot be done if our regional corporations and our local government bodies do not have access to financial resources to be able to provide for their burgesses and the citizens and the hundreds of thousands of citizens, the cleaning of drains, the maintenance of our parks and our recreational spaces, the providing of lighting facilities to improve the living conditions and the physical well-being of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. This is what we are trying to achieve here today.

This is not a debate on property tax, but the issue with respect to property tax, as the Minister of Finance would have said on numerous occasions, is to empower our local government bodies, as we set to transform them, as we set to establish the legal strictures in place and the legal formalities in place, so that they can have access to financial resources to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, this Bill is going to assist every single Member of Parliament, because as I said a short while ago, on numerous occasions issues that come to us in our capacity as Members of Parliament, those issues fall rightly at the regional level, at the local government level. I do not understand why an Opposition will not embrace this opportunity, and work with a government to advance the interests and to empower young people, to empower our local government bodies so that they can provide, raise their financial resources, and provide and enhance the lives of the people in their respective communities.

This is what do in the PNM. We can take the road like the UNC and cry discrimination, cry racial discrimination and political discrimination, but we recognize that this is not the way in which we respond to issues. We respond to issues in the way that we are doing here this morning, by setting up and empowering our bodies so that they can have access to all the resources to advance the lives of the people that we represent.

One can just imagine—can you just imagine if all the local government issues in Pointe-a-Pierre, or in Chaguanas East, or in Princes Town or Oropouche East, or D'Abadie/O'Meara, or in Diego Martin North/East, if all those local government issues are dealt with by empowered local government bodies, then our lives as representatives and Members of Parliament can be better spent dealing with other policies and critical issues facing the people that we represent.

Mr. Hinds: Well said!

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: So this is not about burning tyres, Madam Speaker, as I said. This is not about putting on our nice clothes and getting up at five o'clock in the morning and organizing fiery protests, and coming to Parliament after. This is about doing the things that are necessary, that can redound to the benefit of the

people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: In true PNM style—in true PNM style. And I can tell you that even in the utility sector local government plays a very fundamental role. Many times I get a lot of requests from Members of Parliament on both sides requesting lighting fixtures to be maintained properly, things that fall within the domain of local government, and we have to respond and expend financial resources that should have been utilized to expand resources, not to maintain them, but we have to make those interventions because of the dysfunction that exists at our local government bodies.

If only we can empower the local government bodies, as we seek to do here this morning, then the limited financial resources that are available to us as a government, can now be utilized to expand our utility services, be it water trucking, maintenance of our lighting fixtures, et cetera, to other areas that are in need of help and in need of support.

Madam Speaker, we are the People's National Movement. We are quite aware that the UNC has absolutely no interest in advancing the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. When they are provided with a platform to come and serve and to come and work with us, they turn their backs. They walk away from the table of collaboration as they are doing here today and on several occasions. They present a minority report to this very important report, and the minority report says very little.

With no proposal and not even grasping the opportunity to present proposals to perfect what we are doing here this morning, but rather coming up with all kinds of excuses and all kinds of reasons as to why they will not support the advancement of local government reform in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, as we approach the 60th year of independence as a young, maturing democracy, we on this side of the House, the PNM side of the House, will continue to advance the interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago by further deepening our democratic traditions by enacting true local government reform, and we will give a gift, a 60th independence gift to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, by empowering our communities, empowering our local government bodies, so that they can treat with the issues that affect the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

In true PNM style, as we have done in 1962, as we have done in 1976, as we have done on numerous occasions to advance the interests and the business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, here today we will perfect our democracy by enacting local government reform to empower our people, so that they can take care of their communities. They can be empowered to take care of their interests. They can grasp the opportunity to create young contractors, young businessmen, young entrepreneurs, and move forward with their lives, being empowered by true local government reform. We will continue to work with them as a party and as a government, so that they can empower themselves and empower their communities.

Madam Speaker, I wish to also congratulate all Members of the Government, the Opposition as well as Independent Senators who would have sat hours long to prepare this report. I think they have done a fantastic job and, today, we as Members of Parliament, especially PNM Members of Parliament, we will do the business, we will discharge our constitutional duties and pass laws for the good governance of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish again to say that as we move towards our 60th anniversary of independence, local government reform and local government empowerment will be a gift to the citizens of Trinidad and

Tobago, thanks to the great and venerable People's National Movement. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Rishad Seecheran (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to the adoption of the Joint Select Committee Report on Local Government Reform.

Madam Speaker, before I begin today I would like to rebut a few of the statements made by the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West. The Member stated that the purpose of this legislation is to assist in patching of potholes, the cleaning of drains, the fixing of lighting fixtures, the maintenance of schools and recreational spaces. But my question to the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West is why could all of those things not be done under the current legislation. Because there is nothing preventing the Government from achieving all of these issues with the current legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: The issue is the lack of resources from the Ministry of Finance, and that has not been addressed in the legislation. Madam Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago we have a local government system that cannot deliver goods and services to the public in an efficient, timely and cost-effective manner. Major impediments include the lack of funding, an inefficient administrative system and low productivity. Six years after this current political administration had signalled that this would be a major priority of its administration, we are now here to debate a report in a local government election year.

Madam Speaker, let me give you a little bit of history on legislation that has been passed for local government. The National Alliance for Reconstruction made significant reforms to local government during their tenure.

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, 55(1)(b). We have heard this before.

Madam Speaker: Member, please continue.

Dr. R. Seecheran: Thank you. The exercise resulted in the Municipal Corporations Act of 1990, proclaimed in 1991, which replaced the old county council system. This resulted in 14 municipal corporations, two city corporations, three borough corporations and nine regional corporations. During the Manning administration, attempt was made at reform as well, and several policy documents were created or developed. Among them was a Green Paper in 2004, a draft White Paper in 2006, a Green Paper in 2008 and a draft White Paper in 2009.

So, Madam Speaker, we here in the Opposition have reviewed this report and, as has been said by other speakers before, we have five major disagreements: the creation of the Executive Council. We disagreed fundamentally with property tax; the Bill contains no provision for equity in terms of population, geographic size and allocation of funding. The Bill reduces the protection of workers, as well as there has been insufficient consultation by stakeholders. So, like the Member for Fyzabad before me, I would like to concentrate on the public health aspect that was found in this report.

Within each corporation there exists a division responsible for public health, sanitation and the environment. This division has responsibility for public health, community hygiene, water and recycling, insect vector control, rodents and canine control, food handling, restaurants, markets, abattoirs, environmental sanitation, health education and public health complaints, as well as minor drainage, fecal waste disposal, house waste and burial grounds.

I would like to move to clause 43A which says:

“A Municipal Corporation shall in conjunction with the Insect Vector Control Division of the Ministry with responsibility for Health be

responsible for the implementation of the Insect Vector Control in a Municipal Corporation in accordance with standards developed by the Chief Medical Officer.”

So, Madam Speaker, here in Trinidad and Tobago we have several diseases that are transmitted by insects and other organisms that are potentially hazardous to the health of citizens.

As the Member for Fyzabad said before, some of these include dengue fever, malaria, yellow fever and West Nile virus. So animals and insects that transmit or can spread disease are called “vectors”, and over the last 20 years, there has been an increase in the number of peak periods of dengue due to a number of different factors. In response to this, there has been more aggressive campaigns targeted at the proliferation of mosquitoes and other disease-transmitting organisms. It is my wish that under this provision a system may be implemented whereby a year-round strategy can be attained in terms of public education throughout the year, and not just during peak dengue periods.

Madam Speaker, I am also hoping that a water barrel replacement programme would be implemented to address the vector breeding conditions that may occur in areas without pipe borne water. We have a number of those areas in Caroni East, such as Depot Road and Eliza Trace in Cunupia, places that have no pipe-borne water and residents have to do what they may to collect and store water for later use. What this does, in some situations where they collect water in barrels, these are breeding grounds for mosquitoes and the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. Further as well, the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, should identify the options that are available to find a solution to the health risks that are posed by vacant and abandoned private lots within municipalities.

Moving on to new section 43B, clause 3(aa), raised by the Point Fortin Corporation:

“Where an infectious disease is identified by a Municipal Director of Health or his designate has occurring in the Municipality the Municipal Director of Health shall report the occurrence immediately or within twenty-four hours to the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry with responsibility for health.”

Madam Speaker, the committee agreed with this redraft, and I too agree with this provision. This is an important public health measure that allows a robust surveillance system to trace, isolate and treat infectious diseases that may be introduced into our communities. The real threat to our country in terms of infectious diseases is through our porous border with the South American mainland. The re-emergence of arthropod-borne and vaccine preventable diseases have sparked serious epidemics in neighbouring countries to Venezuela. There are ongoing epidemics of measles, diphtheria as well as the re-emergence of polio. So, Madam Speaker, people move parasites more efficiently than mosquitoes do, and the issues that are in Venezuela are rapidly expanding as people flee the horrible conditions in terms of the economy as well as attaining better living standards.

Madam Speaker, we also have the issue of malaria transmission, and this has followed the same pattern as the other diseases I spoke of before. Venezuela's neighbours in Colombia as well as in Brazil have reported an 80 per cent increase in these cases along the border with Venezuela. We also have the return of measles and other vaccine preventable diseases in Venezuela, as well as the potential for outbreaks in Venezuela's neighbouring countries. These have been identified by the World Health Organization as well as the Pan American Health Organization. We also have increases in diphtheria, malaria, tuberculosis—

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, 48(1) please.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, I will give you a little leeway if you could tie that into the provision that you are speaking about.

Dr. R. Seecheran: Of course. So, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health, as the Minister of Health said earlier this morning, has recently convened an emergency meeting with other officials, as well as officials from PAHO, to deal with the recent outbreak of monkeypox in these foreign countries, and according to international reports there are at least 100 cases in many different European countries. So what I am saying, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Try to tie it in.

Dr. R. Seecheran: Sorry, I was just trying to make the point, travellers that may enter our country—and this provision is very important, that should an outbreak occur it could be identified and traced as soon as possible. That is what I was trying to get at, so that we could respond in a quick and efficient manner.

According to the Centres for Disease Control, monkeypox is an infectious disease, and it is one that we would have to monitor and we would have to respond to in as quick as possible a fashion. I am not saying that there are cases here in Trinidad and Tobago, but should it occur this is an important provision in the report that would help us detect those cases and respond to them. So we must be vigilant to protect our citizens from this new and unwelcome threat.

Moving on to a public health consideration raised by the Port of Spain Corporation, where they stated that although the title for Medical Officer of Health would be replaced by the Municipal Director of Health, it does not take into account the City Medical Officer of Health whose job description is different from the principal Medical and Health Officers of other regional corporations. This is on page 231. Madam Speaker, this too I agree with. This is a step in the right direction, but unfortunately this proposal was not actioned by the committee.

Additional powers to the City Medical Officer of Health would have enabled this person to bring a higher level of sanitation to the capital city. It would allow the CMOH to implement international strategies to safeguard those who commute to the city every day for work, and possibly for recreation.

Port of Spain has been besieged by many infectious diseases over the last few years. Obviously COVID-19 comes to mind, but there were also outbreaks of Zika, Chikungunya, as well as dengue to contend with from a public health viewpoint. Madam Speaker, as well as, every time it floods commuters are faced with a rat infestation in Port of Spain. A 30-minute downpour in Port of Spain will trigger a mass exodus of soggy rats fleeing swollen drains.

In October 2012, firefighters at the fire services headquarters on Wrightson Road refused to work because of what they claimed as a rat infestation in their dormitory. At the time, Mayor Lee Sing said that rats were no longer eating the poison that the corporation had put out for them, and instead preferred a variety of local foods such as fried chicken, roti and doubles.

At the time the T&T Fire Services Association Vice-President, Ashton Cunningham, said firefighters were concerned about their health. The reason for that is that a trainee firefighter died succumbing to leptospirosis during training at this facility. He added, the problem of rats living at the fire service compound was an issue for almost 20 years, and he felt it had something to do with the nearby port. This is not the only incident that has occurred and has not been resolved by the Port of Spain Corporation. In October of 2012, Rosary Boys' RC also closed due to a rat infestation. Classes were suspended so that poison could be placed on the compound. In fact, also in November of 2017, the PSA shut down the Board of Inland Revenue on St. Vincent Street, over complaints of rat infestation.

So, Madam Speaker, this is an issue of leptospirosis which is a zoonotic disease

with epidemic potential, especially after times of heavy rainfall. Humans that acquire leptospirosis through direct contact with rat urine or a contaminated environment may display a variety of clinical manifestations, from mild disease leading all the way up to fatalities.

So how is a public health issue such as rat infestation leading to leptospirosis going to be addressed if changes are not made? This is a major issue. The Port of Spain Corporation would have made that recommendation after many, many years of trying to kill rats using poison pellets. Obviously this has not had the desired effect.

A City Medical Officer of Health with additional powers would have been able to reprimand errant food vendors or establishments in their disposal of garbage in an unsanitary manner. Perhaps, these additional powers would have been used to reprimand absentee landowners with dilapidated structures, possibly causing rodent infestation and possibly mosquito infestation as well. So these are just a few of the public health measures that could have taken place, if proactive measures such as this were implemented in the report.

Moving on to another public health issue raised by the Port of Spain Corporation on page 231:

“It is recommended that the Public Health Inspectorate is used to assist in the implementation of a new grading/points system for hotels, restaurants and other food establishments to encourage improved standards of customer service for locals and tourists.”

Madam Speaker, this is yet another commendable proposal that was left unactioned by the committee.

Madam Speaker, a restaurant grading system is a programme where a food service establishment is assigned a reflective score, depending on the sanitary conditions

of their facility. This score takes a variety of formats ranging from letters to numbers to colours, and most restaurant grading systems are based on this manner. As consumers internationally continue to demand an access to information about that restaurant that they may choose to visit, more and more jurisdictions are implementing this measure.

So the intent of this measure is to interpret the results of the facility's most recent inspection in a quick and easily identifiable manner by the public, that they can use when they are dining out with their families. So existing restaurant grading systems have allowed food regulators that added measure to transmit this information to the dining public. Madam Speaker, preventing food-borne illness in restaurants is a serious issue. According to a freedom of information law request in New York City, there were over 26,000 restaurants that were subject to health department inspections in the year 2019. Of those, 1,500 restaurants were closed due to unsanitary conditions.

We cannot rely on oil and gas revenue forever. At some point in time, this nation would have to adapt to attracting tourists in order to increase our foreign exchange levels.

12.00 p.m.

Customer service, Madam Speaker, is defined as the interactions between a business and the customer who purchases its products or services, and customer service plays a key role in a businesses' success. And, Madam Speaker, the hospitality industry relies on exceptional customer service. We will sooner rather than later have to adapt to international standards in this sphere. We can use the lockdown that we recently came out of, COVID-19, as a hard reset of the system, a chance to emerge new and improve and ready to compete for the tourist dollar. And, Madam Speaker, I would have supported this proposal, but unfortunately it

was not actioned by the committee.

Madam Speaker, moving to clause 3e, section 17(1) on page 201, raised by the Siparia Regional Corporation, in which the Minister with responsibility for finance should appoint a local government panel or committee to advise on allocations. This should not be a sole responsibility of the Minister in consultation with the CPO. And the committee agreed that no action was required. And what the Siparia Regional Corporation was asking for here was some level of consultation in the setting of allowances. We have consistently seen the Minister of Finance will, depending on the level of cash flows in coming to the Government, choose to cut areas of expenditure that may be deemed not a priority to his administration. So local government, Madam Speaker, has consistently borne the brunt of these cuts, and it will be no surprise that allowances would be deemed to be of a low priority. We again call for a local government panel to advise on these allowances.

Madam Speaker, moving to clause 3m, section 33B.(j) on page 203, raised by the Siparia Regional Corporation, as well as the Point Fortin Borough Corporation and the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, whereby they asked, what is the role of the CEO relative to the creation and establishment of the organizational structure? And, Madam Speaker, the committee actually agreed on a redraft:

Whereby a corporation shall establish its organizational structure in accordance with the divisions established under section 33A, and subject to the approval of the Minister.

And, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Siparia Regional Corporation as well as the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation and all other entities that were involved in this timely intervention that led to a redraft. As was related before, services are unique to each organization and each regional corporation. And in any successful enterprise the CEO should have some level of input into establishing the

organizational structure of that company.

Madam Speaker, moving on to local roads, orphan roads, agricultural roads and bridges, and under this provision the report seeks to transfer the responsibility of Ministry of Works and Transport, roads, for maintaining main roads and major roads to the local corporation. And, Madam Speaker, if this function was to fall under corporations there would be an impact on personnel required as well as resources. There would be a need for much more funding to maintain all main roads within these boundaries. The Ministry of Works and Transport has defined an orphan road as:

All or part of a road or right away that is private or un-adopted. It has not been classified in accordance with the Highways Act, Chap. 48:01, and not maintained at the public expense.

So, Madam Speaker, we were told earlier in the debate that the Government has allowed certain roads to get so bad in this country that even an ambulance that was trying to reach a home on fire in Princes Town was not able to—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b), at least three Members spoke about these issues.

Madam Speaker: Member, I will give you a “lil” leeway.

Dr. R. Seecheran: Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, basically the ambulance could not reach those persons and they died, and such is the state of disrepair in our nation’s infrastructure under this administration. And my point is, Madam Speaker, and I will not belabour this issue much longer, is, are we to believe that the reason for this state of disrepair of our nation’s roads is because this legislation has not been enacted as yet? Is this the reason this administration is going to give for their lack of performance and neglect of rural communities in the build up to the local government elections? You know, Madam Speaker, they must tell the nation why

they did not fix the roads.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: Do not come here to say legislative reform in local government is the cure. If so why they did not bring it to the House much earlier, Madam Speaker?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: Madam Speaker, moving on to minor drains and minor water courses, and, Madam Speaker, the maintenance of minor drains and water courses continues to be a perennial issue in Caroni East. And as you know we have been besieged by flooding every year for the last quite a number of years, causing extensive destruction to both private and public assets. We in Caroni East are in constant communication with the regional corporations to assist in the clearing of minor drains and water courses. But in many cases, Madam Speaker, due to the lack of fuel, workers are left on the corporation's compound with no value to the taxpayer. First responders are impeded during a natural disaster as they lack direct collaboration with central government, and calls to the Minister of Finance to assist with the fuel allocation disbursement go unheeded.

Madam Speaker, Chairman Henry Awong of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation has been at the forefront for the call for increased assistance to corporations impacted by floods over many many years. In fact, we had a T&T Speaks at Caroni East just a few weeks ago, and he spoke extensively on the struggles that he has had in his corporation to acquire funds just to do basic functions at the corporation. So these local government officials they should not have to beg for money to do the job that they were elected to do, Madam Speaker. That is so unfair.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: This is the level of disrespect meted out to persons elected by this administration. And then we hear there has been a massive windfall of money because of a higher oil price. So how much money will go to local government to fix roads, to fix drains, to fix watercourses, Madam Speaker? So is it what this administration is saying is no matter if the Treasury has money or not, we are just going to continue to suffer under this PNM administration? Madam Speaker, under the Partnership government we built kilometres of box drains, we built pavilions, we built bridges—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran:—and today we get absolutely nothing. Madam Speaker, in Caroni East we are still waiting for the Lalloo Trace bridge to be replaced one year after falling into the river, into the water. The residents of this area have no recourse. They have no bridge to cross and after they provided tens of thousands of pounds to NAMDEVCO food hampers during the COVID-19 health restrictions. Madam Speaker, I am calling on this administration to act with haste in replacing that bridge.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: Madam Speaker, I am running out of time. [*Laughs*] Madam Speaker, recreational grounds and parks and public spaces, pavilions across the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago are in a state of disrepair. And it should be noted that the Member for St. Joseph, a couple years ago, recently opened a multi-million dollar pavilion at the Aranguez Savannah at a budget of \$5 million. It could hold up to 300 persons, a two-team washroom and shower area, male and female public toilets, a conference room. But that is not the issue, Madam Speaker. My issue is in Caroni East, Councillor Richard Sookdeo had to partner with a local business just to maintain the bathrooms and the Statli Night Grounds in Cunupia.

And that is the level of equity that we are talking about here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: They tell us to stop badmouthing our country. But what we face is not what they face. There are no provisions for equity in terms of population, in terms of geographic size, in terms of the allocation of resources. Madam Speaker, how many more years are the people of Trinidad and Tobago going to have to suffer under this PNM administration?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: Madam Speaker, enough is enough. So, Madam Speaker, while this Bill has been touted as a devolution of power, a simple analysis would suggest that with the implementation of property tax, the focus is simply the case of moving the same money from one hand to the next. This administration has all that is required under the current legislation to allow local government to function. The problem, Madam Speaker, is not in the legislation. It is in the administration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: Madam Speaker, should this Bill be passed they will still continue to fail. They lack the political will to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Seecheran: Madam Speaker, I thank my political leader for showing us the way as Prime Minister during her tenure between 2010 and 2015, and we look forward to the return of her as the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and I thank you for this contribution, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very

much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni East ended on a rather interesting perspective. He thanked the Member for Siparia, talked about how innovative and contributory she was, the Member was, and indicated that he too looks forward to her returning to the office of Prime Minister. “Hmm”.

Madam Speaker, he could not wish for worse upon us.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Among other things, of course, local government is responsible for disaster management. What a disaster that will be. Madam Speaker, the Member spoke about rats and he raised the very serious problem of leptospirosis, and he repeated some of the experiences that different corporations, particularly the City of Port of Spain, has had with these creatures. Rats are indeed very hardy creatures. Madam Speaker, in 2010 I think this country saw a new breed of rats.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member, I am not sure where you are going. I just want to caution you. Okay.

Hon. F. Hinds: Indeed, Madam Speaker, you will see where I am going.

Madam Speaker: Right.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am arguing, Madam—and this breed is as hardy as the old set he was talking about.

Mr. Ram: Madam Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 48(1), please.

Mr. Al-Rawi: What!

Mr. Ram: This has nothing to do with—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Again Member, continue. Just be careful where you are going.

Hon. F. Hinds: Indeed. And the Member for Caroni East quoted a former mayor of the City of Port of Spain as he spoke about rats. I just wanted to remind the Member that a Minister of Government, a Senator, between the years 2010 and 2015, one Mr. Hadeed, he too spoke about rats.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: And the rats he spoke about are so hardy, Madam Speaker, they do far more than run the threat of the disease of which he spoke. They attacked the Treasury.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, please continue on another thread.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am proceeding, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, my colleague, he pointed out in his contribution that as far as he was concerned, our friends on the other side appeared to think badly about local government. I think he is quite right. In fact I think he is so right, they probably spell the word L-O-W-C-A-L, “lowcal”. Because really, Madam Speaker, they come from a position of ill-will. Madam Speaker, they submitted a minority report, and as my colleague for Lopinot/Bon Air West—

Mr. Ram: Madam Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 48(6) please.

Madam Speaker: Okay, so Member for Laventille West, if you could just retract that particular word. Okay, where you say they stand on platform, if you could withdraw that word?

Hon. F. Hinds: I withdraw that they stand on that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Hon. F. Hinds: I withdraw. But I am saying, Madam Speaker, having withdrawn that, that as my colleague pointed out, the Member for La Brea—colleagues actually, and Lopinot/Bon Air West, as they pointed out, one would expect that if

you as parliamentarians on a joint select committee take issue with elements of it you should be elaborate in those objections so that the Government, and your colleagues on the committee, including Members of the Government, who are driving this fundamental advancement in local government, so that they would understand, and more than that, the public would understand your positions.

But when you look at the minority report, so-called, you see the traditional old, stuffy, style of the UNC, come to a Joint Select Committee, put up all manners of frivolity, take objection for the sake of it, with an obstructionist posture, in my view, and offer very little. Because in the Eleventh Parliament you had the Member for Tabaquite, Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan; you had Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh, the Member for Couva South, he still is; and one Khadijah Ameen, a Senator. And during the Twelfth Parliament when this work continued, and having saved the work from the Eleventh Parliament, you had again the Member, now, for St. Augustine, Khadijah Ameen; you had a Vandana Mohit, the Member for Chaguanas East; and a certain Anil Roberts, Senator. So when I say local I know what I am talking about, and how it is spelt. And, Madam Speaker, the brevity of this, it is almost naked, the document. It is skimpy, one page. And hear this minority report, and they have the temerity to call it a report, you know. Hear all that it says.

“The Members of the Opposition take note of the Draft Final Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Government Reform dated June 30th 2021 and wish to record different views, including:

- The creation of an Executive Council excludes the voice of the minority.
- The Opposition disagrees with Property Tax being implemented at this time.

- There are no provisions for equity in population, geographic size and location of resources to each Municipality.
- The Bill reduces the protection of workers”—against—“by recognized majority unions.
- Insufficient consultation with stakeholders.”

That is all. Naked and untrue. And you hear who the members were, Madam Speaker: Khadijah Ameen, Anil Roberts, and the Member for Chaguanas East. Skimpy.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(6), this Member continues to be very insulting in his terminologies against me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Mohit: And I will not stand here to continue to tolerate that.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: So, Member.

Hon. F. Hinds: My lady.

Madam Speaker: You know, I just will ask you to be careful comments that might be considered unparliamentary.

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, my lady.

Madam Speaker: And also with respect to personal reflection, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: Obligated. Madam Speaker, I was nowhere there. I was commenting on the skimpy report.

Madam Speaker: Continue, but again, as I say, be guided.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged. I do not know what the Member for Chaguanas East is taking objection to.

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Hon. F. Hinds: What is her problem?

Madam Speaker: Members, I have already ruled. Member for Chaguanas East stood up on a point of order, I have asked you to be guided. Let us continue with the business.

Hon. F. Hinds: The point is established, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, funding is a critical element of the proposals we are heading into here, and as has been adumbrated in this debate before—

Mr. Ram: Madam Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 55(1)(b) please, we have heard this on multiple occasions. The Member clearly did not read the report and has nothing new to add to this debate.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. As you know, Madam Speaker, the Government and the last speaker, the Member for Caroni East, made the point that the property tax—and I am responding to him—will not change anything for local government. That is what I am responding to. And I am saying, he misses the point substantially, because this is a dedicated stream of funding for local government as intended by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, which they do not now have, and the same Member for Caroni East was complaining about a lack of funding earlier in his contribution, a few minutes ago. Incoherent and inconsistent as always.

The Government is saying, we will extract, people will pay willingly a small percentage of their earnings towards their residential properties, business properties and equipment. There were objections to it, and it is in their minority—skimpy minority report, signed by the persons who I spoke of a while ago as I move on. Do not know what their problem is. They do not like the word “skimpy”. But, Madam Speaker, there were legal objections to this property tax, and the Member for Caroni East rehashed that today. They went to court on four occasions

and they lost three times. And the one occasion when they had a modicum of success was because the forms that were sent out were sent out under section 6 when it should have been section 29, which is what the Government is doing now, which is why we are in a position to say that we have gotten sufficient registrations to be able to proceed with this stream of funding for local government in this reform.

That is all. And all together the property tax is expected to generate about 1 billion, but for residential properties for the time being those would generate about \$400, \$420 million. A very important injection into local government, Madam Speaker, so that it can do its work. And funding, of course, is very important, because if local government representatives, elected officials, cannot meet the expectations of their burgesses, there have been examples in this country where elected officials, not getting official funding, get it from somewhere else. So that we know in this country that back in 2010 one of the first contracts that a firm called SIS got was the repair of the Siparia market, within the purview of the regional corporation, and that was a repair job for \$56 million.

Hon. Member: That alone, to repair?

Hon. F. Hinds: To repair the market. And I knew the area because I frequent it there for familial reasons.

Hon. Member: For familial reasons?

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, Madam Speaker. So I could see what was being done, and I saw what we did not get for 56 million. But little did I know that was only the start, because the prime mover of that company, prior to that, was known for a string of—in local government—entertainment houses. And, Madam Speaker, went on to be the biggest contractor in this country in five years.

Dr. Seecheran: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), relevance of speech. This

is nowhere in the report that we are debating.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I will allow it. If I do recall the Member for Caroni East under the issue of inequality spoke about collaboration between private entities and a particular councillor in doing certain repairs.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very warmly, Madam Speaker. So if the local government body is not able to provide funding, we have seen public officials, including Members of Parliament, and I can give a quick case of the Member for Siparia, in particular—

Madam Speaker: Local government.

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Okay?

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes. It was a local government project. But every year after that for the next five years, the same time that the Member for Caroni East spoke about between 2010 and 2015, he raised it. The Member for Siparia was around the place like *mamma mia* giving out toys by the truckloads. [*Interruption*] So funding is very very important.

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker 48(1), the Minister is all over, and what toys have to do with the local government?

Hon. Member: Totally irrelevant as usual.

Madam Speaker: So, Member for Laventille West, again, I ask you to keep with the Bill. I understood your original point about funding and so on.

Hon. F. Hinds: Funding, yes.

Madam Speaker: All right, so let us move on to something else, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Ram: Madam Speaker, I stand on 48(5) please. He referred to the Member for Caroni East as, “he said it”, and can he please just—

Madam Speaker: Well, Member you have just committed that by saying, “he referred to the Member”. Okay? So let us understand here.

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

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Let us understand this, what I heard the hon. Member say, he referred first to the Member for Caroni East and then he went on and said “he”. It is quite artificial—and we have made that point repeatedly—for us to speaking, the Member, the Member, the Member. Okay. So, sometimes we say “he”, we say “she”. What is not allowed is for somebody to continue, a Member, to continue in a protracted speech speaking about he/she. So I overrule. I hope we understand the he/she use and the Standing Order, “the hon. Member” or reference to the Member by the constituency or the portfolio. Please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you, Madam distinguished House Speaker. I thank you for your elucidation, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, among the functions of the local government platform as it now stands is the business of sanitation, the management and the repair of minor roads, drains, watercourses under the municipality, you know, recreation and play parks, and in this regard the electricity is provided by local government, paying T&TEC for that service, emergency works. Madam Speaker, as first responder in a disaster management experience, and of course some level of planning. Very small in terms of city engineers where they have them or engineers, and they provide completion certificates. But one of the functions, Madam

Speaker, is also pest control, insect vector, and rodents and pest control generally speaking, and I told you of a new breed of rats, and all these disturbances and so on that the society is getting, and I get, and I understand the context, and that is why we have to improve local government.

Madam Speaker, there are about 27,000, I am advised, workers in the local government platform. About 14,000 of them I am told, an average about a 1,000 per corporation, are daily paid workers, based on the information that has come to me. We have 900 persons employed in the CEPEP arrangement out of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government; 14,000 workers, very significant number. And when you consider we also have about almost 5,000 daily paid workers in the Ministry of Works and Transport, and when you consider that we still have the Unemployment Relief Programme, in my estimation there are a host of persons available to us in Trinidad and Tobago, even at the level of local government to do a far better job than we are doing with managing sanitation and other aspects what is now local government.

The Ministry of Finance allocates about \$2.4 billion a year to local government, as it now stands, of which I am advised about 75 per cent or \$1.8 billion is paid in salaries and wages and emoluments. While we heard from the Member for Caroni East that councillors who have some serious responsibility, and many are former councillors in this House and would know, they are paid a small stipend, and they are not the beneficiaries of any real proper longer term arrangements, and some of them having served many terms.

So the point I am making, Madam Speaker, is that more money is not the only challenge we face. And I was expecting in this so-call minority report to hear, as we say from this platform with courage, Madam Speaker, that the issue, part of the challenge with local government is simply the question of lack of productivity.

That is a fact. Because I can tell you, I have constituents who would point out to me, in fact one called me, sent me a video, regional corporation workers show up and they are not as productive as they should be. Everybody in this House knows that. And those are some of the matters that we will have to address in this new environment, which is why I am proud of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for proposing the major change, fundamental change, in the management and the affairs of local government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: That is why. We want to fix the problems in a real way, not just write a skimpy minority report, so-called, and think that that is the extent of it.

Madam Speaker, we are now proposing in these measures, and from this report, fundamental change. In some countries, for example in the UK, local government is responsible for some very serious issues, eh; social services, environmental matters, education, highways and planning, highways and traffic, planning, housing. Local government is responsible for that.

12.30 p.m.

You would have heard some time ago in the Grenfell Tower there was a fire in North Kensington, it was the local government body that had responsibility for that. And as a result of that issue they discovered that the fabric or the material that faced the building, it was itself a fire hazard and they have spent millions of pounds going to all the buildings that they have responsibility for in that local government context to change it out as a result of that horrific experience at that tower where many people lost their lives.

So what we are doing today is, for the first time in this country's history in a real way, is a proposing fundamental change, advancement in the way the local government is run. And I heard my friends, in this half-naked minority report, talk

about executive council. These proposals—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Yeah, they do not like to hear the word, but it is skimpy. These proposals, Madam Speaker, proposed that there be established an executive council and a municipal council. The municipal council will deal with policy issues and it will be largely representative. Whereas the executive council, almost akin to that which exists with THA, will deal with the operational elements and it ensures that oversight in place over the delivery of local government services. That is basically the context and the concept. So that new section 33A talks about:

“A Corporation shall have a Municipal Council and an Executive Council.”

And 33B goes on to say what the roles and responsibilities of the municipal council of a corporation would be responsible for. For example, making Standing Orders, by-laws and regulations for the good governance of the corporation. Very important, very important.

So that all the laws that affect them and the burgesses, the people who they are closest to and working with will not only have to come from this Parliament but a striving, lively local government sector will be able, closer to the people, to amend its by-laws and do these things in order to ensure good governance, formulating broad strategies for implementation by the executive council, oversight of the activities of the corporation as I alluded to earlier and debating matters pertinent to the development of the municipality. And 33C talks about representing the interest and concerns of the burgesses and the citizens within the municipality.

But yet, Madam Speaker, with this in front of us in clear terms, pellucidly clear, as you can see there, the minority report on this which I have just quoted, was in front of them as a proposed amendment to the law, you know. But the minority report talks about not sufficient participation of the minorities. But provision, as I say, (e),

33B, in the roles and responsibilities, it talks at (e) about:

“representing the interest and concern...”

So that the municipal council will represent the interest and concerns of the burgesses and citizens within the municipality. But like that escaped them. And all the other ways in which the voices of the people are and can be heard. A lot of people do not know but the members of the public are permitted to attend these statutory meetings and to listen to what their representatives are doing on their behalf. And, Madam Speaker, many of us had activity in local government and will be familiar with these truths. But yet they just simply sit there find fault. 33C—

Madam Speaker: Member, Member, so I think now you can say, “the Members on the other side” or “hon. Members”.

Hon. F. Hinds: The Members on the other side.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members.

Hon. F. Hinds: “The Members on the other side” would suffice, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Well, well—

Hon. F. Hinds: I am sure.

Madam Speaker: Well, all I am saying is be guided by the—

Hon. F. Hinds: I am guided.

Madam Speaker:—and some of the actions that accompany it.

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, I must admit when you rise to your legs and you speak with such clarity and authority and with the respect that we have, we will never think or do otherwise. So I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Honourable, honourable, Madam Speaker, distinguished, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, 33C, at 33C it talks of the responsibility for the

Executive Council which in part includes:

- “(a) determining broad strategies for implementation consistent with the decision of the Council;
- (b) allocating financial and other resources to the Divisions;”

And I pointed out to you that this is going to generate, the poll tax will generate a stream of income in this regard.

And therefore, Madam Speaker, when I listened to the frivolity and the complaints from my friends I can only say that it is all unfounded. The Member for Caroni East and one before him, I cannot remember who, actually said this morning in this debate that this is not—oh yes, my friend from Pointe-a-Pierre, this proposal, these measures—imagine this report was saved from the Eleventh Parliament. We got the permission of this Parliament to save the work so it would not be lost going into a new Session. We came to the Twelfth Parliament, they put Members as well, the work continued. We now have this report which we are debating here today and still my friends from Pointe-a-Pierre and Caroni East have the gumption, the gall, the shamelessness—

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker—

Hon. F. Hinds:—to come to this House and to tell us Madam Speaker, that these measures are only designed for the upcoming local election. Would you believe that?

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 48(4), please, referring to Members as shameless and so on.

Madam Speaker: So Member, I think I would not take it that it is improper motive. I think it is unparliamentary—

Hon. F. Hinds: Okay.

Madam Speaker:—so I will ask you to withdraw that and find another way which

I know in all your eloquence you can find.

Hon. F. Hinds: Well, let me put it this way then, Madam Speaker, my friends from the other side made the submission that what we are doing now, trying to assist in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago with work that began since in the Eleventh Parliament, between 2015 and 2020, that we are doing this today only in anticipation of an upcoming local elections, is disingenuous and as well, Madam Speaker, devoid of shame.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, and I think I would have said enough to persuade even my friends on the other side that the business of running the country and the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago is no child's play, it is no kindergarten. And I have seen the standard of debate and the contributions, and this minority report so-called, bikini as it is—

Madam Speaker: Member, it is a document—

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: And while I have not taken any objection to the word “skimpy” and so on, because you know—I think your choices of words like “bikini”, I think we can avoid that.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you. Madam Speaker, this embarrassing minority report, so minor in its purport, so expressionless except of course to assert an obstructionist posture—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds:—reveals the state of affairs and I am absolutely—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker—

Hon. F. Hinds: Oh, God.

Mr. Lee:—55(1)(b), tedious repetition. The Minister has been harping on the

minority report since the beginning of his speech.

Madam Speaker: So Member, I think you have a little less than a minute—

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Please make—

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you, Madam Speaker. And as I commend, I just want to say to my friend for Pointe-a-Pierre is it that he is now embarrassed and ashamed of the report. If so, say so, say so. But, Madam Speaker, for the time being, given the very little time that is available yet to me, I would like to commend these measures. It is the first time in this nation's history when we are proposing a very serious fundamental tangential move from where we are to where we want to go in a modern world, in a modern country that deserves the best governments that we could afford. And I commend these measures to all of my friends in this Parliament. I thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so hon.Members I propose at this time to take a break. I suggest that we suspend till 1.15 p.m. I do remind Members about the COVID-19 protocols and we are our brother's keepers so let us try to safeguard each other and our individual health. Thank you. This House is how now suspended for—I think it will now be 35 minutes, we will resume at 1.15p.m.

12.40 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed*

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on an important matter before us today in the House, namely to debate a Motion for the adoption of a report on the very

important issue of local government reform, the work of a Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020.

Madam Speaker, like the Member for Laventille West before me, it was not my intention to speak in this debate, but unlike the Member I am quite prepared with a few points to make. Madam Speaker, the matters before us are important matters in the context of reform, in the context of development, since they touch and concern every single citizen, whether you are a politician, doctor, lawyer, engineer, in an elementary occupation, we all grieve and seek the deliverance of basic utilities to make our lives more comfortable, peaceful and so on.

Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to read and study in some detail the report before us and I have also had the additional opportunity to read the contributions made by several Members of the House in this debate in the recent past. And today I would take the few minutes that are available to me to comment on contributions made, particularly by the Member for Diego North/East, the Minister of Finance, who plays a pivotal role in any new system of local government representation and also the Member, I believe, for Port of Spain South who spoke on this Bill as well. I did study in some detail their contributions and would like to raise a few issues emanating from that. And also to respond very briefly to the Member before me, Laventille West.

Madam Speaker, I thank you so much for the timely intervention of taking a break for lunch and refreshment. It is very difficult when your stomach is churning after such a contribution to continue with business as usual. I think maybe it should be a Standing Orders recommendation for amending the Standing Orders. So any time the Member for Laventille West speaks, we take a break.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: But that would be for the House Committee. Madam Speaker, the matter I want to raise is a general matter. When the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke, the Member spoke with some typical passion, beat his chest about this reform process and how important it was and culminating in years of work, and the Member himself was a Minister of local government between 1993 and 1995 more or less. And, Madam Speaker, I also come to the podium with some experience in both Government and Opposition having been elected almost 21 years ago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—and I was stopping for the desk thumping there—and having interfaced with local government representatives, chairmen, mayors and so on, for 21 years—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—I consider, I am not battered but I consider myself well experienced to speak on the reality that Members of Parliament and Ministers of Government face in dealing with local government issues.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East cried that the debate, in his opinion lacked intellectual depth. I do not know if he was reflecting on his colleagues on his side, but the debate lacked intellectual content and we were not speaking to some of the policy issues and the deeper issues and, of course, he derided in his customary way, Members opposite and so on, and I do not wish to go into that direction as you know.

Madam Speaker, I just want to make an introductory point. This package presents us with the amendments that suggest that we will have a creature of an executive council, an executive leadership in municipal corporations, akin in a sense to the Cabinet system of government, where you have a Cabinet which is the

Executive, you have a Parliament where we are here, that is Legislature and the Cabinet emanates from the Legislature. So it is akin to that. But why is there the assumption that the Cabinet system works? Why is that assumption given? In the dialogue, in the narrative of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, he beat his chest and said we are now having a system like what we have in central government with an executive council, as if the Cabinet system works. But the same people who cannot get the Cabinet system to deliver goods and services, how will they get the local government system to deliver that?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: And we ought to think about that because there are weaknesses of the Cabinet system, whether it is bureaucracy, whether it is corruption, whether it is representation. Those weaknesses will find itself in the executive council model as well if you do not deal with the root cause of it, procurement, for example.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: If you do not deal with streamlining, administrative structures and so on, you are just going to create a 14 mini-Cabinet that will have the same problem that the Cabinet at the national level has. Because the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke in his statement, he says, you know, over the years we have had problems where MPs and councillors, they cannot work with chief executive officers, they have problems with the engineers, they have problems with public health inspectors, et cetera, et cetera, the nuts and bolts of local government management. It is the same principle, Ministers have challenges with Permanent Secretaries, with directors, with managers in their Ministries, with state board chairmen and so on. So, those are problems that face us at every level of governance. But the Bill and the report do not deal with that it is just like we are

introducing an executive council just like Cabinet so feel happy.

Madam Speaker, the other point—my first point is that an executive council does not mean—mirrored after the Cabinet, does not mean that that will be successful. Because there are many people in this country who believe that the Cabinet system is in need of reform.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: The other point I wish to make, to respond to this thirst of the Member for Diego Martin North/East for some intellectual consideration and issues, to reflect on former Prime Minister Patrick Manning and his thinking on some of these matters, because there was a reference to former Local Government Minister, Mrs. Hazel Manning, and the work she did for several years in terms of consultation and local government policy issues and so on. The former Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, well, had a certain thought process as it relates to some of these issues. I want to share one issue. Unless I am mistaken, Madam Speaker, and something may have passed me by in those years I talked about, 21 years, this is the first attempt. And the Member for Diego Martin North/East said it in his statement, he says, we are passing this without the Opposition. And today the Member for St. Joseph says why should 19 people hold back 1.4million when Diego Martin North/East says, “we doh need allyuh, we doh need you, we passing it”, it is a simple majority. Now, people will believe it is 22 keeping back 1.4million, but that is another story.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: But, Madam Speaker, unless something passed me, this is the first attempt to make fulltime politicians. That is an interesting thing, because given our Westminster British parliamentary upbringing, given the historic structure, nature of postcolonial administrations and so on, Members of Parliament

and councillors were always meant to be part time. Now, why was that so? I am not saying I am in support of that, eh, I am saying let us understand the reasons why it was so to understand why we are changing, or why we may need to change.

Because it was felt that apart from someone being a Minister of government and having a full time job as a Minister of government, Members of Parliament—I mean in the British Parliament, unless I am mistaken, that number is how much?—500 people or so, they have a huge Parliament of course. In India I do not know how many thousands of Members they may have and so on. It was felt that the other part of the Parliament outside of the Cabinet should have been men and women who bring to bear experiences of life of different professions. So when you come to the House to debate and to speak to policy, which is really the House, you bring your experience as a barrister, as a land owner, as a dentist, as a doctor. So you bring that experience to bear in your deliberations.

Likewise, in local government environment when you come to the council you bring whatever experiences you would have. You may be a pastor, a pundit, an imam and so on, you bring experience. You may be a business person, you may be a trade union representative, you bring that experience from your work to bear on deliberations, on policy, on programmes. But bringing full time politicians now means not solely but in some cases you are creating a profession called politician. Because if someone joins at the age of 23, because according to the law you can be elected from a young age, 18 years. In the Senate I think it is 25, but here it is 18. So if you come to the local government, and we are about local government, Madam Speaker, if you come to local government at 19, 20 years, you cannot practice as an engineer; you cannot work as a doctor; you cannot work as an attorney; you cannot work as something else, which experience we felt could help.

Now, I am not saying, Madam Speaker, necessarily this is good or bad, I am

saying that that is the effect. The consequence of this is that you may not have the mix of experiences that you need, because at the age of 20 years, 22 years where you are legally entitled to hold office, you will not have the years of experience working in different areas and life to bring to bear that experience. And this is the first time I think they are threading on this.

Mr. Manning when confronted with this issue, was of the belief that Parliament should have persons who are part time, particularly if you are in Opposition, that you work and you come to Parliament and this is why historically, Madam Speaker, unless somebody has some other reasons, Parliament was always in the afternoon so that you will do your practice and your work in the morning and in the afternoon you will journey to discuss the people's business and you would work every other day.

Now, given the nature of the evolution of government and the complexity of bureaucracies and the broadening of responsibility, Parliament now has enormous committees that meet during the week, likewise local government. In local government, Madam Speaker, they have several committees that require persons to be attending, not only on their "statutory meeting" but their committee system and so on is in some cases quite sophisticated. So we come to this full time occupation.

But, I just put it on the table because full time occupation means that you may well have a situation where persons who have experience, accounting persons, persons who have experiences in all walks of life may not be elected and then you will have to get that type of expertise in through advisory services and consultancy and so on, and so forth. So it is just an issue I raise, but having understood the demands of this office and the need, we also understand what we are doing.

Madam Speaker, the speaker before me regrettably had a preoccupation with certain words which I think we quite rightly stood on and in some cases, Madam

Speaker, ruled on. So I do not want to repeat those words in my speaking here, but only to say that sometimes the Member for Laventille West worries me by that disturbing pathology.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: But I would say no more on that. Madam Speaker, I would have thought the Member for Laventille West, being the wordy Minister of National Security, would have spoken to the issues of municipal police in the local government context. Clearly crime is a grave matter not only in the city and so on, but in local communities; in rural communities; in the towns; the villages, crime is rampant, and you would expect a wordy Minister of National Security to speak to that issue. How does this report, the provisions bring greater security? And clearly there must be an integration, both institutional and administrative, between your municipal police and your central law enforcement infrastructure.

There is a law enforcement infrastructure in the country that has to be properly integrated for administration and institutional sharing between municipal police and the central government. Because it cannot be that the municipal police role is just to walk around with councillors and mayor and chairmen like bodyguards. That clearly cannot be the objective of municipal police alone. It has to be to work with central agencies and so on, to protect citizens in their communities and local government reform should do that, protect citizens. But the Minister of course chose not to speak about that but was very concerned with the Siparia market. He is concerned with all things Siparia, but the Siparia market.

Madam Speaker, since the Minister raised that issue I would just respond by looking at a *Guardian* story of Wednesday August 08, 2012 and the headline is:

“\$56million to upgrade Penal, Siparia markets”

Today the Member gave the impression as if \$56million was for one market and

according to him we did not see value for money. How would he see value for money? What is his qualification to inspect a market? What is his qualification? After seven years you have not had any investigation; you have not handed the police any documents; you have not fostered any investigation onto the police, and you come today to say \$56 million upgrade for one market when it is two. And, Madam Speaker, it not my intention to read the entire article but to cite it and say that for the Penal market it was \$6 million alone. And in Siparia they built a brand new market, multi-story, market.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: But you hear the Minister today and this you know, this morbid obsession with SIS and so on. Today the SIS is before, to our knowledge, the SIS is before no police authority, investigating nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Seven years later. Unlike other companies that are before the police, we are told.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: But the SIS is not, but the Minister will speak, the Member for Laventille West, as if there was some criminal wrongdoing, we did not get value for money. It was two markets and to build an entire new six-story market was the \$50 million and then \$6 million for the Penal market upgrade. And they were complaining at that time that persons were stealing produce. Here what they were dealing with, stealing produce. When you go in your land you work day and night and you come to the market, people thieving your goods, so to speak. They were complaining about they do not have toilet facilities at the market for customers and persons who go there to purchase. They were complaining about staircase, they were complaining about lighting, they were complaining about all of those things,

and the People's Partnership dealt with it that way.

Madam Speaker, we were proud during our years 2010 to 2015, I believe under Minister Chandresh Sharma we had facilities extended to councillors for offices, for better conditions of work, for staff, and today to hear Members opposite say, well, we only talk and did nothing. The Member for Diego Martin North/East said that in his statement. He said the Government of 2010/2015 only talk, talk, talk, that is what he said. But we gave better compensation, we gave offices, we got staff. It is now that the councillors have problems paying their rent because central government is not releasing money to pay the rents for offices.

Madam Speaker, as I said before my experience with local government, I reached to a point many years ago where I do not even ask councillors to help to do anything. Because I will get the same answer, they do not have resources, they cannot help, and in our system of government all of us here as elected Members, on whatever side, when people come to you it is the problems that bother them. It is a street light, it is the drain. Madam Speaker, I have had this experience where you could come to Parliament and deliver, you know, some grand speech for 75 minutes. The next day the newspaper carries your speech, Madam Speaker, you make news on the hour by the hour. And after all of that, a fella will come up to you and say, "boss, what about that drain we talk about last month". Because that is important, it is not the twelve o'clock news, what is important is the drain. And we are proud that they called us the box drain government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—because we fixed, and we fixed, and we fixed, lights, street lights. So today, I ask the Government this simple question, you are speaking so highly about devolving power to local government bodies, they must take control and do this and do that and they must have the power, they must have the

resources, they must have everything and we beat the chest; why are you setting up a company called Secondary Roads Company with \$100 million for?

Why are you setting up that at the central government if that is to fix secondary roads? Secondary roads are under the municipal corporations. So why are you setting up a company for the central government to get involved in fixing the trace, and the branch trace, while today you speak about liberation—

1.35 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—of local government reform? But you are going about with a hundred million dollars plus, and it will be much more, to pave roads in the municipal corporation. So what happen, you do not trust them to do that?

Madam Speaker, these are serious matters and this country cannot continue. Enough is enough. And, Madam Speaker, tomorrow the 24th is an important day. It was the 24th of May, 2010 that this country was liberated from an earlier incarnation of the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: So we celebrate that tomorrow and look forward to a next liberation celebration.

Madam Speaker, on this matter of local government before us, I have dealt with this municipal police and the importance of local government, the Siparia market. The issue of paving roads and so on is a critical issue. When people come to your office I will say, Madam Speaker, out of 10 persons with a complaint, five, six will be about roads and drainage together, some job, other infrastructure, and so on, water, electricity, and so on, but it would be road paving. It will be fixing roads and so on, and that is an important issue. This Bill before us, this report, Madam Speaker, will not change anything. I mean I am sorry to say this, I mean but when

you have been around a lot you hear a lot, you see a lot, and we hear the same talk too at times. But this does not change it, because if you do not have bitumen—if you close a refinery and you do not produce bitumen, whether central government or local government, nobody could pave road. How you paving road? With the executive council? You cannot pave road. You have to have bitumen and if you close the refinery you have none, and it is expensive to bring from Europe, to bring Jamaica and Suriname. So less roads will be paved.

Executive council do not change that, and they have set up in this Bill as well, this creature of having the chief officers and so on. A few minutes left to me, Madam Speaker, I just want to ask something. The Minister of Finance came and said—I think he just pulled this from a hat and drop or pull it down from the sky—\$30 million for corporation, for infrastructure arising from property tax. Where he got that from? Which study? Because it is the property tax, some residential taxes that they intend to put to municipal corporation. But have you done a study to tell us the residential properties in Mayaro as well opposed to Diego Martin, the residential property value and estimated collection of taxes in the Port of Spain City Corporation as opposed to the Princes Town Regional Corporation? Have you done that? How do you know it is \$30 million? Because clearly properties have different values in different parts of the country.

There are some areas under local government where the majority of the area might be a lot of forestry. It might be forestry. You are not taxing forestry to give them the money for development. Whereas if you look at a corporation, whether it is Diego Martin, Arima, somewhere, may have a lot, a lot of residential properties. So while you talk about equality, this system that you are introducing could perpetuate inequality by telling these different corporations what you get from residential taxes keep it and use it. So one group has \$10 and the next group has

\$100. So you perpetuate the inequality. So you have to look at that and revise it. Could we not think of a system where, based upon scientific social studies, work in terms of poverty, in terms of population, in terms of projected development? We come with some formula where the various corporations would have a certain percentage, not below something if you know what I mean—not below something. So if you are Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, San Fernando City Corporation, Couva, Chaguanas, et cetera, et cetera, there must be some scientific basis to tell us that we must have a situation where Sangre Grande must not have less than something for their development, Port of Spain must not have less than something based upon scientific data. But the Minister of Finance is a stranger to scientific data. He comes and pulls from a hat 30 million for everybody and “all yuh” vex. But where did that come from? I read his speech about two or three times painfully. I did not see any reference to any study, any work done at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and so on, to suggest that they have a scientific basis for providing revenue, and revenue is the issue.

Madam Speaker, when we were in office local government bodies got much more revenue and they were able to do a lot of work. We did not have this kind of complaint about flooding, and about roads, and about streetlights and so on. In fact, in fairness to the Government before, Madam Speaker, under Mr. Manning, that Government introduced a very comprehensive street lighting programme where all the local and rural areas got streetlights, and we continued that programme, national street lighting programme. We continued it and increased the subvention to that. That brought some development. And in the context of crime, Madam Speaker, in rural areas you have to get into a massive comprehensive street lighting programme to just combat the movement of criminal elements in some form or fashion apart from CCTV camera not working and so on. Local government has to

play some role, and the street lighting programme needs to expand itself to deal with that.

So, Madam Speaker, without resources there will no delivery of goods and services. You can change what you want in terms of the institution, call somebody councillor today, call them executive member tomorrow, make them full-time, part-time. I mean I have given my views on that already, but I imagine full-time members should have more time to commit to their constituents, their members of their electoral district. The full-time member will also commit to working harder in the councils and so on, and on the streets, in the communities and so on. So there is an advantage in the modern system of government to that as well, to having full-time. Many persons here, of course, are also products of the local government system, and certainly on this side of the House we are very blessed to have several local government practitioners formerly—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—who bring to bear an enormous experience and knowhow in understanding some of these matters.

Madam Speaker, in closing I just think I have about two or three minutes left by my calculation—yes, about three minutes. Madam Speaker, one area that local government has been able to assist with is this area of disaster management, of managing crises whether they may be natural, they may be manmade, they may be whatever, and there is a case to be made for strengthening the resources and the human resource capacity of local government bodies to respond to local problems. For example, erosion, sea erosion, is a major issue in the context of climate change and, therefore, councils that find themselves on the perimeter of the Atlantic Ocean or the Caribbean Sea, wherever it is, those councils need to be given some type of consideration to deal with disaster management, to deal with climate change, and

deal with matters like these.

But you see you cannot run this thing on a two-track where on the one hand you give lip service to local government, and on the next hand you put a central company to pave secondary roads. That is the mismatch in terms of policy objectives. I would have liked to see in that hundred million dollars that they are going on the secondary given to local government corporations to deal—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—with potholes. With potholes, Madam Speaker. This morning I am coming here, I am driving myself, and, Madam Speaker, just on one of the streets to the Parliament here if you go there in that hole you “mash up” front end, axle, shocks, everything, and this is Port of Spain next to the Parliament. I do not know where this falls or not, but, Madam Speaker, even in the city—I am not naysaying that the city must always be—benefit apart from rural country, but there was a time when you complain about potholes you complain only in rural areas.

Today, Madam Speaker, if you go to that street where HDC is and so on, if you go around the Red House and you only—there is the deepest pothole. They looking like you could put down a fish broth or something inside there. It is a terrible state. This will not change that. And, Madam Speaker, the final point I will raise because I do not want to repeat anything said before—and the Member for Laventille West, well he did not deal with security. I did not expect him to deal with housing—is the matter of housing. We boast that housing is an area in developed countries that local government has certain control over that, and so on. Why do we not introduce a system as well where the local government corporations can have some type of legal authority to participate in housing development, build their housing stock, distribute their housing stock according to some central determined policy? And that will take the load of the HDC.

It will take the load out of central government that local Government can get involved in a housing stock in partnership with central government, and clearly under the framework of a national policy. And you can prevent a lot of these things, a lot of the duplication, a lot of the crises, and a lot of the complaints you hear about distribution of housing stock and distribution of units and so on. So, Madam Speaker, with those few words it was not my intention like the Member for Laventille West, but I hope I at least added something to the table unlike the Member for Laventille West. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Adrian Leonce): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Leonce:—for allowing me to partake in this debate on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020. I would just like to speak basically on a few things that the previous speaker would have raised, one of which would have been the concept of the councils. Now the councils he referred to it in parallel as a mini-Cabinet, and the Member would have spoken about how mini-Cabinets may not work. But the only thing that would not work is if the persons that comprised the Cabinet they are at fault, and when the nation or the people realized persons that they elected are at fault what they do they vote them out.

So there is an accountability for persons who are elected and who form part of this council in terms of their performance, and to me that says something. Because with persons who are elected having that authority to build and form policies and direction to where you are going, there stands an opportunity for the persons that vote you in. There stands an opportunity for persons to actually

receive the expectations that they would have questioned you and asked you for because they would have your input in mind when they present to the council, and I think that is a very powerful thing. So I agree it is semblance and parallel to a mini-Cabinet, but what I do not agree with is that some Cabinets that may have failed before that you expect all of them to fail, and that cannot be fair to the elected members on either side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Leonce: I have been having several meetings within my different communities and my councillors are there to support me, and a number of issues, if not most of the issues, consist of local government issues. Now imagine a councillor that needs the support of a CEO, and their engineers, and how they operate, to be able to give the service to their burgesses as opposed to a councillor being able to speak to his or her burgesses and be able to bring representation to council and formulate policies that would support the concepts or the solutions that persons would bring.

So, for example, persons would complain about employment or they may complain about certain services that are available within their community, and the council then has the authority, or the power, or the ability to then incorporate more local content within the services that are given. And this can be different with every corporation because the logistics, the issues, the planning, may very well be different. So one issue that one corporation might experience would be different to another. So in terms of—let us say, for example, there is an issue with elderly persons. They may be able to do considerable training under their remit for elderly care and also incorporate within their services some system where the persons that are trained can also provide this service within the community.

Additionally, the local contractors can also play more of a role within the

Hon. A. Leonce (cont'd)

development of the community, and this is a problem I know that that we experience in our municipal corporation. A number of local contractors are begging their councillors, their representatives, to allow them to have a great input in the development of their community—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Leonce:—and this is what the council is all about. The council is there to formulate, to advise, to make changes in the policies that will benefit the community, and I do not understand how we cannot support something like this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Leonce: This will bring economic development, it will bring trust, it will bring confidence, that when you elect someone that the policies, the systems are there that they can deliver to you. So I fully support the parallel system of the mini-Cabinet as my friend from Oropouche East would have raised, and I am sure other Members on the side also support it too.

The Member also spoke about the councillors being on a full-time basis, and if a young councillor gives his time and his life to service that it may prevent him from having personal development. And I am saying that when we give our lives and our time—and the Member himself would have indicated he gave service 20-something years, and I commend anybody that sits in this House that has given the sacrifice to service their community to give service for a better Trinidad and Tobago. And I am saying the full-time basis mean that you are able then to give more of your time, to focus more of your energies, to give more of your ideas to the people that elected you, and this can only be something good. And additionally, the council that is there, is there that can bring specialists to support the decisions of the council.

So it does not mean that the person would not have the ability to develop into

Hon. A. Leonce (cont'd)

different specialist skills. It will allow the person to have development in management skills, in interpreting issues and challenges that they experienced within the community, and translate that into new policies and new directions with the support of specialist skills that they could bring from the outside to ensure that in moving forward the corporation functions much better and much more efficient.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Leonce: And that is something we must be able to support. That is something to support.

The Member also spoke a bit about the crime and the municipal police, and I would like to say that I am not clear too much on how the current structure is now. But what I can say is, because now all the reporting goes to the council the whole operation and the strategies of the municipal police, and even their communication between the community police, can now be strategized in a much better, more effective way, because the strategies will come from the persons serving and the persons serving will bring the ideas from the people that are on ground, and this is the most important thing of this particular Bill and we must understand that. I cannot see why we would not support it. I listened carefully throughout the whole debate and all I am saying is this thing would make a significant difference in the goods and the services that are provided to persons within Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member spoke about without resources there is no ability to provide goods and services. There is no argument there and which is why the part where persons are now able to collect the property tax and get the resources from the property tax so that they can now plan how they spend their stuff. And to question the amount of money that the property tax will bring obviously it will vary within the different corporations, but what the Minister would have given would be an average. And I am saying that any supplement of resources is something that is welcome within

the corporation.

We have all stood here and we all spoke about the challenges that the corporations experienced. We all spoke about the limitations that they have because of the lack of resources. We all spoke about that. So why are we not going to support something that will give the corporation more resources to deliver goods and services to the people, their burgesses, and the nation by extension? Why are we not supporting this?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Leonce: We as a people, a nation, have the ability now to craft legislation to give Trinidad and Tobago a better product. We are a growing nation, we are a developing nation, we are a maturing nation, and we have the ability to give Trinidad and Tobago a better product, to give the persons that you vote a better system to work with to deliver better to you.

Let us not keep this back. Let us support it. Let us make the councillors, regardless of who you represent, give them more autonomy to give the people of Trinidad and Tobago a fair share in what they deserve. Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to make this very short contribution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have listened attentively to Members on both sides of the House as they have crafted their debate in relation to this particular report and this Bill that is before the House. Madam Speaker, it is very interesting that a number of the speakers opposite continue to prosecute the case as they made the case in their minority report that there was still the need for more consultation, and additionally that there was still the need for us

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis (cont'd)

to continue to discuss this legislation that is before us. Madam Speaker, we have said consistently that this particular piece of legislation is one that has in fact been discussed on numerous occasions.

Madam Speaker, we have been talking about local government reform for many years. In fact, since 1927 as I said very clearly when I presented the report of the Joint Select Committee, this has been a discussion that has been ongoing for several years. And, Madam Speaker, even though I have heard those on the other side in particular talk about the issues of property tax, the creation of an executive council, the equity in population, geographic size and the allocation of resources, the issue of a recognized majority union and insufficient consultation. In fact, Madam Speaker, every response on the Government side has effectively debunked these claims that were made by those opposite.

In fact, Madam Speaker, we want to put on record again that the report through the mechanism of ensuring that we had consultation even before the Bill was brought, that we had consultation even whilst the issues were being brought to the House, and, Madam Speaker, even the fact that in the Eleventh Parliament the work of the Joint Select Committee was asked to be used by the Joint Select Committee of the Twelfth Parliament, it was clear, Madam Speaker, that we had had numerous opportunities for consultation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The report itself was very, very clear in outlining all the opportunities that were allowed and that presented themselves to the members of the Joint Select Committee. So, Madam Speaker, without a shadow of a doubt, I take this opportunity to debunk that claim that there was not sufficient consultation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: We had a claim, Madam Speaker, from the Member for St. Augustine, who said that the PNM in Government never did anything for local government, and, Madam Speaker, that was one of the most laughable statements that was made by any speaker on the opposite side. The only thing that those opposite has tried to do was when in 2013 they introduced what was in effect a form of proportional representation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: And as a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, it really backfired on them because they thought that by putting this in place they would enhance their possibilities at the local government polls. In fact, Madam Speaker, they got the licking of a lifetime and—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—they are yet to recover from that mistake that they made as they attempted to make a change to the local government system by introducing a system of proportional representation.

And, Madam Speaker, we have lived to tell the tale that that certainly has worked in the interest of the People's National Movement.

2.05 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East, again, raised the issue of further consultation and I have debunked that, Madam Speaker. The Member for Barataria/San Juan raised the issue of a certain level of independence that should be allowed between the local government municipal corporations and the Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that what this Joint Select Committee sought to do was to investigate all the possible ramifications of local government reform and what it would mean for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is obvious that what we

need is a situation where there is a certain level of independence of the municipal corporations and that in fact is what was clearly spelt out by the Minister of Finance, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East.

Madam Speaker, it was made very clear that the issue of the property tax as prosecuted by the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for San Fernando East is one that hinges on the type of independence that we anticipate for the various local government corporations because we have said very clearly and the report is pellucidly clear on this that the collection of the property tax goes towards the corporations and that is how they will become more independent and be able to use these taxes that they collect on properties to be able to give their burgesses exactly what is needed.

In many instances, we have seen a situation that has developed where corporations have said that they need more money to do more and in many instances because of the fact that there is the need to ensure that the national pie is divided as equally as possible, that some corporations, or perhaps all corporations, suffer from a lack of funding. But, Madam Speaker, we are of the clear view that once the property tax is collected, once the corporations are allowed to collect for their various—for the uses to which property tax will be put, that this in fact will work in their favour.

Madam Speaker, the other issues that were brought to our attention was the issue of salary. For years, there has been an extensive debate on the terms and conditions for local government representatives as recommended by the Salaries Review Commission as most representatives have argued that their work is not recognized, that it is a part-time form of representation and that most, if not all councillors, are of the firm view that they should be more properly compensated and that a certain value should commensurate with the type of work that they do should be afforded to them in their compensation and in their package.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis (cont'd)

Madam Speaker, I was surprised to hear the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre indicate that the Cabinet will be making the decision with regard to the salaries for local government representatives and we all know that the salaries of local government representatives are dealt with by the Salaries Review Commission. So it was passing strange that that should attract the attention of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. And, Madam Speaker, it is clear that what the report indicates is that there is need for better pay for local government representatives. It is clear that the intention is to attract qualified—even more qualified people to the service of local government and consequently, we are of the firm view that the report is accurate in that this is the direction that local government is to proceed.

Madam Speaker, the mechanism that has been brought to our attention that is definitely needed for us to ensure that we move assiduously in this direction is this report that has the support of the majority, and when I say the majority, of the Members who sat on the Joint Select Committee in that the PNM Members signed this report, the Independent Members signed and it was only those in Opposition who did not sign the report.

Madam Speaker, for far too long, we have been clamouring for better representation and for greater efficiency in local government. Madam Speaker, today is that day. That day has finally come. Many posited that that day would never come but I am proud to have sat in that Committee, in the Eleventh Parliament, in the Twelfth Parliament. I commend the Members who sat on that committee.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: And, Madam Speaker, today, we of the People's National Movement fulfil yet another one of our campaign promises—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we continue the work of building a new society according to the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM)
BILL, 2020**

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 66(4), I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, the Burial Grounds Act, Chap. 30:50, the Cremation Act, Chap. 30:51, the Advertisements Regulation Act, Chap. 30:53, the Recreation Grounds and Pastures Act, Chap. 41:01, the Highways Act, Chap. 48:01, the Dogs Act, Chap. 67:54, the Property Taxes Act, Chap. 76:04 and the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, No. 10 of 2014 be now read a second time.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

Madam Speaker: This Bill has 11 clauses.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: This committee is now adjourned. The House will resume.

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

House resumed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I wish to report that

Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Bill, 2020 was considered in the committee of the whole and approved without amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with the committee's report.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendments.

Question put: That the Bill be now read a third time.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Division.

The House divided: Ayes 20

AYES

Robinson Regis, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe, Hon. S.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

Forde, E.

De Nobriga, Hon. S.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Manning, Hon. B.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L.

Scotland, K.

Richards, K.

Monroe, R.

The following Members abstained: Mr. D. Lee, Mr. R. Charles, Ms. K. Ameen, Mr. R. Indarsingh.

Clerk: Mr. Padarath.

Hon. Member: Absent.

Division continued.

The following Members abstained: Dr. R. Moonilal, Mr. D. Rambally.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, could we take the vote in silence because I am not sure what I am hearing.

Division continued.]

The following Members abstained: Dr. L. Bodoie, Ms. V. Mohit, Mr. D. Tancoo, Ms. A. Haynes, Mr. R. Ratiram, Dr. R. Seecheran.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, let us take the vote in silence. And I want all Members to be aware that interfering with Members while they are vote can amount to contempt. So let us practice what we know is proper.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 27th day of May at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, that is Private Member's Day and I will await the Chief Whip telling us what we will be

doing on that day.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We will be doing Motion No. 6 on today's Order Paper moved by the Member for Princes Town.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

House adjourned at 2.28 p.m.