

SENATE

Tuesday, June 06, 2023

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

PAPERS LAID

1. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the Ninth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the implementation of the 2021 Budget with emphasis on the ‘Green Economy’. [*The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne)*]
2. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Trade and Industry to the Ninth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the implementation of the 2021 Budget with emphasis on the Green Economy. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon)*]
3. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Seventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) for fiscal year 2021. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
4. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Eleventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the Island Wide Power Outage and Blackout that occurred on February 16, 2022. [*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]
5. Ministerial Response of the Office of the Prime Minister to the Fifth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

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on an inquiry into the State's Capacity to provide support for victims of Domestic Violence and Family Conflicts (with specific focus on the availability of support mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic).

[*Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES

(PRESENTATION)

Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2023

Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, I have the honour to present the following report as listed on the Supplemental Order Paper in my name:

Interim Report of the Special Select Committee of the Senate appointed to consider and report on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2023, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Galil Assault Rifle

(Loss of Ammunition)

Sen. Dr. Paul Richards: Thank you, Mr. President. Good morning. To the Minister of National Security: Given reports of a missing Galil assault rifle from the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, can the Minister indicate whether any ammunition was lost with the weapon?

Mr. President: Acting Minister of National Security.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, I

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am informed by the Ministry of National Security that no ammunition has been missing with the stolen or missing weapon at the barracks in Chaguaramas.

Sen. Dr. Richards: Mr. President, also relatedly because of the gravity of the situation, having seen the response yesterday, can the Minister give us an update, has the weapon been found yet?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, I am advised that Senior Superintendent Henry of the Western Division is continuing his collaboration with the Chief of Defence Staff and other senior officials of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to continue their investigation into this very, very sensitive and serious matter.

Sen. Dr. Richards: Thank you, Mr. President. And finally, has the TTDF, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force undertaken an audit of the procedures and protocols to ensure no reoccurrence of this dangerous situation?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, all protocols and everything that is necessary to ensure that this matter does not in any way repeat itself has been undertaken by the officials and the administrators of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force whilst the criminal investigation is ongoing.

Galil Assault Rifle

(Teteron Barracks)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. To the Minister of National Security: In light of the disappearance of a Galil assault rifle at the Teteron Barracks and the deadly harm it can generate, can the Minister indicate whether anyone has been detained or suspended in relation to this matter?

The Minister of Public Utilities and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, thanks to Sen. Mark for the question. As I have indicated, the investigation is at a

very sensitive stage. I am advised at this point in time, no one has been suspended or detained at this point during the investigations.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, through you, to the hon. Minister. Hon. Minister can you provide this honourable Senate with an explanation for the disappearance of such a deadly weapon that can discharge, according to my information, 30 bullets within two seconds? Can you tell this honourable Senate how this matter occurred or has arisen in such a premier institution like our defence force? Can the Minister clarify for us, Mr. President?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, that is the reason why we have an investigation into this matter.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: We have to await the outcome of the investigation that is being undertaken by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service as well as the executive management of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. So as legislators, as policymakers, we must allow the investigation to take its course, and at the appropriate time we will report to the national community on the outcome of this investigation.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, can the Minister outline or share with this honourable House or Senate when the Government anticipates the completion or conclusion of this report into the missing Galil assault rifle?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Mr. President, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has full confidence in the capacity and the ability of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to do its work, and we will provide all the resources, all the support that they need to conduct an in-depth investigation into this matter. Insofar as it relates to a timeline for the completion

of this investigation, investigation is something that is very fluid. So we cannot get involved in the details or give anticipation or prediction when this investigation is going to be completed, but we allow the investigators to undertake everything that is supposed to be done to get to the bottom of this matter, and, at the appropriate time, we will report to the national community.

Mr. President: Next question Sen. Mark.

Valencia Primary School

(Shooting Incident)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. To the hon. Minister of Education: In light of a shooting incident on the compound of a primary school in Valencia in the presence of pupils and teachers can the Minister indicate what immediate steps are being taken to address this situation?

Mr. President: Minister of Education.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, this situation was extremely regrettable, and it was also highly traumatic for the staff, the students, the teachers, particularly those who witnessed it at the school. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service were on site yesterday within minutes of the emergency call and they are currently investigating the circumstances that placed our students, teachers and staff at risk. Even though school was dismissed early, the officials of the Student Support Services were dispatched to the school and they did counsel those who were present at the time, and the Employee Assistance Programme their officers were also alerted to do the same. As of this morning, there are 83 out of the 195 students present; six out of seven teachers; there are four guidance officers and three school social workers at the school presently debriefing those that are there at this time. Two police

officers also visited the school this morning to ensure that all was well at the school.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, can I ask through you to the hon. Minister, given the frequency, hon. Minister, of these occurrences of crime and violence at our nation's schools, secondary and primary respectively, can you indicate to this honourable Senate what measures have been contemplated by your Ministry to mitigate these occurrences which, as you have admitted, are having traumatic, emotional and psychological impact on our students, teachers and parents? Can I ask through the hon, Mr. President?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, there was a time in this country where schools did not have guards. There was no security. I am sure when the hon. Member went to school there was not a security guard at the school; myself. At this time, there is almost no school that does not have a security guard. There was a time when schools did not have high walls or fences. At this time there are almost no schools in our country that do not have walls, fences, gates to protect the environment of the school.

In addition to that, what we have been working with the security companies on—is ensuring that the full strength of security is present at the schools at all times. There are some schools over the years that based on the circumstances we have had to increase the number of security guards at the school when we see that this school needs that particular level of attention and care. But there will always be the moment where something happens that you did not anticipate, for this reason there are the guards, there are the fences, there are the gates, and therefore this incident that happened at the time, traumatic as it was, the guard was present. The person ran into the school even though the guard was there. So, what we have been looking at, and the thing happened when the parent was dropping the child off

at school.

So, it was timed, well planned to get at the person that they were targeting. So, what the school is going to institute, this particular school, to ensure that parents are not in the school, and that is something that parents look forward to, walking into a school, they will drop their child to the class and so on. But we may have to put measures now, and this school is instituting it, where the parents are dropping their child at the gate and they are not allowed to come into the school because we want to ensure that the environment of the school remains as safe as possible for the students.

10.15 a.m.

Mr President: Hon. Senators, the time for Urgent Questions has ended.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Amery Browne): Mr. President, I am pleased to inform this Senate that of the three questions for oral answer on the Order Paper, and one question that qualifies for written answer, the Government is prepared to respond to all and the written answer will be circulated. Thank you.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority

(Details of)

113. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

As regard the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority (TTRA), can the Minister advise as to the following:

- (i) the names of the Director General and the Deputy Directors General of the TTRA;
- (ii) the qualifications of the respective office holders; and

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- (iii) the terms and conditions of employment, including the salaries and contract periods of the respective office holders?

Vide end of sitting for written answer.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Litigations in the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago

(Rationale for Increased Costs)

65. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs:

Can the Attorney General advise as to the rationale for the decision by the Rules Committee of Trinidad and Tobago to increase the costs to the public for all aspects of litigation in the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. President: The Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the Rules Committee is established under section 77 of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act, Chap. 4:01, and is empowered to make rules of court under section 78 of that Act which are subject to negative resolution of Parliament. The Rules Committee is chaired by the honourable Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago and comprises a Justice of Appeal, a puisne judge, the Attorney General, two attorneys-at-law nominated by the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Registrar of the Supreme Court.

This question as posed is premature, as the Draft Civil Proceedings (Amendment Rules), 2023, the Draft Rules, are still under consideration by the Rules Committee. The honourable Chief Justice forwarded the Draft Rules to the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago for consideration by its membership on February 13, 2023. The comments and recommendations of the Law Association

of Trinidad and Tobago will be considered before the Draft Rules are finalized. The Law Association is also represented on the Rules Committee.

The rules are also subject, Mr. President, to negative resolution of Parliament, which allows the legislation review subcommittee of Cabinet the opportunity to review the rules before they are published and laid in Parliament, and parliamentarians to ventilate any concerns they have by way of a Motion seeking to annul the rules if considered necessary. Most importantly, at this point in time, no decision has been taken by the Rules Committee with respect to increases in cost of litigation. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Hon. President, may I ask, through you, to the Attorney General, can the Attorney General advise this honourable Senate whether the Government, through the Attorney General, has been consulted by the Rules Committee in their Draft Civil Proceedings Rules aimed at increasing the fees for litigation by the public? Can I ask through you?

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. President. May I read from the statement I have just made in part? The Rules Committee is chaired by the honourable Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, and that Rules Committee comprises a Justice of Appeal, a puisne judge, the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, two attorneys-at-law nominated by the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Registrar of the Supreme Court. So to answer the question, the Rules Committee, consisting of among other offices the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, is giving consideration to the Draft Rules which are now with the Law Association for comment. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask, through you, to the hon. Attorney General, whether as Attorney General representing the State, that is the Government in this instance, can the Attorney General state whether the Government is in agreement with the

proposed increases that this particular Rules Committee currently is considering, Mr. President? Can the Attorney General share with us whether the Government is in agreement?

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: First all, thank you, Mr. President. As I have said, the question is premature because everything is under consideration and no decision has been taken, to the extent that the Attorney General is part of the Rules Committee, to that extent the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs represents the interest of the Government. But beyond that it would be premature for me to say whether the Government is in agreement with a position which on the face of the question is premature. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the Attorney General, through you, as to whether you can share with this House the current fees or at least one element—like filing fees—what exists now? Mr. President, can he share with us what exists now? And I am asking for an example, filing fees. And what is being proposed in the Draft Civil Proceedings Rules that is now being considered by all interested party so that the public will have an idea of what is being contemplated by the Rules Committee? Can I ask through you?

Mr. President: That question does not arise, Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask my final question?

Mr. President: Yes.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask, through you, to the hon. Attorney General, is there a timeframe, Attorney General, for the conclusion of this process of consultation and the final decision for implementation, although subject to negative resolution, of this proposal to increase litigation fees in matters going to the High Court?

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. President. There is no fixed timeframe. I know that the Rules Committee would wish to have this matter

addressed expeditiously. At this point in time, the Rules Committee is awaiting the input of the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago which was invited on the 13th of February, 2023. Thank you.

**Manzanilla and Plum Mitan Road
(Lack of Supply of Potable Water)**

66. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Given that over two hundred (200) residents of Manzanilla and Plum Mitan Road have been without a supply of potable water for several months, can the Minister advise when will this situation be rectified?

Mr. President: Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I am advised by the Water and Sewerage Authority that the North Oropouche Water Treatment Plant, which is the source of the supply to Manzanilla and Plum Mitan Road, was affected by two disruptions along the 42-inch transmission main at Daniel Trace and Santa Rosa Race Course Road on the 17th and the 23rd of January, 2023.

As a result of these disruptions, Mr. President, during the month of January the supply to the Manzanilla and Plum Mitan area was adversely impacted as the plant was out of operation between 48 to 72 hours during the period of repairs. Following completion of the repairs, the plant returned to full operation and the water supply to the affected residents at Manzanilla and Plum Mitan Road were restored in accordance with their normal schedule.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Can I ask the hon. Minister what were the factors that led to this disruption of the water supply given what you have just identified?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. President. So there were two

main disruptions. In one of the disruptions at Daniel Trace—it is in the Valencia area—as a result of weather conditions and moving soil, the 42-inch pipeline in that area was disrupted. In the Santa Rosa racetrack area, again, because of heavy rains around that period in time, the main 42-inch pipeline was dislodged because it was buried below the surface of the river over 50 or 60 years ago, I am told, Mr. President. And as a result of the weather conditions and the river conditions the pipeline was dislodged and WASA would have undertaken the necessary repair work. And since then the plant returned to full operation and the schedules to the affected and impacted communities have been restored and normalized.

Sen. Mark: Through you, Mr. President, hon. Minister, having regard to the age of these pipelines and the inclement weather conditions that we are currently experiencing, can you advise this honourable Senate whether WASA has conducted or is contemplating conducting a proper audit of their pipelines to ensure that these matters could be addressed in advanced rather than have a reaction to same? I am asking.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, I am pleased to advise that WASA has undertaken a major capital investment programme. It is the reason why we entered into a collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank. And part of this programme is to conduct an audit on all of its main transmission lines, particularly in the Navet, the Caroni north and south, the Hollis and the North Oropouche transmission system, with the intention of ensuring that we have the necessary infrastructure to prevent those types of disruptions as a result of climate change and other climatic conditions.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Hon. President, through you, to the hon. Minister, can you advise this Senate whether—well, can you provide us with the value of the loan that was extracted from the IADB—the loan for this process that

you have just outlined? And can you—well, I am going to ask two questions. I will just ask one. The value—

Mr. President: Well that one does not arise anyway. So you can ask the next one. The last one. Go ahead.

Sen. Mark: Okay. Can I ask—seeing that we spoke about the loan, Mr. President, and the IADB, I am asking the hon. Minister if he can provide this honourable Senate with a copy of the loan document governing this particular arrangement that the hon. Minister has just outlined? He has just advised us.

Mr. President: Minister, go ahead.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Mr. President, if Sen. Mark should file his question in accordance with the Standing Orders, I will be more than ready to comply with the Standing Orders of the Senate.

Mr. President: Okay. Leader of Government Business.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, notwithstanding my earlier indication, I wish to apologize to the poser of question 67 and to indicate that we would wish for a deferral of two weeks on that particular question, given some information that I have just gotten. I apologize to Sen. Mark.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Wade Mark:

Immigration Detention Centre Officers (Non-payment of Salaries)

67. Could the hon. Minister of National Security state:

Given January 2023 reports indicating that approximately thirty (30) officers attached to the Immigration Detention Centre in Aripo have not received salaries since November 2022, can the Minister advise as to the following:

- (i) what are the reasons for the failure to pay salaries to these officers; and
- (ii) when will salaries be paid to these officers?

Question, by leave, deferred.

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE

Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2023

(Extension of Time)

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Amery Browne): Mr President, having regard to the Interim Report of the Special Select Committee of the Senate appointed to consider and report on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2023, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament, I beg to move that the Committee be granted an extension of time to June 27, 2023, to complete its work and submit a final report.

Question put and agreed to.

VISITOR

Ms. Cynthia Alfred

(Former Parliamentarian)

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, before I call on the Minister, permit me to welcome Ms. Cynthia Alfred, the former parliamentarian who has joined us today from Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. President: Ms. Alfred served as a Senator during the Fifth Parliament.

10.30 a.m.

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
BOROUGH OF DIEGO MARTIN AND THE BOROUGH OF SIPARIA)
BILL, 2021**

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Mr. President. I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 to establish the Borough of Diego Martin and Borough of Siparia and to make consequential amendments to the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01, the Interpretation Act, Chap. 3:01, the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act, Chap 25:50, the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations, Chap. 48:50, the Central Tenders Board Act, Chap. 71:91 and other written laws, be now read a second time.

Mr. President, we are gathered under the provisions of section 53 of the Constitution where we make laws for the peace, order and good governance of our society. The aim of the legislation before us, the Bill comprising a few clauses only, sets out the task of bringing into life the expressed desires of local government bodies in the persons or entities of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the Siparia Regional Corporation. They have resolved specifically that they wish to have their status changed from that of being a regional corporation under the provisions of the Municipal Corporations Act into the status of borough under the same Act.

The Bill before us is six clauses in length which includes the short title and

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the commencement provision and the interpretation at clause 3. There is also a Schedule which sets out in the detail the matters which I will discuss are relevant. Now, that being the aim of the law, the fact is, Mr. President, that the parent law, the principal parent law that we are amending, the Municipal Corporations Act, is one which we paid quite a bit of attention to recently. Indeed, Mr, President, we have had significant discussions on the need for amendment to the system of local government. That is not fully why we are here today, there is a touch and concern in relation to reform of local government that causes connection with this Bill, that has connection with this Bill.

But in fact, suffice it to say, that the records of this Parliament will reveal that we have been discussing local government as a key cornerstone of so much of what we do, for in fact, well over centuries, local government has been the feature of discussion since we were first the Royal Cabildo in 1768. It took us straight through our journey of colonialism. It took us straight into the anchoring of the Municipality Ordinance of 1840 where we saw the Town Council of Port of Spain created. We had significant discussions again straight through the status of Royal Charter which gave Arima its position as a borough.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. President, we went through the Town Board in 1907 to 1914. The Port of Spain City Ordinance in 1914. We then went into divisions of Trinidad Act in 1927 where we established eight counties. Quite interestingly, in that establishment of the county system, there was again significant discussions on the status of municipal laws, the things which govern us most closely to where we live, work and traverse.

There was a significant amount of discussion again in the 1930s, if you were

to look to the upheavals associated with Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler. In 1938, the Moyne Commission. In 1945, the Moyne report. In 1945, the County Council Ordinance which saw us with seven electoral districts as county councils, six in Trinidad and one in Tobago. That one in Tobago is the one that we had significant discussion about when we were creating the Tobago House of Assembly and in fact when we were discussing, in deep ways, the reflections on the Tobago House of Assembly and the move of the status of Tobago into our Constitution by removing that offending label of being a county council, Tobago standing by itself. Right now, we are in the grips of treating with local government elections in Trinidad, not in Tobago.

Mr. President, if you look at the move at some of the background behind this Bill, it touches and concerns the source of authority that our corporations enjoy. Indeed, you could say that the problem was rooted largely in 1959 in the Exchequer and Audit Act which took away all the power from the municipalities which enjoyed the county council operations where they each operated individually and developed themselves and we centralized it into Government under the Exchequer and Audit Act. 1962, we then saw beginning in the '60s, '62 and '65, deep discussions, Mr. President, around our municipalities, who we are, what we call ourselves, where we situate the power into Trinidad and Tobago's people. Is it at the local government level? Is it at the constitutional level?

It is quite interesting that local government itself is not reflected upon in our Constitution, it is merely an Act of Parliament, the Municipal Corporations Act as the ordinances that preceded it were. But it is true to say that there is a reflection on the right to have political will and the right to vote. So there are reflections in the Constitution even though there is no entrenchment of local government. There

is a shallow entrenchment of the Tobago House of Assembly in section 141 of the Constitution. We know that. There were attempts to make that deeper.

Now I am saying all of that, passing through the Hugh Wooding Commission of 1974, passing through the abolition of the Tobago County Council in 1980 and the birth of the Tobago House of Assembly Act. We got in 1980 to significant discussions which touched and concerned this Bill because it was in 1990, 33 years ago that we saw the repeal and replacement of the Municipal Corporations Act. The current Municipal Corporations Act was born in 1990. It was a feature in discussion under successive PNM governments, birthed by the very distinguished A.N.R. Robinson, then perfected in 1992 by the PNM Government by a simplification in the number of local government municipalities. We went down from 17, we went to 14 because of concerns about the administrative spread that would be involved particularly where we have sparse population in certain areas.

But suffice it to say, the last significant reform that we had prior to 2022 was really 33 years ago. Now, Mr. President, we did in 2022 engage in the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) package where we had 10 clauses which became law and that was an opportunity to carry out the exercise that we are doing today. But in the course of getting here, I want to remind we got here effectively to change the status of the municipalities of Diego Martin and Siparia into borough status by a separate route because of the manner in which the consultation happened.

Let me for the record, therefore, point out, Mr. President, that the two councils that is Diego Martin and Siparia, they met and resolved themselves in the system of local government that they after consultation at the municipal

corporation level, by resolution from each of the councils, they determined and recorded into their records their desire to achieve borough status. For the record, I can say that the Diego Martin Regional Corporation at its statutory meeting held on May 2nd, 2019 and then the Siparia Regional Corporation at its meeting in—forgive me and I will get the date of the resolution that the Siparia—so it is May 2nd, 2019 by the Port of Spain City Corporation and then the Siparia Regional Corporation by its motion in the name of Alderman Christopher Encinas. There was a unanimous support of motion by the member and the date of that motion is at the 27th Statutory Meeting, Thursday, 28th February, 2019, Siparia Regional Corporation and again there was a whole process of forming that up.

There were further discussions. After the corporations resolved themselves to establish themselves as boroughs, they then communicated that to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government but the exercise to take us to borough status involved Cabinet-appointed committees to consider the requests. Bear in mind the local government authorities in the Municipal Corporations Act do not themselves have the power to change the status from the regional corporation to borough or from borough to city. That process is, in fact, one which only the Parliament can engage in. The communication of the resolutions from the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the Siparia Regional Corporation to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government then involved two Notes to Cabinet.

And in the second Note to Cabinet, August 19th, 2021, there was a decision by the Cabinet that there would be an establishment of ministerial committees, specifically to look at the change in municipal status. Why? The first thing that we needed to do was to understand how the change of municipal status was to be

effected. Secondly, why it should be effected? Thirdly, what are the benefits to be derived from the status of borough? Fourthly, are there any precedents involved in that exercise in the Commonwealth that we can turn to by way of reflection? The committees, in fact, established themselves and effectively looked at the Municipal Corporations Act. The Municipal Corporations Act is interesting.

When in 1990, we birthed the Municipal Corporations Act, Chaguanas was just labelled as a borough. So in 1990, 33 years ago, the conferring of the borough status to Chaguanas was merely done by way of the expression in the law. So in reformulating the 1990 Act, the borough of Chaguanas was born simply at section 5 of the principal law and that was by the inclusion of the borough of Chaguanas. In the law itself, the Municipal Corporations Act, what is relevant in this exercise that we consider is that section 3 says:

“The Municipal Corporations established under the provisions of the written laws set out in the First Schedule and known by the corporate names...in that Schedule are continued...”

Because there was a system of local government that existed since 1980 in a more familiar form to the 1990 Act so they continued it. In the section 4 of Municipal Corporations Act:

“The several new municipal corporations bearing the names and having the respective officers, memberships and descriptions set forth in the Second Schedule are...established.”

Section 5 says:

“Subject to subsection (2) and section 6, this Act shall apply to—”

And then it names:

“(a) City of Port of Spain;

- (b) City of San Fernando;
- (c) the Borough of Arima;
- (d) the Borough of Point Fortin...”

The Borough of Chaguanas was added in.

- “(e) the several Municipal Corporations referred to in section 4...
- (f) such other towns, districts or places to which...this Act...”—may be—“applied pursuant to subsection (2).”

And subsection (2) says this:

“The President may, by Order, subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament, apply the provisions of this Act to any town, district or place for the purpose of incorporating the electors thereof.”

Section 6 says:

“An Order made under section 5(2) may apply the provisions of this Act generally to town, district or place mentioned therein or it may provide that the Act shall apply subject to such exceptions or modifications as are specified in the Order.”

And subsection (2) says that that:

“...Order...shall—

- (a) designate the corporate name by which the new Corporation shall be known;”

That ends the principal law, the Municipal Corporations Act, detailing how we can create a new corporation.

So the exercise really was having received these resolutions of these two corporations, how do we change the status and reference two corporations? How does one move from a regional corporation to a borough to a city? It is clear that

under the Municipal Corporations Act, sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 that you can create new entities. But that is not what we are doing. We are in fact changing by reference to the terminology used in the law, the references of Diego Martin Regional Corporation and Siparia Regional Corporation to the boroughs of Diego Martin and Siparia. In 1990, it was done in the context of birthing the new law, they just labelled it as a borough status.

So the exercise that we perfected, in terms of the Bill now before us, was poured into a mould that produced these six clauses.

10:45 a.m.

And effectively what we need to do is, we need to repeal and replace the scheduled references to the municipal corporations, Diego Martin and Siparia, replace it instead with the scheduled references be it to the borough of Diego Martin, and the borough of Siparia, and in that exercise we need to restate what all of the boundaries, and geographical limitations of the regional corporations are. Now part of the reason that I should say that this was not included in the larger package of reforms—apart from the exercise of investigating and interrogating how to do it et cetera—also involve the fact that we are as a nation, with boundaries established in this law, the Municipal Corporations Act, dealing with vestings, that is descriptions of boundaries, which are only up to date at the year 2000. And therefore, there are 23 years of boundary descriptions that have to be perfected to tell us exactly what the boundaries are.

We saw a reflection of this—and hon. Senators who participated in the larger reform package will recall—we saw a reflection of this when we used the term “orphaned road” in the municipal corporations reform and where we sought to give the power of corporations to take over things which were abandoned, or

orphaned, land which was owned by a state enterprise but was just lying there without supervision or ownership, new roads that are created in private developments and then public. Unless it is laid out in the Schedule to the Municipal Corporations Act as part of a municipal corporation, be it city, borough or corporation, the corporation cannot lawfully expend money in the full extent because it is not vested in the entity. So I am now to say that we carved out this particular intention to create boroughs, did not put it into the reform package because the vesting orders were being updated.

Indeed, when I came into the Ministry in March 2022, we set about in preparation for the rollout of the reform package, an urgent exercise of vestings. That is; surveying, carrying out, checking the records et cetera. And I can tell you now, Mr. President, that the vesting orders are prepared and we are ready to take them to the LRC, the Legislative Review Committee, by way of Cabinet Notes. And what that will do, is that it will bring forward 23 years of development, 23 years of what can be deemed to be orphaned roads into new schedules, 14 new schedules, to come to the Act. And therefore we are ready for these vestings.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: What does that mean? It means that people who cannot receive garbage collections services, cannot receive repairs, landslips, roads, et cetera because of a lack of locus, a lack of legal standing on the part of the corporation, to engage in the expenditure of public moneys that will be a thing which would be solved by the updating of the vesting orders. Now—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—there has been a lot of discussions about why we have this change of name. Indeed in the House of Representatives there was a trivialization

of the effort. What is this thing about “borough is only ah name change”. In fairness, if you look to the actual powers that come from being a borough or otherwise, that may in fact be a fair reflection to say. Because what is it in a name? I mean if it occupied the lips and mind of Shakespeare, then surely it should not be too far on the shoe for us to say that yes, perhaps it is just a name change. But traditionally and historically throughout the Commonwealth there has been a status that is associated with boroughs. That finds reflection in different ways, in different parts of the Commonwealth. When we look to what guided us to get here which is part of the points that I adumbrated earlier in my contribution, I can tell you safely that we did look at a number of areas that we thought would guide us in this.

Mr. President: Minister?

Sen. Seepersad: Minister, can I just ask you a question and—

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Sure.

Sen. Seepersad:—you could incorporate in your—

Mr. President: One person should be on their feet.

Sen. Seepersad: Oh.

Mr. President: Minister. Go ahead.

Sen. Seepersad: Minister considering that a greater level of administrative authority and funding will be given to the Diego Martin and Siparia boroughs now, what are the changes in the governance structure to ensure their financial accountability and transparency?

10.50 a.m.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Sure. If I may? Thank you, hon. Senator, for the question. That is contained in the reform package. If you recall, the municipal corporations

miscellaneous provisions reform package, there is now, on deck, in the new sections 33 onward and in section 60 onward, very detailed provisions for the creation of full-time executives; standing committees; audit committees, including an audit committee, which is managed by the minority with the inclusion of the public sector, and for the use of audit and accounting facilities that are very different from what prevails right now. In fact, we had, I recall it vividly now as you asked the question, deep discussions about that in the course of the debate of the local reform package and in the Joint Select Committee.

So the increased money, the increased responsibilities, which the Government is the advocate of in delivering the reform package—regrettably we do not have the Opposition’s support for local government reform. But in our version of local government reform, we are saying, please take more money with greater responsibility and with closer management, the ability to hire, the ability to manage, the ability to be positioned by audits et cetera.

I want to remind that we have also fully operationalized the public procurement law. So there is an outside perspective to the management of accounting. I see Sen. Deonarine shaking her head as much as I wish to shake my head because I believe that the public procurement law is a very complicated piece of law that will have a lot of bugs to work out. But in the philosophy of “just start” and trying to get to in a new position, that is where we are. The Act of Parliament was passed and therefore, it has to be operationalized and we have to just work it out. Lots of heads on the Independent Bench shaking left to right. Perhaps, we will hear it in their contributions on public procurement. So in the context of the name change to borough, a lot has been said, “It is just a name change”. If you take it at its lowest, yes, perhaps it is. Historically, however, in the

Commonwealth, in the Westminster and Whitehall systems, which we have adopted and which we practise here in Trinidad and Tobago—there is precedent that we looked at. For the record, we looked at Northern Ireland, we looked at Canada, we looked at New Zealand, we looked at Jamaica as examples where the municipal corporations and the use of borough status are done. In the United Kingdom, it is done by way of the prerogative of Her Majesty. You have the Royal Charter being applied.

Indeed, there are songs that immortalize the boroughs, Scarborough, and other places that you are well familiar with in history and in literature and in music. And there has been an association throughout Canada and the dominions of the United Kingdom, in terms of who is still not fully republican, but yet independent. There is a full reflection of what boroughs look like.

When we look to the benefits of borough status, it really is an acknowledgment or titling that has associated with it status and symbol. Anything in our society bears title. Hon. Senators have a title. Senior Counsels have a title. Persons who receive the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago have a title. What is there in that medal? What makes somebody who holds an Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago any more powerful, faster, stronger? It is the acknowledgment of the society of the status associated—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—with the position that brings to bear how people feel about themselves. It is almost an aspiration that one celebrates. And therefore, the achieving of the borough status is not far off from the aspiration that the people of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the people of the Siparia Regional Corporation, through their elected and appointed representatives, resolve

themselves to do. And having brought forward written resolutions, the Government has to act.

Now, we were facing this—and perhaps I am anticipating argument—the Opposition in the House of Representatives had a long cry, and bawling and gnashing of teeth about boroughs not meaning anything. And I had a question to ask the Leader of the Opposition, who complained most bitterly about the Bill: Well, why did you not just delete the Borough of Chaguanas, which you control, but which you sat on willingly for 23 years watching it as a borough status in the Municipal Corporations Act in 1990? If it was so odious, why keep it, particularly when you had a parliamentary majority of 29 seats in the House of Representatives, when you made amendments to the Municipal Corporations Act to introduce aldermen, et cetera, and a supposed form of proportional representation? You see, it just does not ring. So let us accept the argument at its lowest, that there is a title change.

The Parliament is now met with the expressed will that has not been revoked by the people of Diego Martin and by the people of Siparia, notwithstanding the fact that in what is to be the borough of Siparia, sitting MPs went to the corporation and complained, “Why are you supporting the Government in its desire to make you the borough of Siparia?” That is on the records of the resolutions and meetings held where apologies were expressed for who was invited and who was not, in terms of Opposition MPs visiting to say, “Look, change your mind”. But the borough of Siparia did not do that. They stayed with their resolution, and the resolution is before us because it has come via Cabinet consideration, committees appointed to look at it and today we are intended to confer the status of borough upon these two corporations.

There are some other benefits that apply which are to be found in the provisions of the Bill, if you look at the minor issues of traffic management in the motor vehicles regulations where you see the parking alongside and the reversing and other factors. There are other aspects to be found. There are arrangements in the twining of cities which already exist in our position. There are arrangements in the association of local government and regional bodies. But really and truly, what we can look at, in terms of the demographics and statistics that occupy our attention, really come from the published reports of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the Sipara Regional Corporation, which in their printed literature, the “Municipality of Diego Martin Local Area Economic Profile (Final Report)” and the “Municipality of Siparia Local Area Economic Profile Report”, both of these two entities published for themselves, across hundreds of pages, how they consider themselves to have grown.

Now, it is important to bear in mind, what is intended to be the borough of Diego Martin and what is intended to be the borough of Siparia, have achieved a different form of economic development. They have grown in size. The Diego Martin Regional Corporation is comprised of parts of what people believe to be the City of Port of Spain. It is not the city, but the suburban environment of Diego Martin actually encompasses and touches part of Port of Spain. If you look right there in Maraval, Maraval actually, if you get into La Seiva and that whole connection, you are into Diego Martin North/East. And it works its way straight across through to the peninsula as we go, Diego Martin North/East, Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin North/West. These are three very large constituencies that border on the City of Port of Spain. And this area now comprises a significant footprint.

In the electorate in Diego Martin, we have noted that it has grown from 59,245 persons recorded in 1992, to nearly 89,190 in 2019. That is Diego Martin; an increase of approximately 50.5 per cent. Further, certain population data from the CSO suggests that the population of Diego Martin has grown from approximately 74,000 to 115,000 during the period 1992 to 2021, making it one of the most populous areas in the country.

In the case of Siparia, our committee and the reports, the local economic development reports noted that the municipality comprises an electorate of 72,506 people, listed in the Elections and Boundaries Commission's list of electors as at July 01, 2021, where electors were distributed across nine electoral districts and spanned five constituencies. So Siparia actually spans five constituencies. The borough of Siparia, as it is intended to be called, is not in reference to the seat of Siparia from a general elections constituency perspective. It is in fact nine electoral districts and spanning five constituencies.

With respect to its economic development, there are some 1,100-plus businesses registered, and our committees looked at there was further strengthening going on. Now, when you look to real estate value, you look to location and desirability of living conditions, et cetera, you will notice that Diego Martin is receiving right now attention that is quite significant in its highway and traffic circulation and development aspects, its green space aspects, its business aspects.

Siparia, if you get down to the city of Siparia itself, to the constituency of Siparia, for those of you who do not leave past the lighthouse, I invite you to get there, you will notice that they have two mega stadia. I mean, I was so blown away by the size, that barely a couple hundred feet apart from each other are two

massive footprints for sporting and structures, et cetera, in an area that really the rest of Trinidad and Tobago has looked at and said, “Well, how come we did not get one too?” which is perhaps why I pioneered and pushed and my Cabinet delivered the redevelopment of Skinner Park, which we are extremely proud of in the City of San Fernando.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: But the point is, as we move these positions forward, the status of borough has been sought. The people via their resolutions, through their elected and appointed representatives, have resolved themselves to ask for it. It has come. It has been inspected. We are taking it through its position. There is precedent for the movement to borough status in the Commonwealth. An inspection of the Municipal Corporations Act reveals that we are not creating new boroughs, new municipal corporations, new cities, et cetera. Therefore, we are outside the provisions of sections 5 and 6 of the Municipal Corporations Act. And therefore, the mechanism by which we deliver this relief is via the Bill before us.

There will be other amendments for us to consider as the top priority of this Government is the local government reform. Indeed, Sen. Vieira SC used a very interesting term, which I will repeat here, on another occasion, that there will be corollaries by way of amendments to the law. Because as we have interpretations coming from the Privy Council, or as resolutions and circumstances cause change, the Municipal Corporations Act is now a living, breathing entity.

I was speaking recently, Mr. President, at an event on local government reform, and it crossed my mind and I said, and I put it on the record, that in reflecting upon the work that I have done as a parliamentarian and as a Government Minister, I spent seven years drafting laws for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. If you include

subsidiary laws and orders, et cetera, the laws under my belt crossed over 650 laws. But all of the major laws that I piloted and that the Government produced are, in occupation, in local government. The Public Health Regulations that everybody looked for every two weeks during COVID, people had not heard of the Public Health Ordinance for centuries. A health inspector was a guy you expected to go roll around the corner when you are opening a restaurant, coming to check your grease trap to see if your kitchen is in safe order. But the Public Health Regulations came to save this country in a time of crisis. It managed the whole concept of zoonosis and transmission of diseases from animals to people. It is the thing that allowed us to regulate our living conditions, in the most part, without a state of emergency. And in the state of emergency that we eventually used, it was a state of emergency that was very different from states of emergencies in the past.

The Planning and Facilitation Development Act occupies space inside the municipal corporations, as the planning authority has to find itself inside of there. If you look to the revenue authority; if you look to the Property Tax Act; if you look to the Valuation of Land Act; if you look to the Electronic Transactions Act; if you look to the ASYCUDA system in Customs; if you look to the CROS, the computer registration online system in the Companies Registry that the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs is delivering; if you look to the Registration of Titles to Land Act; the miscellaneous provisions (registration of deeds) Act; the Registration of Deeds Act; the Real Property Act, all of these occupy space inside of the municipal corporations.

11.05 a.m.

If you look to the systems of the Exchequer and Audit Act, if you look at STRs and SARs, Suspicious Transaction Reports, Suspicious Activity Reports

under the Financial Intelligence Unit, all of them find space inside of there. And in operationalizing the local government reform, on an accelerated basis as this Government has done since the passage of the law in April 2022, what I can tell you is that we are bringing home all of the pieces into the Reform Package.

Today, we press pause to bring to life the express resolutions of the people of Diego Martin and the people of Siparia. We are bound to do it because the Constitution put us here. It is why I started off by saying that we are here pursuant to the provisions of section 53 of the Constitution. Because only the elected parliamentarians in the House and the appointed parliamentarians in the Senate, in the bicameral system that we have can pass the law to do this.

So therefore, bound as we are to perfect the desires and wills of the people, one in respect of an Opposition-held local government body, one in respect of a currently Government-held body. And I say “currently” because we intend to take the Siparia Corporation as it comes eventually.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: One must always aspire. What I can say, is that we are here with a legitimate aim in a proportionate exercise to carry out the will of the people.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And therefore, I look forward to the contributions of learned Senators, and I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. President: Sen. Roberts.

Sen. Anil Roberts: Thank you Mr. President, as I rise to lead off for the United National Congress in this debate, let me just clarify. Mr. President, how much time do I have?

Mr. President: You have 40 minutes, you end at 11.47.

Sen. A. Roberts: Forty minutes, thank you very much, Mr. President. On this Bill, an Act to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 to establish the Borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia and to make consequential amendments to the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01, the Interpretation Act, Chap. 3:01, the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act, Chap. 25:50, the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations, Chap. 48:50, the Central Tenders Board Act, Chap. 71:91 and other written laws.

Mr. President, it is amazing that this Government will make big people bathe and dress up in suit and put “smell nice” to come here in a Senate to debate a name change. So now the people of Siparia and Diego Martin could say, “Aye boy, ah went through ah pothole in the borough. Aye boy, ah get flood out in de borough. Oh lord mosquito bite meh in de borough. My goodness, look garbage pile up in de borough.” This insulting for big people, we have problems in this country and this PNM comes here to waste time.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. A. Roberts: This is superfluous, superficial, and an exercise in PNM “mamaguism”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Lyder: They on borrowed time.

Sen. A. Roberts: This Bill is like eyelash extensions on an already naturally beautiful woman, a total waste of time. To paraphrase Stalin, “Sufferers doh care if de Mayor have on ah chain.”

Like the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government who

spoke eloquently, with passion, with great research for 37 minutes and 35 seconds, I too, have absolutely nothing to say.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. A. Roberts: Whether you borrow the borough or “yuh” burrow under the borough, the effect will be the same. Absolutely no effect, no impact on the lives of citizens.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. A. Roberts: Call the election now.

Sen. Lyder: They on borrowed time.

Sen. A. Roberts: Stop hiding. Stop the cowardice, face the people, bring the election date now. You are on borrowed time. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Deyalsingh.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. President: Okay. Members, Members, Members. The noise level is elevating. I have called on Sen. Deyalsingh. Sen. Deyalsingh.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh: Thank you, Mr. President, for allowing me to partake in this discussion here today. So according to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, you know, it is an honor for these corporations to be elevated to the status of—the municipal corporations to be elevated to borough status. So I heard his talk, I heard the fact that there will be some sort of traffic alleviation that we need to look at these aspects; we need to see the advantages that may come about.

But Sir, I have to say, when I looked at this Bill I asked myself, the existing

boroughs when it moved from being a corporation to a borough, did it achieve any major benefit to the population? Did they get better services? Did the movement of Chaguanas to a borough, Point Fortin to a borough somehow improve the lives of the citizen? So I am look to see first of all, if it did, then there might be advantage, if it did not, it may not be advantage of what we are doing here today.

So I looked at the existing boroughs to see did they make us proud. I also looked at the corporations that are in question today, could they measure up to move into that status of a borough status. Have they given us that confidence that they could do that? And I also looked at something that I am very, you know, very conscious of in our economic times, we have to see will the cost factor of moving these corporations to borough, will it be beneficial. I mean, we are asked to tighten our belts, to drink mauby. We are asked to do certain things to—and as citizens we have a lot of us have sacrificed and a lot of us have definitely taken the heed of the Minister of Finance, and others who told us let us sacrifice.

So therefore, would it really be something beneficial? Is it cost effective? It will be costing more. So therefore, as I would like to say, I must make mention to the fact that when we are looking at the Municipal Corporation Act and we are looking at other pieces of legislation where it would be affected, the Motor Vehicle Road Traffic Act, et cetera. The Bill itself is just six clauses long, but the substance of the Bill, I want to take it from how I mentioned that I would like to look at the benefits.

So I heard some benefits, but then I want know that the fact remains is if I have to look at the existing corporations, I need to at least say have they been doing what they are supposed to do. So let us look at, for instance, Point Fortin. So, Point Fortin, this is the smallest borough that we have. So it should be the

easiest to manage in terms of land space. And I looked at different reasons why we may move from a corporation to a borough to a city, and it looks like it is sometimes the land space, the development that is occurring in the area to take it to a greater status.

So history would have shown that Point Fortin was originally an area where they had cocoa, coconut estates, and this district eventually discovered oil. It was the first to produce oil in commercial quantities. And in 1960s though you found that there was a decline and massive retrenchment and Government was forced to bring in the Dunlop tyre factory then to try to beef up the employment there. So the economic revival came in 1970s, the oil boom. Shell was acquired by Trinidad Government. So then, it was elevated to a borough and I had no problem with this because it now was a hub for this sort of industrial activity.

So then, let us look at what is happening now. As we have a decline in the market for oil and natural gas, we found that the people of the borough now are faced with major challenges with the closure of the refinery and the instruction of the gas and oil company. So therefore, has it brought advantages? Is it somehow measuring up to what it is supposed to do?

And I looked at two reasons to see if it is measuring up. I look to see as a citizen living there, would they say that they are getting a better benefit from being a borough than if they were a corporation, or living elsewhere? So therefore, and I looked at the fact that on the 30 April, 1980, Point Fortin became a borough. And the thing is, if I have to look at the infrastructure there because I heard mentioned that, you know, we have to look at the roads et cetera, in Diego Martin now that may be improved with traffic.

But if you look at the infrastructure, Mr. President, I would like to just

remind persons here that there are lot of challenges in Point Fortin. A lot of challenges where the residents were complaining and there were a lot of fiery protests where persons were complaining that that their roads had a lot to be desired. And I remember the Point Fortin Deputy Mayor Chang Fung, said that funding for the borough corporation is not enough to address the resident woes. And he noted that there is also currently a shortage of bitumen oil.

So then, borough status does not necessarily mean that you are getting better roads. And then, it was in 2022 residents blocked the road, that is August 2022. December 2022, a similar thing where residents again blocked the road and taxi drivers actually had to actually stop picking up passengers that day. Then Cap-De-Ville in Point Fortin there was a protest over a bad bridge and that was in 2021. Even in 2018, the Point Fortin taxi drivers protested. So we had challenges in this borough and we still have challenges in the borough. And having it as a borough status did not seem to me to serve any sort of improvement, right. Good.

So let us look at just not the conditions of the road but let us look at the conditions of the people. It was Sabrina Thomas who was gunned down in her yard in February 12th this year, 44 year old, now dropped her children to school. There were decapitations of persons there. In February 28, 2020 you had bodies of 69-year-old Cestlyn Farrell and her son Patrick and her church friend Seycelles Hannah all burnt beyond recognition. Now, those are victims of crime. Those are people there who were suffering and yet still borough status did not seem to get them in any greater degree of, you know, safety. You see, so we looked at the history. We looked at different—a ten-year-old in 2020 was almost kidnapped walking down the street. Then 56-year-old Sandra Gopee-Despot, she was killed in her home. We had shooting of somebody twice, twice. And this morning we

heard a question about the shells from the Regiment and shells were used.

So what I am trying to gather is, there is a problem with crime. There is a problem with not just crime with but with the roadway—and I do not think the borough status has done anything to help it.

11.20 a.m.

And you see, I am someone who I love that Trinidad could get a good name all over—all over the world. But there is a HikersBay, it is a kind of travel advisory and it actually looked at comparing the crime in different parts of Trinidad and Tobago. And they looked at areas for people to visit, so I am happy if tourists come here. And their index, the crime index to Trinidad and Tobago was 70 but for Point Fortin, 73. Safety index for Trinidad and Tobago 29, Point Fortin, 26. They did praise Point Fortin's health system and they did praise the availability of health and nursing personnel and the friendliness of staff. But then it looked at the level of crime in Point Fortin and it was very high compared to Trinidad and Tobago, very, very high, and it—this is a comparison to different parts of the country. Crime increased over the past three years. Point Fortin very high, 82; Trinidad and Tobago, 83. So, probability of home burglary, Point Fortin very high, 78, Trinidad and Tobago, 66. So, Point Fortin actually, even though it is borough, they have a greater degree of getting home burglary and things stolen. So my point is—even car theft in Point Fortin, high 67 compared to the rest of the country 63. Borough status is not going to help us in terms of crime in Diego Martin, or Siparia. It is not going to help us—I do not see it helping us much in terms of—in the infrastructural developments because we have seen what has happened and the strikes that are continual basis in Point Fortin.

And do you know Point Fortin, what came to mind Sir, is that yes, money is scarce. And my problem is, and I bought this up some time ago. My problem is, if I see money wasting, I am concerned. And my concern is, Point Fortin recently had a borough day celebration and I am happy people can enjoy themselves. I am happy that persons could be able to express themselves. But look what happened, we just finished carnival—people were questioning all that money spent to carnival and we have certain problems here. But in that borough day there were 16 bands including Desperadoes, Renegades, a whole set of bands, Jah Roots, all these for a whole month. You know, you had what I would consider the borough day month, which again, I love people to enjoy themselves and the cultural expression there. You had Arima Angel Harps, you had, you know, it is like what they have a J'ouvert sort of thing for a whole month.

So, I am saying that it is good. But would that now, for me trying to sacrifice for my country, for me trying to say government should not be spending money in non-essentials because of what is going on in the country. When I see this whole month of activity, I am saying—I see the potential for a borough to get money and to take that money and waste it. And this is why—this is one of the reasons why I am saying, if Diego Martin, if Siparia comes and we get that borough status, who knows they may have borough days lasting a whole month and taxpayers' money. I do not mind private funding, taxpayers' money goes in to partying, wining. I would have rather that money, you get CCTV cameras to put in all these areas that I mentioned were crime ridden. These little areas, these nooks and crannies where I would have more enjoyed if the borough would have use that money to put in municipal—hiring those individuals to come and guard the place, to have a community patrol group started back.

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So wastage of money is something where I am thinking that I would not—I have no guarantee that Diego Martin and Siparia may have a whole month of celebration on what I consider essential, safety features for the persons, giving food hampers to members who are on the breadline, providing security for them, burglar proofing their homes, putting CCTV cameras would have been better to me in that. So, let us look at wastage that occurred there. So, therefore, so I made mention of one, which is the element of the Point Fortin.

I come to Arima now. Now, Arima has a historical perspective, and I know the Arima Mayor—what I am saying, you know, it is always a historical attachment to when they became a borough and when we heard about the royal assent, giving them that power status. There was history, where even the Amerindians were in charge of certain land and renting certain land. So, all these were reasons, historical reasons why they were given a borough status years ago, probably to appease the Amerindian population there. And I can understand why Point Fortin was given it because of the industrialized thrust that we saw.

But sometimes you know, if you find that a country has a city and that city is no longer functioning as a city—there were cases in Georgia, where they even decided that they would remove city status from a second city in Georgia. And there are historical aspects worldwide where people may decide let us downgrade. So sometimes we may have to decide do we downgrade somebody from a borough status back to a corporation if it will save money. But I do not agree with that because moneys have gone into the signage, moneys have gone into, you know, to put things in place. So I do not believe in this. Because this is another reason why I want to make mention why I may not want to support the venture of bringing these existing two areas, Diego Martin and Siparia, into the domain of having a

borough status because it is costly. You have to change all your stationery. You have to change all the signage in the vans, the corporation vans. You have to change signage at the grounds, at the burial grounds, you have to change it. So it is now this, all that costs money. We cannot afford that, we really cannot afford that now so, all that money going in—somebody may gain from some contract for signage et cetera. But—you know I am looking—if we had oil money and oil boom, I do not mind. Every municipal corporation could come a borough, but we do not have money. So I am saying now, the money it costs to do this.

Another factor too Sir, is besides the cost of having to implement it, if you have to change it, you know there are certain regulations you have to change in terms of not reversing onto the highway, you know. Certain motor vehicle laws have to change as the Minister did put it here. We also have to remember too even certain laws, because in a borough, you are not allowed to sell meat, fresh meat, in an open market, in an open place, you have to go into the market. So therefore, my fish vendor who passes in Valsayn and announces, shrimp, Carite, whatnot, let us say he operates in one of these soon to be boroughs, he could be charged. Let us say the little fisherman who just opens his truck—open truck and wants to sell some shrimp quickly to the population, he could be charged because— So this is where now, it can have a swing back effect to the small man. And we did see police—I think there was something on WhatsApp where I think the police officers were charging someone in a truck for a bucket. So, who knows, this may open up some sort of negative things for our persons who are trying to survive. So then I want to go back now. I just do not want to look at Point Fortin. I want to say: Are the other corporations, have they been a success story?

Let us look at Arima. Arima, Sir, is, you know, when I looked at Arima, you have to remember once even crime-wise, remember once there was an Arima Mayor in borough day walking down the street and his chain, in front of a whole crowd, his \$3,000 chain was snatched. So even though you have that, the level—it did not help crime if their own mayor with his own chain could be snatched. And you see not just that. Let us look at—I just would like you, Sir, to just to read in one thing because I am trying to develop the point that the boroughs are wanting and therefore, we may be creating other boroughs that are wanting. So I had like to read in Sir, a letter to the editor. It was a letter to the *Guardian*, where it was written by Garfield Daniel, of Arima Old Road, Arima. And its caption is:

Dear Editor,

Arima was the capital of East Trinidad. Now it is a lost and forgotten borough.

And in that letter he said:

“Arima was always considered the capital of” East “Trinidad”.

But he was critical of some of the services, of some of the buildings there, of things that they were promised. And in this letter, which was January 2022, he made mention:

“Today, when we looked at the cherished town that”—can—“boast of being the”—country’s—“only royal chartered borough a status granted by Queen Victoria in 1888...”—we see only—“a battered and bruised community...”—which has—“lost all facilities...”—that made it so special and is—“now reduced...”—“to a lost and forgotten borough.”

He quoted former Mayor of Arima, Ashton Ford, who has aptly described the once proud borough as a:

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“‘Glorified Village’ with only the First Peoples Community” garnering “any national attention.”

So we have these individuals. And on the letter went on to say:

“In fact, Diego Martin”—which—“is not yet a borough...”—will soon be—“getting”—its own—“brand new administrative complex while”—the borough of—“Arima, 133 years old”—this year—“is... waiting”—impatiently for—“the construction of a new Town Hall.”

So therefore, we have these objections which I have raised. And also the fact remains that let us look at again, the Arima—I would like to quote the *Newsday* Thursday, 24 August, 2017, where the Arima Mayor Lisa Morris-Julian, who I must say was one of the hardest working mayors there was and the most available mayor that was there because people love her. She really gave service, was always available to help and she to this day, she still has that—I could still give kudos for that. But even then she had quoted that she:

“...expressed outrage and her hope for a speedy resolution to allegations of fraud at the Arima Borough Corporation”—where—“1.5 million was stolen from the corporation.”

So, we looked at the fact that fraud can occur, not just, let us look at Chaguanas Borough Corporation, yes, they are a borough. In 29th of October, 2022 death threats are being made against an inspector who unearthed corruption in the building inspectorate. Then before that, in 2018, a group of allegations of fraud and misconduct in Chaguanas corporation. So here we have our boroughs, which should be the pinnacle of success, giving clear cut service to the people. We are seeing corruption all over. This I mean, and in this corruption at the Chaguanas corporation, it was mentioned that one of the guys there actually had death threats

against him, shades of Dhanraj Singh and other things in the past where people would have been frightened to even come forth.

So therefore, even in this article, it had mentioned it was alleged corruption at Chaguanas corporation, August 3rd, 2018 in the *Guardian*, and it made mention of the following:

“...the arrest of ten persons accused of collecting approximately \$22.5 million in fraudulent salaries in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, there are now accusations of more corporation fraud; this time at the Chaguanas Borough Corporation.”

Mr. Minister, I would like to—I admired your role as the Attorney General, I admire when you served in that capacity. I admire when you spoke about, even today, following the money, FIU, et cetera. But you see these cases, 2018 and before, where you had persons arrested, we want to see some action there. We do not want to—we are happy that we have action going after persons in Miami. But what about these persons here who were serving in these borough corporations? And we still need you, Minister, to show us that you could be the champion to clean up these corporations. Clean it up, so we now will have a level of less anticipation in putting them to borough status, where they would be controlling more money, where they will have Mayor’s Funds, where, you know, they could now have a greater degree of negotiating loans.

11.35 a.m.

Municipal corporations could negotiate loans, and even Sangre Grande, they could twin with other persons. So twinning, and all these things, you could do it presently. You do not need to be borough status, I think, to do that. You could twin with another city, you could twin with another area. So therefore, what I am

saying, we need to solve what is going on. We need to clean up the mess before we can now decide that we are going to give blessings to this. Good.

So therefore, I actually went in details about the existing boroughs and their deficiencies, and I also would like now to see, what are we going to elevate? The two corporations that we are thinking that we want to elevate, could we trust them to be elevated? Could we look at it and say, “Hey, you know, they are clean people. They are above board. They will go up there and they will really do a good job as a borough”, or will we have the same history in the past of the three different corporations, where you may have corruption, you may have road repairs wanting, crime wanting?

So I just want to look at these two corporations. Siparia Regional Corporation, it was reported on the 28th January, 2023, 300,000 missing from the Siparia Regional Corporation. Right? So therefore now, we need accountability from these corporations before I could trust you and say, “Go up to borough status”. You see, so we have—you see, and it is not just there, there was a joint select committee where it unearthed a—

“Fraud scandal unearthed”—by—“Diego Martin, San Juan...”

And then in this one—it was sometime when there was a joint select committee and there was a question given to Ken Calliste who was the financial assistant in Diego Martin, and actually there were instances where:

“...six cheques, valued around \$50,000 each, to unauthorised persons.”

There were cases where:

“...people...never provided any goods or services to the corporation. This occurred in 2013.”

And Calliste had:

“...another incident that occurred in 2016”—that—“was also under investigation.”

And he made mention that it:

“...involved...purchasing...items from a vendor who paid in full...though the items were never received.”

So, as far as I know, no one was charged for these crimes, no one was held accountable and, you see, we need to fix all these things. We need to fix what went on there. And even a:

“Member of the Committee Jennifer Baptiste-Primus reacted with shock as she questioned whether there were qualified financial officers employed by the corporations to prevent these things from happening.”

So:

“‘We cannot’”—as she said—“‘in 2019, have accounting units that are not staffed by the required qualified personnel,’ warned Baptiste-Primus.”

So again, we have to realize—and even:

“Committee member Khadijah Ameen also chided the Diego Martin Regional Corporation which she said had flouted the rules and wasted taxpayers’ money.”

So I am saying, give us accountability first, Diego Martin, show us that and probably let us go after those persons. Show us you are cleaning up your act. Show us that we could now trust you with more moneys, if you get more moneys. And, you see, the point I want to make here, somehow—and they went on to more details about chequebooks and giving payments in a cemetery, it is a host of things. But the point I want to make is even a past Commissioner of Police said persons and gang members were hired, and even Calliste confirmed that there were cases

where about 300 labourers were hired via blank forms, and we want to know how all these things happened. I want you all to clean up your act before I could say, “Listen, I give blessings for you to be a borough”. So therefore, we need updated finances from these corporations. Our Independent Senator, Sen. Seepersad, mentioned in a previous debate that there are shortcomings in their updated books.

So here we are, corporations are inefficient and we want to elevate them up now to borough status. This does not make sense. I think we have to clean up first. We have to make sure things are above board then we make it up. I remember that same Joint Select Committee, Sir, they made mention that water damage—and rats ate some of the documents. It seem those rats know exactly what to eat. But it goes on to, as I am saying, the fact that I am making is that we now have seen the—we have to fix things first. We have to fix things first before we decide to move up.

And, you see, when I heard mentioned that those two corporations were being considered, it took me by surprise because, you know, I remember, it was far back as 2009 where the then late Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, had a plan to propose city status for Arima and Chaguanas. So this was there in the books and this is something I might have given a little blessings to. But even all the things I wanted first, like cleaning up their act, especially for Chaguanas—because he suggested that it was time for that. So this is what I was looking at. I was looking at—and the idea by Chaguanas, we always heard about decentralization, traffic going into Port of Spain. We heard about the pollution from cars going there. Our poor—people have to take transport to go down there, so we were hearing about that. So when Mr. Manning suggested city status for Chaguanas, I was hoping a lot of buildings in Port of Spain could have moved there, where you would have had

access from people from south, people from east, people from north come into there instead and make Chaguanas the hub. But again, that was in 2009. So we did not get follow up for this when Government proposed this, but here we have two new corporations that are we are looking to elevate.

So my problem also, Mr. President, is the fact that if we are going to have the name change, I say, there is cost factor involved with that and I do not think we can afford that. If it seems to be, it is not going to give us a benefit in terms of services—because I have shown the other corporations have—the other boroughs have been deficient somehow. I could understand persons wanting to elevate certain countries but then, remember it was on the drawing board before for Tunapuna/Piarco also which, you know, has the University of the West Indies, it has the industrial estates in Tunapuna and it has the airport. So even if you have to look at a borough, should we now be looking at that instead of these two?

You see, so that means the decision to create two boroughs, to me, especially going back in the past where you could have given city status to Chaguanas or you could have looked at other areas were questions I had. So as I look here, I say that, as it stands now, I do not agree and I do not support the granting of the borough status to Siparia and to Diego Martin. I am hoping that we can get a greater degree of accountability, from not just them but the other corporations, in terms of their spending, in terms of the alleged corruption, in terms of the persons who were charged, and we do not know what is happening to those cases.

I also would like to say that, you know, some people may think we are doing this for a name change. Some people may think we are doing this to elevate friends to a mayorship position. All these are things in the public domain I have been

hearing, but the whole idea is, I really do not think we could afford it and should venture to put money out there. I do not think it might be feasible, in terms of accountability. We have not gotten things in place to tell these corporations how to manage their affairs properly; to show us, to convince us that there is no sort of corruption occurring. You see, so we can change a corporation to a borough, but it is just like changing URP to DEWD—DEWD to URP. It is a name change. You are not going to be—we did not see much improvement in the work ethics.

So in a sense, I am saying, we have to look at trying to get the work ethics of the persons there. We have to look at getting accountability there. I am happy to say that there are procurement officers being assigned to these corporations, so hopefully we may be having something in place where the population could feel something better is happening; that they could feel that, you know, we are putting things in place, you know.

So we really have to look at the granting of these borough status because, remember, as I mentioned before, it affects different things, you know. There will be different planning codes. Sometimes you may have different zoning. Sometimes you have areas, where people are accustomed to a two storey, you may now have to go to a three storey which may cause some level of concern. We may have to see that—the fact is that we want our roads to be better, our parks, our bridges to be better but remember, the property tax will be here; that will solve our problem. Changing a corporation to a status, I do not think will achieve much. I think—

Mr. President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Sir. I am not saying that Alderman Sigler Jack and all these people are—those are good people; those are people who want to

serve but, you see, I do not think at this time we could afford any extra money because the changing of the signage, the delivery service would not be there. Let us look at what we have and fix it with the existing things we have. I am saying that, at this stage, I would like to say, Sir—with all due respect to the Government's proposal here today, I am saying that I do not think that I can support this unless I am given some other convincing arguments, that I am still waiting to hear, that will alleviate my fears that I just elaborated. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. President: Sen. Hislop.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Laurence Hislop: Mr. President, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this legislation this morning. I pause, and the reason I pause is because this morning was another episode—another episode why I believe that the UNC clearly wants nothing good for Tobago—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop:—for Trinidad and Tobago. You see, there I go saying “Tobago”. They clearly want nothing good for the country even when the proposal comes from a corporation that they are responsible for, that they are in charge of. Sen. Roberts' contribution, or non-contribution, was a slap in the face of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: Because if you are going to stand in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and with all bravado and grandiose as if you are going to make a contribution to a debate—and this is not a proposal from the Government, I want to correct, Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh. This is the desire of the people of Diego Martin—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop:—and the people of Siparia. And it is the responsibility—as the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government shared with us this morning, we are here because the people have said to the Government, “This is a desire that we have”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

And for us to trivialize the desire of the people of Diego Martin and Siparia is just—to use a phrase that became very popular in Tobago, “I was flabbergast”. So for Sen. Roberts to be himself—to be himself this morning and to stand here and to say that he has nothing to contribute, he has five other colleagues on his Bench, he could have given his speaking time to any of his other colleagues, if that is what he intended to do this morning.

11.50 p.m.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: I will forever say that I am a young Senator, but I was really blown away by that this morning, by that level. I was flabbergast by that level of disrespect this morning.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: But what do we expect?

Sen. Lyder: The disrespect is holding back moneys. Lend money to Grande!

Sen. L. Hislop: What do we expect?

Mr. President: Sen. Lyder, there is one person contributing on the floor right now. Continue Sen. Hislop.

Sen. L. Hislop: Thank you, Mr. President. That is the norm. It seems like for the last couple of sittings that we have been here, the Opposition a using the opportunity to treat to a wider audience, because they have a challenge gathering

an audience at their meetings.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: So they are using the Parliament as an opportunity to have their election campaign kick-off.

The issues that Sen. Deyalsingh spoke to with the corporations is simply we have exhausted that in our reform debate.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: Because the issues that the corporation—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Nakhid: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. L. Hislop: The issues that the corporations face, Mr. President, lies squarely with regard to the challenges they have in administration and the challenges with funding. I know the Opposition really does not like to hear us treat with the issue of reform. It seems as if “reform” is a bad word for the Opposition, but all that this Government is seeking to do is seeking to create a framework by reform—creating a workable framework by the reforms that we are seeking to have established within our local government construct.

So for us to look at, or to even attack tourism—and I know the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts will treat with those issues that were dealt with by Sen. Deyalsingh.

Sen. Mitchell: I cannot wait.

Sen. L. Hislop: The mover of the Motion has outlined the process by which we got here. It is the expressed will of the people of both corporations, through their elected officials, that said to the Government that it is our desire to be elevated to the status of boroughs. It is these two regional corporations by way of a specific resolution, that said to the Government, “We want greater responsibility and

greater powers to manage our own local affairs”. And for us in this place to say that you are not ready—you may say to a child, “You are not ready”, but when a child says to you, “Mommy and Daddy I am ready to—I think I am at the place in my life where I am ready to go, to step out”.

Even if it is with some trepidation, you allow the child when the child is of age, and I believe that Diego Martin and Siparia have proven that they are of age to be given additional responsibility.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: The Government is determined, and we are going to keep reminding the population, that this is what this entire thing is about. That the borough status, the property tax—some people like to call it the “dreaded property tax”, but the property tax reform and implementation, the reform of the local government, is a holistic package. It is about creating a new management structure. And I think it was Sen. Teemal in the previous debate we had on the valuation, where he said that it was a quantum shift. This is what—we have talked over and over again in this country about local government reform, and it is sad that when there is significant strides being made towards that, that we have such push-back from certain quarters.

I heard this morning a commentator saying on the television that he does not know what has been done with regard to local government reform. And I say to myself, where has he been? Certainly not in Trinidad and Tobago. This is well thought out, well researched, and it will lead to more autonomous and a properly funded local government structure. All of this, this borough status elevation, dovetails so beautifully into what the Government is seeking to do.

The legal minds, through our Minister for Rural Development and Local

Government, the legal minds will drill down, and within this Chamber we have several legal minds who will drill down into the legalese of the legislation. But I want to speak to the fact that this is to benefit the people of Diego Martin and Siparia.

Sometimes when we contribute in this Senate, or when we contribute in the House, what we say, in a lot of regards, goes above the people, because we use a lot of legal terms, a lot of words that sometimes the citizens, the ordinary citizenry has a challenge understanding, but I want to reiterate that this has come from the people. This is not the Government imposing something on Siparia and Diego Martin, but it is the corporations who have made a clear decision that we wish to become boroughs. So the Government, after consultation, after it sent out committees, saw the importance of the wish of the people.

When we look at both localities, both of them in their desire to be elevated, also deserve the additional recognition and responsibility. When you look at the growth of both areas, not only in population size—and that has been ventilated—but you have to look at what they have been able to contribute to Trinidad and Tobago.

Their both geographic footprints are significant, Siparia more so than Diego Martin. When you look at where the Siparia Regional Corporation stretches from, where—it is only when I did my research for this contribution that I recognized how huge the Siparia Regional Corporation is.

You see, each of them, on their own, can rival some small-island independent States, or when combined can even surpass them in their population size. By comparison, when you look at—you are talking about over 150,000 people. These corporations have a larger population size than Antigua and

Barbuda, which has 93,000, and St. Vincent with 104,000, and they are a larger population size than a lot of our Caribbean neighbours. When you talk about Siparia, it may be larger geographically, but has a slightly smaller population size than Diego Martin. But that does not take away from the fact that it contributes significantly to this country.

I looked at a document here and I saw the number of constituencies that fall within the Siparia Regional Corporation, Mr. President. We have constituencies like Fyzabad and La Brea, and some of Siparia as well. Parts of Oropouche West fall within Siparia, and for to me, this is significant in their contribution—that is Siparia's contribution to Trinidad and Tobago. In terms of Diego Martin, who has an electorate that is over 88,000, and a general population that is over 100,000, 10 electoral districts and three constituencies, it may be smaller geographically, but its population density is significant.

If we continue and drill down into the impact that they both have to the economy, from agriculture and tourism to thriving business centres. And when you look at the level of activities that take place in these two corporations on a weekly, monthly and a yearly basis, they are indeed paying their way in Trinidad and Tobago.

What we want for these two regions is to realize their desire. It is not about—and I want that to sink in to all of us in here. It is about their desire. When we saw what transpired here this morning with Sen. Robert's contribution, come on, this is the will of the people. And if the desire of the people is to be elevated to borough, why are we trivializing it? We expected to—what should happen—
[*Interruption*]

Sen. Roberts: You are trivializing the country. That is what you all are

trivializing.

Sen. Mitchell: Mr. President, I seek your protection. Protection under Standing Order 53(1)(b) please.

Mr. President: So I have spoken to the talking across the floor when a Member is contributing, and the fact that that can be deemed to be a disturbance or an interruption. So whereas we do allow a little bit of crosstalk with each other, what we do not allow is shouting across or talking directly at the Member when they are speaking. Continue Sen. Hislop.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: Thank you, Mr. President and thank you colleague. I am a big boy, I could handle the small talk from across the floor, the small talk.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. L. Hislop: Yeah, but that is all we get from the other side of House, but that is alright.

Sen. Nakhid: You could handle it?

Sen. L. Hislop: This is the desire of the people, as I was saying, the desire, and self-determination refers to the idea that individuals and groups have the right to govern themselves, to make decisions about their own lives and to determine their own future, whether it be at central Government level or at the local level. This Government is about empowering people to do more, and giving them the tools to do more.

These two corporations—and to be honest I look forward at the end of this debate when we can declare both corporations boroughs.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: When we can say with pride that Siparia is a borough, Diego

Martin is a borough. I look forward to that. These two corporations can be considered by some people to be polar opposites in their make-up, their ecology, socio-economic positions and other measuring methods, but one thing that they have similarity is their desire.

You see, one is largely urbanized with retail, tourism, ship repair and agriculture at the core of their economy, while the other—well the other is largely rural and agriculture, with a strong historical background. When we look at what or who—let me say what—what is Siparia and what Siparia brings, you talk about the La Divina Pastora celebration. You talk about parang. You talk about food. You talk about agriculture. You know sometimes we do not realize how important a place like Siparia is to the cultural dynamics of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mitchell: Daisy Voisin.

Sen. L. Hislop: Remember the days of Daisy Voisin, as Sen. Mitchell reminded me of. That is what Siparia—and even business. I am not from Siparia, but Siparia has contributed significantly to what Trinidad and Tobago is.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: And for us to sit here and trivialize that, oh, it is just a borough, this is what the people of Siparia want, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: This is what they want. With this elevated status, in conjunction with the reforms of local government then we can only see that it would be a benefit to the people, to the burgesses of Siparia to receive this accolade, this title. And I could only say why not? Why not? Why not give Siparia what Siparia deserves?

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

12.05 p.m.

Sen. L. Hislop: So, Mr. President, these corporations, as with all corporations, have suffered with limited financial resources, human resources and a limited management structure, but they have still been able to give assistance to their burgesses. Siparia has done some notable things that, in preparing for this contribution, I want to share with the national public.

We have had the construction of public convenience at Wrightsville, establishing facilities and tourist attractions including the Carapal Spring enhancement of the La Brea abattoir and the development of Station Beach, including the installation of a walking track and lights. And I was informed, Mr. President, that the Village of Siparia was recently awarded the Caribbean award for the best tourism village of the Caribbean by the Caribbean Tourism Organization.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. L. Hislop: That award may not have been as a direct work of the corporation but the region is receiving its just reward because the people have put in the work.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: And the people are asking that this is another recognition that they deserve. And this Government, Mr. President, this Government sees it fit to give to the people of Siparia what they deserve.

The Diego Martin Corporation has also done what is required as a corporation. Clean up campaigns, the cleaning of watercourses, and repair and construction of box drains. They have also seen major works being done in conjunction with their three Members of Parliament, Member de Nobriga, Member Imbert, and Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley. From six fully functional and

operational community centres, to a state of the art health facility, conceptualized by the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West. Another brainchild of the Prime Minister was the fish fry facility and the fishing facility. These things have added value to Diego Martin and not only Diego Martin, Mr. President, but Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: You see these things, Mr. President, are vital to creating economic activity to the benefit, not only of the region but when the region prospers, what happens? The country prospers.

Hon. Senator: Talk like “ah” boss.

Sen. L. Hislop: Yeah. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development in conjunction with corporations have also been able to complete a few significant projects, Mr. President, and they shared with me major reconfiguration of accesses including roads, bridges and retaining walls in Resurrection, upper Hague Street, with input and advocacy of the Member of Parliament. The corporation was also instrumental in the completion—and the Minister could assist me with this, the La Vee-gee?

Hon. Senator: La Vigie.

Sen. L. Hislop: La Vigie, Paramin Lookout. This, Mr. President, is a must-see location, must-see, you know, in our country.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: And falls within the area of Diego Martin. The thing about it Mr. President, is that both Diego Martin and Siparia are ready for more.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: They are both ready for more, Mr. President. But could you

imagine the transformation that is possible not only with their elevation status, Mr. President, but with the reform in totality? And I want to draw a parallel, and I am a proud Tobagonian, and so I want to draw this parallel with an institution which I call the apex local government system in the country, which is the Tobago House of Assembly.

12.10 p.m.

Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing: Not right now. Not right now.

Sen. L. Hislop: Well, well, I am talking about the system. I am talking about the structure, maybe not necessarily the people who manage the structure at this point in time. Right?

You see, Mr. President, the desire for more—the desire for more that Tobago has is the same that is seen in the people of these both regions; a desire to be more responsible for managing their own affairs, to be more a part of the decision-making process, to be more autonomous in their governance. And I will always draw the parallel—always draw the parallel between the THA and the municipal corporations. And I draw the parallel because this is where I would like to see the municipal corporations get to; not necessarily a Tobago House of Assembly structure but a structure of more autonomy, a structure that speaks to more direct funding. Because when you have a management structure that is similar to what is experienced in the Tobago House of Assembly and you have the levels of funding that is also experienced by the THA, you could imagine the level of delivery, the level of—

Hon. Senator: Performance.

Sen. L. Hislop:—performance that would take place in each corporation in Trinidad.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: If you have that level of performance in corporations in Trinidad, it redounds to the benefit of who, Mr. President? It redounds to the benefit of the people because—

Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing: Including UNC people.

Sen. L. Hislop: And that is the thing. The thing about it is that the reform that the Government is seeking to roll out, it is not for PNM-controlled corporations alone. It is for the country. So who benefits if you level of governance structure, that level of performance within your corporation. And people could—you could say what you want but when you recognize what took place in Tobago, especially within that period 2001 to 2021, when you look at what was done from a local government system—

Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing: Outstanding work.

Sen. L. Hislop:—the level of delivery, you would come to Tobago and you would want to know, it cannot be that is the local government system that has this level of delivery.

Hon. Senator: That is a fact. Excellent fact.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: 2021, 2001. If Sen. Lyder did not hear, Mr. President, 2001.

Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing: He did not do maths.

Sen. L. Hislop: The present Chief Secretary was still at school in 2001.

Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing: Primary school.

Sen. L. Hislop: Just to be clear. Because at that time—

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. L. Hislop: I would not, but he was still at school at that time. So it could

not—

Sen. Lyder: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. L. Hislop: Mr. President—

Mr. President: Number one, you all are debating across the floor and I have repeatedly asked that that not to be done. And number two, Senator, just be careful where you are veering outside of what we are here to debate today, so do not go too deeply into the reform. As much as you may mention it in the context of what is before us, to go too deeply into it, will put you outside of relevance. Continue.

Sen. L. Hislop: Thank you, Mr. President. You see, when a body of people is given additional responsibility and given the tools to fulfil those responsibilities, then it will only be to the benefit of the people of the country. You see, even in that system, even in the THA system, there is a desire for more. And even in the local government system, there is a desire for more. And so the desire that the people of Siparia—the desire that the people of Siparia and Diego Martin wish for is what we are seeking to give. We are seeking to establish a way forward for them to be more responsible for their jurisdiction. We are desiring to seek a way for them to be able to deliver more to the people of both Siparia and Diego Martin.

And so, Mr. President, I want to compliment this Government for taking the desire of a people and saying to them, we hear you and we are going to deliver to you what you desire.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop: And so, in closing, Mr. President, these corporations and very soon these two boroughs have asked for something; they have asked to be recognized as more. And with pleasure, when the time comes for me to vote in the Senate today, Mr. President, I along with my colleagues on this side of the House

will vote resoundingly in favour of in granting to the people—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. L. Hislop:—of Siparia and Diego Martin borough status. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I am happy to join this debate on a matter addressing what the Government has deemed the desire, according to their spokesmen or spokespersons, including the mover of this Bill, the desire, almost the will of the people of Diego Martin and Siparia respectively. I must put on record, as you have done and my friend, Sen. Hislop, good chap from Tobago—

Sen. Lutchmedial: I thought he was in Tobago today.

Sen. W. Mark:—I must put on the record that I am a Carenage-born citizen of this great Republic. So when we talk about Diego Martin, I can speak to Diego Martin. So I have a lot to say about the Diego Martin.

Mr. President, the Bill that we have before us today has six clauses essentially and it is the wish of the Government to grant through this legislation borough status to Siparia and Diego Martin. Now, what is extremely interesting in this debate thus far, especially coming from the last speaker, Sen. Hislop, and it was repeated with, what I call, Mr. President, with monotonous frequency, the desire, the will of the people of these two regions. Who can argue, who can object to the elevation and the enhancement of an honorary status for two regions into, what is now called or what is proposed to be called, boroughs? But, Mr. President,

no speaker thus far, including the mover of the Motion, or Bill I should say, as well as the first speaker on the Government Bench, formerly that is, none of them have been able to provide to this honourable Senate concrete benefits that would derive as a result of the granting of this status to these two regional corporations. There was a dancing around this issue but no specifics as to the benefits.

Now, we are also told in this debate thus far that there have been consultations, and the consultations have come as result of the representatives of both corporations through resolutions/Motions agreeing to borough status. That is what we have been told. I would like to ask the Government, whoever comes after, including the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, to please identify for this House, please provide the data on those consultations. For example, Mr. President, if there were consultations, as we have been told, when did these consultations take place? Where did they take place?

Sen. Lutchmedial: Who did they consult with?

Sen. W. Mark: Who did they consult with? I would like us to be transparent as we seek accountability for this particular exercise that we have embarked upon. So I would look forward to the Government providing us with specifics on this matter of consultation.

Now, Mr. President, I have in my possession an article and it will demonstrate to you, Mr. President, and to this entire House what I call the hoax of the century. It is a mamaguy of the century and I will show, Mr. President, the contradictions in the submissions thus far. And we even went to the point, Mr. President, where the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government has put on the *Hansard* record when those decisions, when those resolutions, when those Motions were approved by the two corporations. In case of Diego Martin, if

my memory serves me well, we are told sometime in the month of May 2019. And then in the case of Siparia, we are told, Mr. President, it was sometime in February of 2019. Now, this is before local government elections, held on 2nd December, 2019.

Mr. President, I have an article in the Trinidad *Guardian*. It is dated 18th November, 2016. It is entitled and headlined, “PM elections promise”. I want to read for the record the hoax of the century and the contradictions, Mr. President, and almost bordering on people being misguided, and they have come to this Parliament to continue this almost attempt at misleading this honourable Senate. And to my mind, it is disrespectful. It is almost bordering on contempt to come to this Parliament and seek to mislead all our Senators, when the movers—I may not be correct on this, I would not say it. But when presentations are made in this House, one has to assume that the persons who are making these presentations ought to be properly informed, and you just cannot come here and speak in a wild and arbitrary fashion because you would believe that some people have not researched this subject matter properly, so we can take anything for granted.

12.25 p.m.

Mr. President, you can go to the article that I am going to quote here. Again, it is the 18th November, 2016. Mr. President, may I advise, there was a local government election in 2016, around there, and there was a local government election in 2019, because they are held every three years. Hear what this article tells us, and I quote:

The constituency of Siparia which is represented in the Parliament by Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar is in line to become the next and fourth borough in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Mr. President, this is the 18th November, 2016. Follow carefully what I am saying.

This is among a bag of goodies Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley and other Government Ministers rolled out when the People's National Movement bandwagon rolled into Siparia on Thursday night in support of its nine candidates contesting the local government election for the Siparia Regional Corporation.

It goes on, Mr. President, to say that:

The hon. Prime Minister—they say Rowley but I say the hon. Prime Minister—said he believed that the community of Siparia could benefit from local government reform patterned, after what my friend said, the Tobago House of Assembly model which his administration intends to roll out over the next four years.

And it goes on to say, Mr. President:

It is my expectation that this is the next community in Trinidad and Tobago that would rise to borough status and will elect a mayor in Siparia, you have all the makings of a township and you have such tremendous and wonderful history according to the hon. Prime Minister.

I will pause at this time.

Mr. President, the hon. Prime Minister, political leader of the PNM in 2016 in Siparia promised the people of Siparia borough status. That was in 2016. In 2016, Mr. President. We are being told by all our colleagues today that the two corporations agreed to the people of Siparia and Diego Martin respectively, and they passed resolutions in order to give borough status to these corporation. Nobody never told this honourable Senate that the Prime Minister in his campaign to win the borough, or I should say Regional Corporation of Siparia, made a

campaign promise during the local government elections of 2016.

So it was not, Mr. President, the people of Siparia calling for borough status, it was an election promise in 2016 by the Prime Minister, who consulted with no one, because he was seeking to win the Siparia Corporation, and this is what came out, and this is what we are debating today. That is why, Mr. President, if a forensic criminal investigation is conducted into the minutes and the files of Siparia and Diego Martin somebody will go to jail. Because the question here is whether these minutes were doctored?

Sen. Dr. Browne: What!

Sen. W. Mark: Were they backdated? That is the question that we have to deal with in an effort to coincide with the Prime Minister's commitment in 2019 when he went back again and he repeated, Mr. President, borough status. So he did it once, he did it twice, and is there an attempt, Mr. President, I am not accusing anybody. I am saying is there an attempt to mislead this Parliament by the Government?

Sen. Nakhid: It would not be the first time.

Sen. W. Mark: Because the question is, we are being told by Sen. Hislop that that is the will of the people. That is the desire of the people. It is not the will of the people, it is not the desire of the people, it was the will and the desire of the Prime Minister.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: And that is what we have to get clear here in our debate today. If you want borough status come clean. But do not come and “mamaguy” us in this Parliament by telling us, Mr. President—I challenge the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to produce for you and us here the

consultations that took place between 2016, '17, '18 and '19 when the Prime Minister went on the platform and offered the people borough status. Where were the consultations during those three years? Mr. President, it took another promise in 2019 for borough status, and when they realize and thing that they got caught, they got caught, what did they do? They went to their corporations where not one single UNC was represented, although we had an alderman in 2019 and just recently demitted office. I spoke to him a couple hours ago, he was never invited to any meeting.

Sen. Lutchemedial: Papa!

Sen. Nakhid: What! Who they consulted?

Sen. W. Mark: He was never invited to any meeting on consultation for borough status. So, Mr. President, the question that has to be asked, were these meetings held in secret?

Sen. Lyder: Yes, clandestine.

Sen. W. Mark: Were they clandestine meetings? Let us know. But do not come here and try to hoodwink and “mamaguy” us in this Senate, because we do our research. We do our homework. Mr. President, both in Siparia corporation and in the Diego Martin corporation the people who took those decisions were all members of the Prime Minister PNM.

Sen. Nakhid: So they consult with themselves?

Sen. Lyder: Himself unto himself.

Sen. W. Mark: They had no UNC. They had no members of the UNC involved in those decisions.

And further, Mr. President, may I advise you, the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government said, two subcommittees were established to

give effect to this decision by these councils within the corporations. One headed by the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, it included Allyson West, it included Stuart Young, and in the case of Siparia they had a fella called Rambharat. I almost say may his soul rest in peace, but he is alive. Okay, so I want to wish him the best. But he, Mr. President, according to what we were told and are in the records, he headed that, and that included a couple of them including my good friend Sen. Sagrarsingh. Her name featured as a member of that committee. Okay. But, Mr. President, not one single member of the Opposition was part of any subcommittee.

Sen. Lyder: Why is that?

Sen. Mark: You know why, Mr. President? You know when you want to mislead people, there are some accounting firms that have been found guilty for corruptly engaging in what is called “creative accounting”. You remember Enron, the Enron scandal, Mr. President?

Sen. Lutchmedial: Cooking the books.

Sen. W. Mark: That is exactly what we are dealing with here. Cooking the books. Cooking the books and coming here to tell this honourable Senate that everything, Mr. President, was done above board. Listen, we are going to conduct a criminal forensic analysis when we take office—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark:—and the chips will fall where they may. Because it is my considered opinion, I am not accusing anybody, I am saying it is my considered opinion and view that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago backdated the minutes in those two corporations in order to reflect, and that is why we need a criminal forensic enquiry into this matter.

So, Mr. President, let us—and, Mr. President, to even consolidate my position, or our position, I would like, Mr. President, this is May the 23rd, another article in the *Trinidad Guardian*, this is not last year. This is this year 2023, the 23rd of May, the *Guardian*. Here is the headline, Mr. President:

Diego Martin residents baffled over what borough status means.

And you are telling us that you had consultations. How can you have consultations with the people of Diego Martin and the residents of Diego Martin are baffled? They do not know—what borough status are they talking about? Mr. President, I am saying this Government is guilty of misguiding us and misleading us in this Parliament.

Sen. Lyder: I from Diego Martin and I was never consulted Senator.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. President, if the Government has nothing to hide, lay all the documents on the table of the Parliament. Let us know when all of these consultations—and, Mr. President, as you rightly said, and I think you were guiding my friend from Tobago, let us not confuse local government reform with borough status. Let us not confuse the both. We would like the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to table in this Parliament all the documents dealing with consultations for borough status in both Siparia and in Diego Martin. I dare him to produce those. He cannot, because no consultation took place.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: You are “mamaguying” us. That is what they are doing, Mr. President. They are “mamaguying” us. But you cannot get away with this, because the people will find you out. They will find you out, Mr. President. So, Mr. President, I thought it was important to clear the air on this matter, because I

have done my research and I am telling you it is impeccable.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. W. Mark: You “cyah” challenge me.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. W. Mark: All those who try to rain on my research. None, none of you all can challenge me. None! Because I have done it and it is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: So they cannot challenge me on that at all, because they know, Mr. President, no consultations took place on borough status. None! That was a figment of the PNM’s imagination.

12.40 p.m.

And, Mr. President, look, let us face some realities. I think somebody made the point earlier and we need to pay attention. There is something called state capture. That is a concept. It is a concept in which corporations and the politicians go to bed together.

Hon. Senator: What?

Sen. W. Mark: And they go to bed together not to promote the interest of the people, but they go to bed together, like Jacob Zuma did in South Africa, to promote their own private and personal interest, and that, Mr. President, is a form of corruption, state capture. And, Mr. President, may I advise this honourable Senate that when we talk about state capture, you are talking about influencing the decision-making processes. And you know how it is manifested, Mr. President? Through what we are debating right now, legislation.

The corporations, in bed with the politicians, bring legislation and they want

us to pass it in their interest. That is what corruption is about, and that is what state capture is about. This Government has been captured by big businesses in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: And when they come to Parliament you have to be like a “cokey eye”, looking at every provision because everything that they do is towards benefiting themselves.

Sen. Lutchmedial: Ulterior motives.

Sen. W. Mark: Why do you think they have over 300 recusers in the Cabinet? They do not understand the difference between business and their responsibilities—

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. W. Mark:—in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark, number one, your back is turned to me so you cannot see me—

Sen. W. Mark: My apologies, Sir. It is disrespectful.

Mr. President:—and number two, the line that you are going down is imputing improper motives. I will ask you to veer away from that and get back to what is before us.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President, I am guided by you because you know you and I come from the same school. I used to sit there so I understand it.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, I sat there as President of the Senate. Look, you are—

Mr. President: Okay, Sen. Mark. All right, sit, sit, sit. Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark, have a seat, have a seat. Please do not engage. Just continue your contribution.

Sen. W. Mark: [*Inaudible*]*—*that I would not. I would like to deal with this at the political platform and I will at—oh my God, Mr. President, you will not want to hear me. So, Mr. President—

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President, on a point of order. Standing Order 46(7) and—

Mr. President: Both of you all cannot stand at the same time. Again—have a seat. Have a seat. Again we getting back into this type of procedure. The little nuances that we have had post, pre-COVID sorry, and now post-COVID, it means that when somebody rises on a point of order the other person will take their seat. We cannot have two people standing at the same time. So, Leader of Government Business, you have a point of order to raise.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Mr. President. Standing Order 46(7) and (8).

Mr. President: Okay. So the particular Standing Order raised is one where you do not incorporate the person occupying the Chair, which is myself, into the debate too much. And again, Sen. Mark just be careful. Continue.

Sen. W. Mark: I am guided. I do not know why my colleague who has just come from the UN promoting—

Sen. Dr. Browne: The President has risen, continue along the—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. Mitchell: He is very trivial.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President—okay.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, time is running. It is your time—

Sen. W. Mark: Yeah, I understand.

Mr. President:—so I implore you continue your contribution.

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. I cannot help it. It is part of me.

Mr. President, let me just indicate to you and, through you, to my colleagues here. Mr. President, if we could have gotten from the Government concrete benefits that

would be derived from the passage of this legislation—and it is not only as in United Kingdom. Honorary status in terms of a name change it is superficial. Because, Mr. President when you look through the legislation not a comma, not a full stop of significance has been changed. It is only minor changes here and there. If my friend from Tobago talked about the administrative structure and the question of funding, I would love, hon. President, for these corporations in our country to have a similar status or status as my colleagues would have and they do have in the Tobago House of Assembly as he has advanced.

Mr. President, the truth is—and I want to advise my good friend here, Sen. Vieira. Last time we were here I said something, he say something and that is all part of it, but he did say something about I am voting for this property tax because of decentralization. Something to that effect. I remember he said that. And, Mr. President, all I want to ask my honourable colleague who I know very well and we know each other very well, just read the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Act which was passed in June of 2022. If you read that carefully, Mr. President, you will see it has nothing to do with the decentralization or devolution. It is over-concentrated centralization. And you know who is in charge of local government? The Minister of Finance is the tsar of local government. So I just wanted to tell my friend it has nothing. Local government reform—“doh” matter as you said, you do not want us to get into that debate, I am not getting into that debate. But I just want to advise my colleagues that when we are talking about local government reform, my colleague who now sits and who has just piloted this Bill will be no more. His entire office and the name of his Ministry has been abolished.

You know who is the Minister of—

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Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President—

Sen. W. Mark:—local government?

Sen. Dr. Browne: Standing Order 46—

Sen. W. Mark: The new Minister of local government is the—

Mr. President: Again Sen. Mark—Sen. Mark!

Sen. W. Mark: Sorry. Sorry, Sir.

Mr. President: So I get from the particular position that you are in that it is difficult to face the Chair all the time, so you would talk to your colleagues further down the Chamber. But the problem is when I stand you do not see me.

Sen. W. Mark: Sorry, sorry.

Mr. President: So I have once again calling upon Senators that the procedure is simple. If you are hearing a point of order being raised, you take your seat, allow the point of order to be raised so that it can be dispensed with by the Chair. Leader of Government Business.

Sen. Dr. Browne: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, Standing Order 46(3). I am hearing rebuttals on matters and so on, that have long since been determined in this House.

Mr. President: So, again it ties in to re-debating local government reform, which I have spoken to whilst other Senators were speaking. So Sen. Mark, I would ask that you move on from that point. Your point has been made in a very cursory level which was again raised by the piloter of the Bill that is before us. But to go too deeply into it puts you outside of the Standing Orders in relation to relevance and the one just raised by the Leader of Government Business. Continue, Sen. Mark.

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I am just simply asking

if my colleagues can, when they rise to debate this matter, can our colleagues tell us how will the change of a name from a regional corporation to a borough in a tangible way benefit the people of both Siparia and Diego Martin? For example, Mr. President, can I ask, through you, to my colleagues, would such a change of name bring about an improvement in the physical infrastructure of those corporations? Because, Mr. President, you would know that one of the challenges that this regional corporation that we are dealing with, Diego Martin, as well as Siparia, they have experienced funding problems. They do not have any funds. You have a Minister of Finance who holds back on releasing funds because he is suffering from a crisis of cash, and he has to pay salaries before he can put money into infrastructure otherwise he will have a revolution on his hands.

Mr. President, I want to apologize to you, but my doctor has always advised me when I am speaking for blood circulation, I have to be going left and I have to be going right—

Hon. Senator: Yeah right.

Sen. W. Mark:—because of the fact I have to keep fit you understand otherwise that is going to be trouble.

Mr. President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: So, please forgive me if for instance, Mr. President, I am not looking at you in the way that I would like to.

So, Mr. President, I want to indicate to the hon. President—Mr. President, I would like to raise with you, and through you, when my colleagues are responding, if they could tell this honourable Senate how will borough status improve on the physical infrastructure in the case of roads and sidewalks, in the case of bridges and drains, in the case of landslips and the environment? These are issues I would

imagine that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, who will be no more after this Bill becomes law, Mr. President—

Hon. Senator: That is not true.

Sen. W. Mark: No, his office will be abolished. Mr. President, if you do not believe me, look at the local government reform. Mr. President, improved services—look, Mr. President, I am a Carenage man—

Sen. Dr. Browne: On a point of order, Mr. President.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President—all right let me sit one time because—

Sen. Dr. Browne: Standing Order 53(1)(b). It really has become extremely tedious at this point.

Mr. President: So, Sen. Mark, you are wrapping up. You have a few more minutes, just continue, but bring everything to a close.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President, there is a disaster waiting to happen and I want to bring it to this House's attention. Mr. President, I am from Diego Martin but I do not live there any longer, but I am from there. I passed recently on that main road and, Mr. President, I visited a place called—you know where the Chamber of Commerce building is the down there, and when I looked at the river mouth of that river that comes through Westmoorings from Maraval, Mr. President, the silt, the debris, the mud, the slush, is between four and six feet high.

Mr. President, you what is going to happen? I am calling on the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to get the equipment down there quickly because the rainy season is upon us. There is going to be a backup of waters and they will flood out Westmoorings, and all the people upper Maraval, into Petit Valley, into Diego Martin. So I am just raising this because, Mr. President, we are talking about borough status, and I am saying if we are talking

about borough status, one of the functions of the Government is to ensure that there are adequate services provided so that we can avoid a deluge of flooding. That is what we are talking about. That is what local government is partly about, Mr. President.

So, Mr. President, I have said that when it comes to this matter of local government and these regional corporations, we recognized that there are several, what is called, consequential amendments to the legislation that is before us. And those consequential amendments, Mr. President, as you are aware, will impact on several pieces of legislation. But all of these changes, consequential changes, are going to be, what I call minor, negligible, and it would not be impactful, but nevertheless it is in the legislation and I need to bring those to your attention.

For example, Mr. President, you would see that, for instance, the Act or the Bill that is before us is going to be looking at changes to the Representation of the People Act as it relates to the Tobago House of Assembly and local government. Because wherever the regional corporation of Diego Martin appears, or the regional corporation of Siparia appears in the Bill that we have before us, it has to be deleted and replaced with borough. So the borough will now replace the regional corporation for both Siparia as well as Diego Martin. And you will also recognize, Mr. President, that amendments have to be brought to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic regulations.

12.55 p.m.

Because one of the things that I saw here is that when you are reversing in a public vehicle, there are going to be regulations that are going to govern you in that particular exercise. In other words, going around a corner, reversing—you “cyah reverse around ah corner”. It is about parking. All of these things are what you

call negligible, minor—

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Mr. President: Senator, your time is up.

Sen. Mark: Oh. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Vieira SC.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Anthony Vieira SC: Thank you, Mr. President. This is a relatively straightforward piece of legislation, the purpose of which is to elevate the status of Diego Martin and Siparia to that of boroughs and amend related legislation accordingly. A borough is a district, town or urban community with its own local government; historically, a medieval fortified group of houses forming a town with special duties and privileges. This legislation essentially relates to our local government system and as the hon. Minister who moved the Bill said it is part of a package designed to enhance decentralization in rural development.

Now, as it stands, there are two city corporations, three borough corporations and nine regional corporations, and with the passing of this legislation, there will be five borough corporations. Now, why does this matter? While one may legitimately criticize this legislation as being merely cosmetic, a change of name only with little or nothing of substance, and while that may be technically correct, I would respectfully suggest that it also adds gravitas. It is a difference of prestige—it is a matter of prestige and status. And gravitas and status is a serious matter, especially where it can cause feelings of respect and trust in others.

But, for me, the real benefit is that it is another step towards the ideal of decentralization and for years, the country has suffered from the effects of over-centralization where decisions made in Port of Spain were often criticized as disconnected from rural communities and from issues on the ground; where the powers of Government, being concentrated at the centre, would be far removed from those who lived outside of the capital city; where officials at the local level voiced complaints about being stifled or ignored, unable to vary programmes from the central government and frustrated by bureaucracy; where one of the downsides of overly centralized control is people feeling disconnected, losing interest and becoming apathetic; where it would be difficult to identify local needs because decision-makers were too far away from the reality on the ground.

The hon. Minister stated earlier that this legislation is part of an omnibus reform package and they are looking to move away from over-centralization. So at the heart of that package is that desire to move from central control towards decentralization and towards making local government meaningful and effective.

Now, local government in Trinidad and Tobago is governed by several pieces of legislation, the most important being the Municipal Corporations Act. Tobago, as we have heard, falls under the Tobago House of Assembly Act and it has its own special arrangements. In Trinidad, however, the country is divided into 14 municipal corporations, of which there are three types: city corporations, regional corporations and borough corporations. Now, as you have heard, all corporations have the same powers, they have the same responsibilities, they can make policies and by-laws in relation to their functions for their local area, and there is ministerial oversight headed by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

As you have also heard from the hon. Minister, prior to the Municipal Corporations Act, Trinidad and Tobago was divided into eight counties, which were further subdivided into wards and regions. Tobago was administered as a ward of the Saint David County. County councils historically function as the administrative bodies for local government. And notwithstanding the Municipal Corporations Act, counties and wards are still reflected in many of our maps. They pop up when lawyers handle conveyancing matters, for example, by having to go to the warden's office and they played an important role in revenue collection for Government. But by and large, however, and certainly from an administrative point of view, counties and wards have been eclipsed by the municipal corporations.

And what do these municipal corporations do? Their areas of responsibility are set out at sections 33A and B, 35A, 232 and the Thirteenth Schedule of the Municipal Corporations Act. Briefly stated, municipal corporations, whether city, regional or borough, have statutory responsibility for making by-laws and regulations for their local areas; representing the interests and concerns of citizens within their local area; sport and youth development; recreation grounds and public spaces; spatial planning and buildings; community development and social services; policing via the municipal police; infrastructure development and maintenance; disaster management; distribution of truck borne water; street management; construction and maintenance of drains and watercourses; nurseries, child care and homes for the elderly; regulating the operations and conditions of marketplaces and slaughter houses; waste removal and management, including development and maintenance of sanitary landfills; maintenance and control of corporation cemeteries and crematoria; bus and taxi shelters. And that is not even

a full list.

The point I want to make, and this is important not just for this debate but I would like the listening public to really understand, municipal corporations are responsible for most of the activities impacting citizens in their local communities. Now, my friend Sen. Mark reminded me about my interest in decentralization. The municipal corporations represent decentralization in action. What is decentralization? It is the transfer of control of activities to local offices or authorities rather than a single authority and control emanating from central government.

When the mover of the Motion spoke, he made clear that reform of local government was a key cornerstone. He said that the top priority is local government reform. And because important decision-making activities will impact citizens in the most direct, in the most fundamental way; because municipal corporations will be responsible for planning and crafting suitable strategies to boost the well-being of our local communities, it is vital—it is vital that we give serious consideration to who will represent citizens at the local government level.

Sen. Roberts raised a call for elections, and I would like to share some thoughts on this very important topic because come election time, it will be vital to get decent, hard-working and persons of integrity at the executive level of the municipal corporations; relevant, authentic, forward-thinking leaders who understand the complexities of governing during the times of uncertainty and change; mayors, councillors and aldermen who can build and sustain healthy relationships with their communities, who do not disrespect, make personal attacks or create unhealthy relationships which undermine sound governance.

We want council members who can work together as a team, who can work

instructively with others, and who can set aside personal interests and influences for the common good. We want mayors, councillors and aldermen who are accessible to their communities through meetings and events by phone and email, who are committed to clear and regular communication with their communities; council members who are critical thinkers, who can maintain long-term perspectives and who can consider the important potential impact of decisions; council members to come prepared to participate in decisions by researching and reading relevant background material prior to attending meetings; council members who understand basic financial information and can evaluate budgets and financial statements; leaders who are willing to seek training and continuing education to improve their skills.

And this is why the upcoming local government elections matter so much. The local government elections will allow citizens to get representation from their local community and it will enable those from the local community to directly impact the decision-making process. This is decentralization in action. It is important for citizens to exercise their voting franchise responsibly and carefully. Your votes will determine how your communities move forward.

Effective local government also requires a fair amount of money. You heard me go through some of the list of what municipal corporations and borough corporations do. And that is why, Sen. Mark, I supported the property tax legislation last week. Section 109(1A) of the Municipal Corporations Act provides for the funding of corporations. And in the main, the funding comes from appropriations by Parliament from the Consolidated Fund, borrowings and residential taxes to be collected under the Property Tax Act. So the bottom line here is that your money will be paying for your respective corporations and

voting—

Mr. President: So, Senator, just guidance, as I have given to everybody else. I have given you some leeway as you are, you know, going through your introduction but I do not want to go too deeply into reform matters or even election matters too much. What we are dealing with specifically is the borough of Diego Martin and borough of Siparia and what is in the Bill, which is six clauses long and outlines to the necessary changes to effect that. So I would like you to bring it in towards the Bill and focus more on that part.

Sen. A. Vieira SC: Mr. President, I will just end by saying that voting will be the chance of citizens to choose how their tax dollars are spent.

So let me turn now to one of the regions under consideration. Now, regretfully, I do not know enough about Siparia to speak authoritatively about the area. Happily, Sen. Hislop was able to competently address that aspect.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. A. Vieira SC: I will limit myself to saying a few words about Diego Martin having lived there and having read, *A History of Diego Martin* written by Father Anthony de Verteuil who taught me geography at St. Mary's College.

So Diego Martin—so, Mr. President, I am going to take a little historical journey through Diego Martin because we are dealing with the Diego Martin Regional Corporation. Diego Martin got its name from the Spaniards. According to tradition, the whole valley was named after the first settler, Don Diego Martin. The valley is some four and a half miles long and a little less than a mile wide. It was one of the most fertile areas in the country but sadly, that fertility was lost to agriculture in favour of urbanization.

1:10 p.m.

Physically, the valley is bounded as follows: in the North from the seacoast where north post was used by the Spaniards as an observation post, and as a signal station, telegraphing messages using balls, rings, and flags to Fort George where the message would be repeated. In the East, by the Maraval valley, now the north-eastern part of the Diego Martin valley is famous for the Blue Basin falls. So named because of the beautiful clear or azure pool at the front of the cascade. In the 1860's besides the visit from the son of the Prince of Wales to the area, there was also horse racing at the River Estate savannah. With racing being a special event in the valley, with people coming from all over Trinidad to see the races and to bet on horses.

In the East, there is a limestone area and the undulating Cameron plateau with small caves, underground drainage and springs. To the West, is the valley of La Quesa, now called Tucker Valley. And to the South, what was once marsh and swamp has been reclaimed and converted into high end residential and commercial seafront areas. Diego Martin was settled by French planters and has had its share of larger than life characters, including a battle involving Edward Teach also known as 'Black Beard'. Where he plundered a brig in the Gulf of Paria and then burnt the ship. The wealthy merchant Pierre Begorrat who had nine children on a 37-acre estate known as Plaisance, and who was instrumental in developing commercial business in the area.

The Brunton family who traded with Venezuela and owned River Estate and the Rich Plain Estate. The Bruntons had warehouses in Cocorite from where they would ship sugar in barrels. Diego Martin also attracted Sephardic Jews, coming from Spain and Portugal. For example, the Senior family who owned the La

Puerta Estate, and the Averbrooks who developed New Yalta, Schneider Gardens and Chima Munker, with street names such as Sinai, Leobass, Goldermere and Albert Einstein.

The Diego Martin region has enjoyed a colourful and eclectic history, and I can say a lot more but time and the Standing Orders will not allow. Suffice it to say, that the region has a population of over an 115,000, there is an industrial estate, there are at least two very good hospitals, there are well-appointed shopping centres, several churches, schools. The region has its own identity and is sufficiently populated, developed, and diverse to constitute a borough. Moreover, if that is the desire of the people of Diego Martin and the people of Siparia, through their elected representatives, if that is the desired outcome of meetings held and resolutions to that effect, I do not see why it cannot be accommodated by this legislation. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, I stand today before this very Senate to support my colleague the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, in bringing this important Bill to the House, to the Senate today. And I want to commend him on all the work that he has done so far—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: —and the work that he continues to do at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

1.15 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—and the work that he continues to do at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. That is a Ministry that is on the ground with the people of this country.

Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to contribute to the debate on Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and Borough of Siparia) Bill, 2021. The Bill seeks to amend the Municipal Corporations Act to provide for the establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia and to make consequential amendments to the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01, the Interpretation Act, Chap. 3:01, the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act, Chap. 25:50, the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations, Chap. 48:50, the Central Tenders Board Act, Chap. 71:91 and other written laws where references are made to these municipalities.

Mr. President, it is not secret that I have been always passionate about local government. I am always in support of any progress or move—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—that would see the upliftment or enhancement of local government. I strongly believe that a well-developed local government system can be used as a mechanism to measure the progress of a company so as to establish the borough of Diego Martin and the borough of Siparia. It is a step in the right direction.

Mr. President, it was during my tenure as Minister of Rural Development and Local Government that the matter of the establishment of the borough of Diego Martin and the borough of Siparia was first raised. And I am heartened to

be part of this debate that would see this real matter finally brought to fruition.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Mr. President, like the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Act, 2022, this Bill forms part of the acute vision of this Government to signify/enhance the system of local government by creating new opportunities for municipal improvement.

Mr. President, the work of this Government regarding the reform is ongoing and full proclamation of the Local Government Reform Act would see greater autonomy and accountability in the local government system, improved governance and administrative structures, secured funding, as well as the effective and efficient delivery of goods and services.

Mr. President, although this Bill contains only seven clauses, it represents the combination of intense research and deliberations among key stakeholders who work to ensure that the legal framework for the establishment of these two boroughs were robust. The focus of this Government has always been on putting people first. And this is what we did when the Motions from the municipal councils of these corporations were received in 2019, requesting that the Government take steps to declare their respective municipalities as boroughs.

Mr. President, in the case of the Siparia Regional Corporation, their Motion was approved at their statutory meeting held on the 21st January, 2019, which was based on significant, commercial, social, cultural and administrative developments within the region over the years. They called on the Government to declare their municipality a borough.

While I am on Siparia, I must say that I was present on that particular day at the statutory meeting held on the 31st January.

Hon. Senator: That is right.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: It was held on the 31st January, 2019. It was moved by Alderman Councillor Encinas and seconded by Councillor Gerald Debesette. And I want to say that each member of council agreed to this Motion.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Mr. President, I do not know if I have the liberty to call the members' names who were present at the council.

Hon. Senators: Call it.

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: At the time the Chairman of the Corporation was Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh; Councillor Leo Doodnath, Siparia East/San Francique; Councillor Shankar Teeluckisngh, Cedros; Councillor Arlene Ramdeo, Erin; Councillor Doodnath Mayrhoo, Avocat/San Francique/North; Councillor Gerald Debesette, Brighton/Vessigny; Councillor Maurice Alexander, Siparia West/Fyzabad; Councillor Deryck Bowrin, Mon Desir; Councillor Chanardaye Ramadharsingh, Otaheite/Rousillac; Councillor Christine Neptune, Palo Seco; Alderman Denesh Sankersingh, Member, who is the present Chairman now; Alderman Alston Cadore, Member; and the mover of the Motion, Alderman Christopher Encinas.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Mr. President, I was asked and I was invited to that meeting at the statutory meeting held on that day. And as I do for all other 13 corporations, I try to attend all statutory meetings—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—throughout the country; whether it belongs to the

UNC corporation or the PNM corporation.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: I was very delighted to know I was invited and I was treated with utmost respect. I gave the respect and I was treated with respect. There was no quarreling, no fighting, no fussing, nothing like that.

And I must say, in moving on from Siparia, as I said no one objected. The whole council agreed—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—and here we are today to fulfill the mandate of borough status of the Siparia Regional Corporation. Similarly, the Diego Martin Corporation approved their Motion at their statutory meeting held on the 2nd May, 2019, where they also called on the Government to declare their municipality a borough. And Mr. President, I must say nobody advised the councils what they should do. They advised the Ministry of Rural Development, which I was there at that time. This is what they wanted and this is what we intend to fulfill.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: In both cases, the Government agreed that justification put forward merited further investigation, and steps were taken to advance the process of making borough status a reality.

Mr. President, it is important to note that prior to these Motions, there had been no upliftment in the status of a municipality for upwards of 33 years. The last municipality to have conferred the borough status was the Chaguanas Borough Corporation in 1990. San Fernando and Port of Spain, Mr. President. If I may briefly summarize the changes in the municipal status one would note that the Port of Spain was established as a borough by the Municipal Corporation Ordinance

No. 10 of 1853, and subsequently became a city. San Fernando also gained borough status in 1853 by the same Ordinance which established the Borough of Port of Spain, and city status was therefore conferred on November 18, 1988. Arima, Mr. President. We have an “Arimian” in the House here today, which is Sen. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing. Being a member of that council at a point in time, Arima became a borough by Royal Charter in 1888, and currently stands as the first and only Charter and borough in the Caribbean, none came after that.

Point Fortin and Chaguanas. Mr. President, the municipalities of Point Fortin and Chaguanas were both elevated to borough status by the Point Fortin Corporation Act 1980 and the Municipal Corporations Act 1990, respectively. As it stands, over 33 years have passed since the passage of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, there has been significant population and economic growth within the municipalities since then which merits consideration of any of the requests and upliftment in the municipal status.

Mr. President, upon receipt of the Motions, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government conducted an in-depth examination to determine the legislative process required to give effective change in municipality status. It was ever noted that the existing Municipal Corporations Act 25:04 did not contain any express provisions to facilitate the elevation in status, and as such, the research was extended to several Commonwealth jurisdictions including the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, Jamaica, whose local government legislation included a prescribed process for altering the municipal status.

Additionally, advice was sought from the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs. Mr. President, based on our learnings, it was gleaned that it is most judicious an alteration of the municipal status would be on the behest

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of the municipalities or the residents who would petition this Government and the title of the city or the borough would only be confirmed after considering certain physical, social, and economic factors, including population size, importance, distinct character and identity of town; the level of commercial and economic activity and the existence of a well-established local government ministerial committee at work.

Mr. President, two ministerial committees of Cabinet were established to advise on the change of the municipal status of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the Siparia Regional Corporation.

1.30 p.m.

These committees gave due consideration to the physical, economic, social and other factors which could be a justification for elevation to borough status, and reported that in each case careful note was taken of physical growth and development in such urbanization, population size, density, residential and commercial expansion, trade and business, accessibility of government services, and physical infrastructure, spanning the last 33 years.

Mr. President, it was noted that both regions were found to have significant income-generating potential; significant natural resources, which support the development of industrial and agricultural sectors, small and medium enterprises sector; and considerable potential as cultural tourism or ecotourism generators. Mr. President, both possessed significant heritage and tourism assets; an abundance of recreational, cultural, and social facilities; substantial private and public educational institutions; a modern system of health and sanitation; and negotiable civil society organizations, places of worship, and NGOs, et cetera.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Mr. Vice-President, according to the Tenth Report of the EBC, the Diego Martin—the region of Diego Martin currently has a total electorate of 89,593 spread across 10 electoral districts, which notably has grown by over 50 per cent from 59,245 in 1992 when the first election was held upon passage of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990.

Mr. Vice-President, Diego Martin now boasts of a significant number of highly developed, residential neighbourhoods, spanning from low to high income, and is considered the most populous areas in the country. It also contains a well-established industrial park in Diamond Vale; an international multi-sport facility; modern and state-of-the-art private and public health care facilities; sophisticated public and private schools, including the maritime campus of the UTT; several commercial shopping centres, including most modern shopping mall in the country, The Falls at West Mall; a growing business sector comprising a considerable number of business establishments, office complexes, hardware stores, supermarkets, and a well-developed maritime and yachting industry.

Mr. Vice-President, Diego Martin is also home to the Chaguaramas peninsula and various arms of the defence force; extensive agriculture and farming in the Paramin area; the new West Park Recreational Savannah; a new Diego Martin Regional Corporation Administrative Complex; a deepwater and sheltered harbour and marina; a \$500 million international standard water and amusement park; a new facility to support local economic development and entrepreneurship in the Carenage Fish Fry; as well as numerous areas for leisure activities, including hiking, boating, cycling, water sports, and several well-known tourist attractions.

Mr. Vice-President, Diego Martin was also noted to be heavily developed

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and suburban in nature, and given its characteristics could easily fit in the criteria of the borough with the UK Local Government Classification System. Mr. Vice-President, according to the Tenth Report of the EBC, the region of Siparia has a total electorate of 72,946, spanning nine electoral districts. And based on 2011 data from the Central Statistical Office, Siparia is ranked as having the second most number of businesses in the southern region. The same 2011 CSO data revealed an increase in every category of business, from micro to large businesses, with the total registered businesses at 1,080. And no doubt, when the next survey is completed, these figures could easily be found to have doubled.

Siparia boasts of a substantive history of involvement in the energy sector as well as the well-established industrial sector, which includes Trinidad Generation Unlimited; La Brea Industrial Development Limited, LABIDCO; the LABIDCO port; and Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited.

Mr. Vice-President, the region is also an administrative hub for government services, including a Magistrates' Court, Board of Inland Revenue, National Insurance Board, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, headquarters of the South Western Division of the TTPS, Siparia District Health Facility, postal services, fire services, several prestigious primary and secondary schools. Siparia is also a tourist destination, being the home to the renowned festival of La Divina Pastora which notably attracts large multi-religious masses of the general population, not to mention the historic sites of the world famous Pitch Lake; Erin mud volcano; Trinidad's oldest resident, Banwari Man.

Mr. Vice-President, I want point out a few benefits of the elevation of status. This elevation of their status to borough will usher in a new era for both municipalities and will pave the way for enhanced local identity and respect

locally, regionally and internationally. Recognition as one of the newest boroughs will also bring increased opportunities for direct municipal investment, infrastructural development and private sector investments, and will be encouraged to expand their footprint within the municipality, thereby making it the centre of economic growth. New investment opportunities and attractions to the region would also serve to create employment opportunities for the residents, thereby increasing their overall standard of living and quality of life.

Mr. Vice-President, the enhanced status would also present great opportunities to partner with foreign local government bodies, since designation as a borough or city continues to attract prestigious acclaim worldwide. Foreign twinning arrangements, similar to those enjoyed by the existing cities and boroughs, will be more readily available to these corporations, facilitating culture, economic trade partnerships and exchanges that would redound to the benefit of the inhabitants.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Mr. Vice-President, the reasons advanced for the granting of this elevated status and the benefits to be derived are in total alignment, and the Government is in full support of the conferment of borough status and this is what these corporations have been lobbying for. Mr. Vice-President, I am extremely happy to stand here as a former local government councillor, alderman, mayor in this honourable House and to say that history will once again take place under this Government, under this Prime Minister, and for the benefit—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—of both the people of Diego Martin and Siparia, and the entire local government fraternity. Mr. Vice-President, this Bill represents a

new era for the region of Diego Martin and the region of Siparia—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—and serves as an inspiration for those municipal corporations with similar aspirations.

Mr. Vice-President, we anticipate that this elevation of status of the two municipalities will result in greater economic development; boost local employment; greater opportunities for partnership with foreign local government bodies; and generally, more recognition, prestige and pride among the citizenry abroad. We anticipate that in a short order more municipalities will clamour for consideration of their own circumstances, and we stand ready to give support and recognition where it is due.

Mr. Vice-President, normally when I get the opportunity to speak at these forums, I must give a little background of myself in local government. Mr. Vice-President, I love local government.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: I love serving the people. And whoever wants to get in politics and they do not have love for people, they are in the wrong business.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: I have worked in local government fraternity for over 40 years and I can say without fear of contradiction that the change in status boosted the economy of the municipality. There was a notable increase in business and development. And I can say, recall, countless visits from foreign and regional ambassadors, Ministers, NGOs, CBOs, and so many key stakeholders, all of whom were greatly interested in investing in the City of San Fernando.

And, Mr. Vice-President, as I look across to Sen. Wade Mark, I remember every time he spoke in this Chamber here, he will always speak about trade unions and his role and involvement in trade unions. And, Mr. Vice-President, I want to remind Sen. Mark that I was also a trade union member in the San Fernando City Corporation for over 30 years. So just as you are a fighter, Sen. Mark, I am a fighter for the people too.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: And I can call you “Comrade Mark”.

Mr. Vice-President, the Bill will not shift any boundaries, and I want to repeat it. The Bill will not shift any boundaries, as those have said before, nor will it infringe on any of the powers entrusted to the Elections and Boundaries Commission. Simply put, Mr. Vice-President, this Bill is a response to the call of the people of Siparia and Diego Martin who have determined, by way of resolution through their elected representatives, that they are desirous to be elevated.

In conclusion, Mr. Vice-President, I wish to congratulate the chairman and councils on their foresight to lobby for this enhanced status and I hope that their continued stewardship leads to increased economic development across their respective municipalities. You have advocated for your burgesses well, and in doing so made, history here today. The Government—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—supports you in your quest and look forwards to the change each one of you will make in your newly installed mayors. You will have Your Worship the Mayor of the Borough of Diego Martin and you will have the Your Worship the Mayor of Siparia.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. President, with these few words, I would like to welcome this change in borough status to the Diego Martin and Siparia Regional Corporations. And I want to express my sincerest gratitude to all those who have supported me in my local government quest. All the administrative arms, my colleagues, the mayors, chairmen, councillors while I was in Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, I worked with everybody at every level in this country. And I will always remain accessible as councillors and aldermen and mayors should be accessible to the people of this country. I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, we are here today to allow the Government to do perhaps what they are best at. We are here to permit them an opportunity to do the one thing that I think that they have mastered in the last eight years and that is to put on display the art of complete “mamaguism”. If they have not done to our science, Mr. Vice-President, because what they really want to do is have an opportunity prior to calling on election date, to come here and try to sell the population again, on this local government reform—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: —which for the last six months, they have done absolutely nothing except postpone elections. And that is what we are here to do today so, let us be real about it.

This Bill, is about a whole lot of form, and zero substance, because we have had I think about at least three, or if not more, speakers on the Government Bench, who despite repeated calls, from this side of the Chamber, still cannot name one actual benefit that will redound to the current residents soon to be burgesses of Siparia or Diego Martin, by this change of name that the Government has come here to give them today. And again, to utilize parliamentary speaking time to campaign and to try to sell the population on their local government reform. You see, having been forced to call an election that they are not ready for, they need to utilize every possible opportunity in order to try to sell the population on this local government reform that they set out a big timetable for and yet, they have not been able to actually deliver one single benefit to anybody whether it is Diego Martin, Siparia, Chaguanas or anywhere else in the country when it comes to local government reform. So that is why they are here.

They are here today to say that we are still not allowing you to vote, we will still not allow—tell you when the election will be held. We will show utter contempt and disrespect for judicial decision and not even say, when we are going to have this election, but “do not worry, you all will now be a borough”. And it sounds so lovely. We will be a borough. “You are not going to be just a regional corporation, you will be a borough. And that is what we are good at. We are good at selling you all on nothing”.

Sen. Mark: Dreams.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Dreams, dreams, no, dreams. I do not even think it is a dream. Because even the person who pilot this Bill, had to sort of, in his own nice way, because he is good with words, not much else, but good with words, had to

say that, you know, it really is just a change of name. And there is no actual material benefit to the citizens, whether they call for it through their elected representatives or not, there is no actual benefit, nothing will improve in terms of the delivery of services, nothing will improve in terms of their access to resources, nothing changes when you move from being a region to a borough. So, we have nine regions, three boroughs and two cities in this country, and all of them suffering the same way under the PNM. So, whether you are called what—regardless of what they call you same suffering, and that will not change.

Mr. Vice-President, I listened with amusement, about the Minister talking about his love for people and how well he works with everyone, and how accessible he is—the former Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, I should say. But you know, and he is really is very accessible. I remember the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government sitting right next to me, in the funeral of our dearly beloved Mr. Purushottam Singh, the former representative for the electoral district of Debe South. And do you know that under the tenure of this Minister, the people of Debe South had to go to court and wait an entire year to get an election called on local government so they could get a new councillor.

Sen. Lyder: Wow.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: In a three-year term in office for a councillor, the people of Debe South, did not get love from this Government or this Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. They did not feel that love because for an entire year, they had no representation. And I will give you one guess about what it was that was the excuse—was only two excuses they have, Kamla and COVID. It was COVID. COVID was the reason that this Government refused until we took

it to court and filed a constitutional claim against them and a judicial review, for their failure to call an election. So, this is a government that is coming here to tout their love for local government, and their love for people and how proud they are of their record on local government. But they will not even give people an opportunity to vote in local government. At every twist and turn and opportunity they have, they try to deprive people of the opportunity to—the most fundamental underpinning of the democratic system of local government in this country is the right to vote.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: And while they want to give them name and fame, and hang a chain around somebody's neck to call them a mayor, they do not want to even give people the right to elect their own representatives when it is due. And that is why I say all of this here today is “mamaguism”.

So, now instead of hiding inside of your home within the region of Siparia, paying for private security to keep your family safe, you could hide inside the borough of Siparia. Instead of residents of Diego Martin calling 999 and I am getting no response, the burgesses of Diego Martin can call 999 and get no response when there is a bandit coming into their home. And that is what we will have after today when this Bill is passed by this Government.

I heard one member opposite say that reform seems to be a bad word for the Opposition. Mr. Vice-President, reform is not a bad word for the Opposition at all. What we do not like is dictatorship. What we do not support is the installation of executive councils, which silences the voice of a minority in corporations, which are split. Because that is what this reform has brought and those are the parts of the Bill, on local government reform that the Opposition objected to so, stop

misleading the population that the Opposition is not in favour of reform. We are we are in favour of local government reform. We are just not in favour of silencing the voice of a minority especially when you have corporations that are almost split down the middle. You have corporations that are, you know, five one way and four the other way. And whether it is PNM-controlled or UNC-controlled, you should not have executive councils installed by the mayor who is a product of the majority deciding who will exercise the functions on those councillors. That is what we are opposed to. We are not opposed to reform. We are in support of meaningful, decent reforms that will truly bring—

Sen. Mitchell: Mr. Vice-President, I have given my friend, a long time, a long wind up, but 46 (1). We are not talking about reform. We are not talking about elections.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, 46 (1) has been raised. I ask that you tailor your contribution to the Bill at hand, please.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Mr. Vice-President, I am sorry, but I am responding directly to a matter raised by several Members opposite, who have spoken about nothing but local government reform.

Sen. Lyder: Yeah.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: In fact, every single speaker in this House has spoken on nothing but local government reform.

Sen. Lyder: Yes, politicking.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: So I am here responding directly to a comment saying: Reform is a bad word for the Opposition made by, I believe it was Sen. Hislop, who used that expression.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: I take very copious notes, Mr. Vice-President, whilst I am speaking. So, Mr. Vice-President, the history of local government will show that it is whenever the people of this country wake up, rise up and reject the PNM that they see meaningful reform in this country. And everyone, all of the Government's speakers from the mover of the, sorry, the person who piloted the Bill, to Sen. The Hon. Minister Kazim Hosein, took us through the history of local government, as well as the history of various boroughs and cities and so on. And so, I will spend a little bit of time on history and I want to correct, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government who talked about the PNM bringing reform of municipal corporations. As usual, this is a case where somebody did all of the heavy lifting and the PNM come in to try to take credit because it was under an NAR Government that the Municipal Corporations Act was passed. It is the NAR that passed it. I think it was proclaimed the following year, just like they beat their chests now that they have proclaimed and operationalized procurement, someone else did the heavy lifting and what they did is, they came and they whittled it down. And history will show you that after the NAR Government reformed the county councils—what we had as County Councils Act, back in the day from I think 1967 or so, that it is the NAR Bill, that came into effect as the Municipal Corporations Act and the Municipal Corporations Act, that we still have today, passed in the year 1990, a significant year in our history, that we have what is today the structure of local government in this country.

Subsequent to that when the PNM took power 1991—you know what they did? They came in 1992 to merge corporations together. That is the reform that they brought in 1992. So, when they want to carry us through the history, they must be honest about their history, and that merging of regions that occurred in

1992, under the PNM was really gerrymandering in smart because what they did is that they created now that we must only have 14 corporations and they did it in such a way to make sure that there were not so many regions that will be controlled by Opposition. That is what they did. So what did they do? They merged San Juan with Laventille. They merged Tunapuna with Piarco. Look at where Tunapuna is and look at where Piarco is. They merged those two together. They merged Couva/Tabaquite and Talparo together, which was previously under the NAR original plan for creating towns and regions that could develop and grow into their own. They merged them together into one corporation, and say well, you see that that going to be Opposition, put them as one, together.

Sen. Mark: Exactly.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: So they only have one.

Sen. Mark: Yeah.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: That is just what they did, gerrymandering in smart. And they merged Mayaro and Rio Claro together. So that is the PNM is record again, and that is Act No. 7 of 1992, for anybody who is interested in it.

They brought amendments to the Parliament between 2002 and 2010. You know what I was to do? Well, at least then they had more—they were not so cowardly, and they had a little more respect for the Parliament. They brought Acts to the Parliament under the Municipal Corporations Act, to put off elections again. At least, like I say, they did not try to come through the backdoor, they did there. Now, under the People's Partnership administration, you had real reform, you had one of the most significant reforms introduced to local government since 1990. And that was the introduction of proportional representation—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: —because it is only under a UNC Government that believes in representation, that believes in democracy, that believes in the rights of the people to have adequate and fair representation, that we introduced proportional representation into local government in the form of Act No. 13 of 2013 because we believe in the philosophical underpinnings of our democracy, and that proportional representation, really and truly bolsters and improves our democratic way of life in this country and so, that is what the People's Partnership administration did.

I have heard several speakers opposite and even on the Independent Bench, talk about improving the lives of the people and how the Opposition—the “piloter” of the Bill, said that you know, the Opposition does not support them and so on. So, if you want to improve the lives of the people and gain the support of the Opposition, I want to give you a few pointers here today of what you can do. You can give constitutional recognition to local government so that you do not have people—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: —randomly just deferring elections. What you can do to improve the lives of people of the Siparia and Diego Martin, is not change their title from residents to burgesses, but put fixed dates for elections into the Municipal Corporations Act, and put an end to this election date-in-the-back pocket-type of politics that we have in this country. If it is, you want to improve the lives of the people who live in the various regions and corporations of this country, what you really ought to do is to ensure that people do not have to go to court in order to have a right to elect their representatives.

Now, again, if we want to talk about reform of local government, I want to continue to say that it is under the People's Partnership Government, for example,

that regulations were brought to govern municipal police in 2014. That was brought by the People's Partnership administration. We also brought, you know, by way of Legal Notice to introduce the special duty allowance for the municipal police that we also gave to the regular police. So that they got that \$1,000 tax-free duty allowance. You see now, at a time, when you know, crime is at its absolute highest and the last eight years, you have a government shoving 4 per cent down the throats of our protective services but that is not what the People's Partnership was about.

2.00 p.m.

We were about, really and truly, ensuring that municipal police will enhance safety and security. Whether it is a region, a borough or city, you will want it to have municipal police and try to enhance municipal police and expand municipal police, and that is what we were bringing to the municipal corporation in terms of amendments. We did not just changed names, we had action. Sen. Deyalsingh raised some points about some of the other boroughs and he also mentioned the issue of corruption within local government. You know, he spoke about benefits to the people in boroughs and questioned what will be the benefits, and he made specific reference to, you know, Point Fortin and others, Mr. Vice-President, but he also raised the issue of corruption. I want to ask a question—and I am sorry the Minister did not want to sit down and listen when I asked him about why he did not have love for the people of Debe South. He fled the Chamber after I raised that matter. But in 2019 there was an investigation conducted by one media house and we had a report; the first article and a series of articles captioned on the 16th July, 2019, captioned, “Gangsters benefit from contracts through corporation”, and no surprise the named—

Sen. Mitchell: Mr. Vice-President, on a point of order, 46(1), please.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lutchmedial, although your rebuttal is based upon partials of what has been raised already, I ask that you tailor it a little bit more accurately and swiftly within the debate at hand. Please proceed.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. You see, I am responding directly to what Sen. Deyalsingh raised, and Sen. Deyalsingh was not interrupted because perhaps he did not zero-in enough on the issue that affects the Government, because two PNM-controlled corporations were named in this article as there being seven known gang leaders as getting contracts, and one of those corporations is Diego Martin. So that is the relevance, if it is not my friend does not follow and does not recall that the Diego Martin corporation was named in that article as being one of the corporations where there was, you know, an issue of concern. And on the heels of that report, the then Minister of Rural Development and Local Government who came here to speak about his love for people and enhancing their lives and so on, spoke about an audit report and promised an audit report. So instead of coming here to give us the history and a whole “kahani” from way back when to now about his own history in local government, he should have told us what the audit report into the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, soon to be borough, had to say about financing of gangs through that corporation. That would be meaningful if we were here to talk about boroughs today and—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order, relevance 46(1). This is going beyond.

Sen. Mark: She is responding to a contribution—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: I am responding.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: They do not want to hear that.

Mr. Vice-President: Once again—once again, that horse has left the stable, it is in the domain of the debate, but, Senator, I ask that you respectfully curtail your comments towards the Bill as much as you can.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Yes. You see, Mr. Vice-President, I understand they are getting antsy because they are here to sell dreams and hopes to the people of Diego Martin when they have done absolutely nothing to treat with the issues—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial:—the issues affecting the people of Diego Martin. “Mamaguism.” A change of name while crime riddles this country, but they cannot stand here and say what they have done to eradicate corruption, but, we will change the name. And so they are getting antsy because they know elections around the corner and that they cannot answer any of these questions, but they come here to campaign today about reform and a change of name as though it is promising something to anybody.

Mr. Vice-President, I heard somebody raised the issue, talking about Siparia and want to talk about Daisy Voisin; again, the former Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the only thing he knows about Daisy Voisin is, he went down to Siparia and he pulled off something on a sign to rename a street. But I want to tell him again, they renamed a street after Daisy Voisin, but while he was there pulling the sign off of that—pulling the cloth off of that street sign and cutting some ribbon and so on, he should have looked across the street and see the very beautiful reformed Irwin Park facility under the People’s Partnership government that we delivered to the people of Siparia.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: State-of-the-art sporting facility that under the PNM

government ended up turning into a shelter for migrants when they left the entire coastline that is part of Siparia, open, and every day you had hundreds of migrants coming in. Go back and read in the newspaper, Irwin Park, beautiful state-of-the-art modern sporting facility in Siparia turned into a shelter and a place where the police would round-up migrants and put them there, not knowing what to do. And whilst the Government spends a day of parliamentary time, or two days because there is one in the other place as well, speaking about how wonderful it will be for the regional corporation of Siparia to now be known as the borough of Siparia, they, through their inaction, bad policies and failed governance have allowed Siparia to have an infiltration of illegal migrants through the unsecured borders and, of course, social and economic turmoil and a dramatic increase in crime, and none of that will change when you change the name from region to borough. So let us not come here and speak about Daisy Voisin when the hometown of Daisy Voisin continues to experience decay under this particular administration.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Mr. Vice-President, as we are on the point of street signs, and I heard again, because it was raised and I am responding, Minister, that when Sen. Deyalsingh raised the cost of street signs, and so on, you know, that is the one accomplishment, I think, of the entire Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

Long ago every region had a colour assigned to it, so in San Fernando we had a nice beautiful navy blue street sign. In Princes Town, I think, they had orange; others had different signs and so on. The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government embarked on a mission to change all street signs into one

ugly green and that is the only thing that I think that they have accomplished and that that Ministry has done since taking office. So when the Minister—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Vice-President, 46(1), what is all this about?

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: There is particular legislation—

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*] heat—

Mr. Vice-President: Members—Members—

Sen. Lyder: “You cyah come here and talk and then we can’t respond.”

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder—

Sen. Lyder: “You cyah talk and we cyah respond.”

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder, that is up to me to decide. Relax. Calm down. Senator, as I stated before, yes, you are responding, can you curtail your response in like manner according to the Bill, please.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Yes. So I am responding to Sen. Deyalsingh’s concern about cost, because Sen. Deyalsingh also raised the issue, and I think another Member raised the issue about under local government reform and the increased funding that the Government says it is going to give to regional corporations, whether there will be accountability now for this spending and how will the enhanced status of these two regions into boroughs improve accountability. But I want to tell Sen. Deyalsingh that he will never see accountability under this Government and that he will have to wait just a little bit longer until a UNC government comes back into power—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial:—before he sees any sign of accountability. Right? Under this Government you only having jumping up to prevent people from talking about

and highlighting the failures, but you will never see accountability and you will never see any explanation of accountability once this Government is in office. So he has a little bit of a wait.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: You see, and as Sen. Deyalsingh also raised the issue of, for example, other boroughs and he talked about what changed when they acquired borough status, and the truth of the matter is nothing changed. But you know when things changed? Things changed for some of our boroughs and cities when the PNM took office, and I will close by mentioning two of those boroughs, some of which has been, you know, raised by Sen. Deyalsingh.

The borough of Point Fortin, for example—and this is why being a borough makes you no different from being a region or makes it no different from being a city. The borough of Point Fortin continues to suffer under the PNM because of their failures with Atlantic LNG. The Dragon cannot even get a box step right as yet, two six months into the two-year moratorium, but they are waiting on Dragon Gas to help Atlantic LNG to be a lifeline to Atlantic LNG, and meanwhile the burgesses of Point Fortin, who have the privilege of being known as a borough, continue to languish and suffer under the—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order, 46(1).

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you are veering way beyond and way beyond—you are veering way beyond the scope of the debate, as much as you are carrying it down a line of response. Kindly bring your closing arguments and closing points into the Bill, please.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Yeah. You see, Mr. Vice-President, this is a Bill with absolutely no substance so it is very difficult to talk about anything other than to

respond what everybody says, because there is absolutely no meaning, no substance and no value to what the PNM has come here to do today, and that is the point. So I am responding to a direct, a direct comment on the borough of Point Fortin by Sen. Deyalsingh. You see, some of us actually take our, you know, role, like Sen. Deyalsingh, seriously to stand in this Parliament and speak about the issues that really affect citizens of this country. And the last issue affecting anybody in this country is whether they live in a regional corporation or a borough corporation, but that is what the PNM want to discuss.

They do not want to discuss crime. They do not want to discuss economic decline. They do not want to discuss security. They do not want to discuss roads, bridges, a pothole, garbage collection, none of the above, flooding—definitely not flooding. They do not want to discuss any of that, they want discuss the change of—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Point of the order, 46(1), what is all of this?

Sen. Mark: Yeah. “She referring to you.”

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lutchmedial, your comments are really, really, really going too far from the Bill. I understand that you are responding but I am asking you to not extrapolate as far away as you are going because you are starting to lose relevance.

Sen. J. Lutchmedial: Yes. Mr. Vice-President, it is amazing that when everyone else raised these issues, I do not know where the Minister was, but the Minister was not here to jump up on any points of order. But anyway, as I will say, whilst every region, including Siparia—I would say, particularly areas in Siparia, continue to suffer from neglect, whilst people in Diego Martin continue to suffer from neglect and poor governance under this administration, we are here today to

make sure that there will be two people walking around with—I think somebody said and I am responding—\$3,000 chains around their neck now, calling themselves mayor, because that is the only change that will be brought about by this piece of legislation brought today by this Government.

Mr. Vice-President, this Bill encapsulates and succinctly captures the essence of the People's National Movement and that is a whole lot of form and absolutely zero substance. I thank you

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Deeroop Teemal.

Sen. Lyder: “Yuh cah take de heat—cannot take de heat.”

Mr. Vice-President: Senators—Sen. Lyder, there is a Senator on his feet.

Sen. Lyder: Oh yes.

Mr. Vice-President: He is about to make his contribution, kindly allow him to do so.

Sen. Deeroop Teemal: Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Bill before us here today in this august Chamber. Mr. Vice-President, this Bill before us comes in the midst of local government reform and whilst we have heard from the contributions by our Senators about the extent of development in the representative areas, that is Diego Martin and Siparia, and what projects have been done, what has been accomplished, the extent of the reform, not necessarily the development of projects, construction projects, but the extent of reform as captured in the municipal reform Act. There is no timing as to where we are with the actually reform, and I felt that in presenting a Bill to make Diego Martin Regional Corporation and Siparia Regional Corporation, to change the status from corporation to borough, that some attempt would have been made

to link the actual process, the actual progress that has been made with regard to reform, particularly under what was set out in the municipal reform Act—the Act in which we have very detailed reforms outlined. So at the beginning of my contribution, Mr. Vice-President, I will just want to revisit some of those things based on what I have said just now, and local government is really about communities and ensuring services delivered in an efficient, timely, cost effective and equitable manner, despite size, nature and geographic location.

2.15 p.m.

In addition, the reform envisaged that local government should not be seen as an arm or appendage of central government, but as an organization in its own right, fully conscious of the needs of citizens within their communities, and having the ability and resources to address the needs of citizens through service-driven strategy, goals and objectives. And I am sure that the intent of the Bill before us is along these directions. But at the same time, we have to bear in mind that the reform has been predicated on certain studies that were done previously, certain experiences and certain consultations that were carried out. And yes, local government reform is indeed a complex matter, and any step to enhance the status of any one of the corporations would also be lodged in some degree of complexity due to lack of definitive criteria regarding changing from a corporation to a borough, and changing from a borough to a city.

The reform is seeking to address several things: political and administrative arms having parallel arms that only relate to each other at the highest level; informal systems, processes and relationships that are used to get around formal systems that do not work; parts of the service operate in a dual capacity, for instance, municipal corporations manage both the delivery of services and also

deliver services themselves. Now, if this is an integral part of reform, in the contributions here today, moving from corporations to borough status, this has not really—I have not heard this aspect being specifically mentioned with regard to Diego Martin and Siparia, where both the delivery of services and the corporation delivering services themselves would be adequately addressed by the change in status from corporation to borough.

And then, of course, the existence of a bipartisan system, which is manifested through pro-government councils or anti-government councils, which leads to political interference and manipulation. There is also inadequate funding, inadequacy of current legislation. Although we had this monumental reform Bill, we are still realizing that there are areas of legislation that needs to be looked at through amendments and, of course, the whole issue of the lack of productivity.

Now, I think the intention is that by moving from corporation to borough, some of these factors would inevitably be addressed. But are they going to be addressed in an informal way and benefits are going to come from that, or is the reform seeking to have more definitive, as I said, measures and criteria for bringing about the reform?

Now, Mr. Vice-President, I have said it before and I will say it again, the reform envisaged is indeed very ambitious. We are talking about eight specific divisions to be established, corporate services, et cetera. And within those eight divisions, we have functional units, which when you add together with disaster management, monitoring and evaluation, and internal audit, there are almost 32 functional units to be established under the respective eight divisions envisaged in the reformat. So it is indeed a mammoth task. It is a daunting task. And this is the background of reform that this Bill is being brought into.

Now, in piloting the Motion, you know, we have heard from the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government that there were certain steps that were taken. One, it was by resolution of the corporation. The respective councillors of the corporation made a resolution of their desire to attain borough status, and the matter was considered by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. A Note was sent to Cabinet, and the Cabinet appointed committees to consider the request.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, in light of the primary motive for local government reform, which is decentralization and removal, as much as possible, of the role of central government within the local government system, I still have some reservations about this approach here, regarding having to change the status of corporations to boroughs, and boroughs to cities. In that, yes, Sen. Hislop went into a lot of detail about the desire and the will of the people within those corporations to chart their own future, to chart their own pathways for growth and development, and the word “desire” came up a lot. But in addition to the desire of persons within those corporations, I ask the question: Is the desire to be tempered or to be evaluated or to be measured against certain criteria regarding the eligibility for promotion?

And, you know, outside of just desire and will and a request, and a request through the Ministry to the Cabinet—because if we are talking decentralization, I ask the question: Why is the Government still involved at Cabinet level to determine whether a corporation should go to a borough status or to a city status? Why such a high degree of central government’s involvement, where the Cabinet has to appointment committees to look at it? And why not have some other mechanism that takes away this centralization from Government to look at this?

Because we have the local association of local government authorities that actually is in the Municipal Corporations Act. It is in the legislation. I am asking: What was their role in this recommendation that is here before us? Were they consulted? Did it go to them? The request, did it go to them? And did this local association of local government authorities, did they make a recommendation for the consideration of Government? I am not sure, because it was not mentioned. And the question is whether they should have a more pronounced role.

So the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government did mention that there are amendments to be made to the Municipal Corporations Act because, as I said before, it is complex. There are so many aspects. And I think this is one of the aspects, where you transition from corporation, to borough, to city that unfortunately the Joint Select Committee at the time, because of the wide range of things that were being looked at, this was not looked at particularly, in terms of changing it from one of, in my view, subjectivity to a large extent, to bringing it within more—where we could have more empirical data in order to arrive, to justify the desire and the will of the people to have this transition.

So I see this as an area where we have to come with amendments that would lay out, in a more definitive way, how corporations transition to boroughs and to cities, and maybe a more pronounced role for the local association of local government authorities, and minimizing the role of central government in this process, in keeping with the objectives of the reforms for local government that we are looking at.

Now, the current Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, hon. Sen. Kazim Hosein, by his contribution, did pre-empt some of what I was going to question. But he did mention about the benefits that would be gained from the

attainment of borough status by Diego Martin and Siparia, such as twinning and all of these things. But what I did not get from him, and I would have really liked to get such information, was what have been the benefits—and I think Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh would have mentioned this—what are the benefits—an assessment of the benefits that Arima, Chaguanas and Point Fortin have derived from being a borough. What are the benefits? And I think that would have helped us in this debate. Because in addition to what the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries said, it would have helped us to really evaluate. He did outline possible benefits, but how much of those benefits really became—changed from possibility to reality for the three boroughs that we already have?

You see, for these corporations, one of the things coming out of the Municipal Corporations Act, and the amendments that were made for reform, is the whole issue of a development plan. That is one of the foremost things in the reform, a development plan. Now, I ask the question: Where is the Siparia Regional Corporation and the Diego Martin Regional Corporation with regard to the production of this development plan? Is their desire and will to become a borough in keeping with what they have in their development plan? Is it a work in progress? And is it a question that we are putting the cart before the horse? Because in the midst of all of this reform, you know, we have this move to upgrade but at the same time, where are we on the pathway to reform, as envisaged in the reform?

Now, Mr. Vice-President, in a previous contribution that I did when the Bill for—the Municipal Corporations Act was being amended, which included a huge amount of reform, you know, I raised the question of change and the management of change. So the reform is putting on the corporation the need for change, and the

need for significant change. And on top of that, we are adding to these two corporations, a change from corporation to borough. Now, if we say that that change is just symbolic and that change is just to change the status quo, then we are defeating ourselves in terms of saying about all the benefits that would accrue. Because being in the midst of a change, where the extent of change is questionable to this point in time, and then we are seeking additional change, I really question the wisdom of that.

The whole point of change is that—the suggestion was made at that time when I was contributing that we need highly skilled change managers to be enlisted to facilitate the transition and implementation process. And through expert training and continuous development, staff of the human resource units within the corporations, of each corporation, would become skilled in the area of change management.

With that, Mr. Vice-President, I will just summarize. Are we putting the cart before the horse? Are we rushing this thing? Should we implement the reforms that are envisaged to a greater extent before we look to make these corporations boroughs? Should we look at, going down the road, including as possible amendments to this Act, the Municipal Corporations Act, where we seek to close this gap, where we seek to legislate how corporations can transition from corporations to boroughs to cities, and not leave it up to subjectivity, and to maximize the role of the local association of local government authorities and minimize the centralized role of central government in determining that?

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Vice President: Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye.

Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye: Thank you Mr. Vice-President. I really thank you, because my name is not on the list, I had not planned to speak, but a few minutes ago I decided I should speak. The motto of my school is “veritas”, “truth” and I have heard that in piloting this Bill that no benefits were mentioned. But I have heard an important benefit of this Bill which I would like to speak to, I heard the Minister mention a very important word and that word is status.

One very often hears that nothing is free. There are lots of things that are free, the air we breathe, the friendships we have and one can give a whole list of things. Is status a benefit? I wholeheartedly agree that it is not just a benefit, it is a very important benefit.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye: Right now in my country, when I read the newspaper, when I listen to talk shows I hear so much sadness, I hear despair. What will status bring to a borough? That sense of community and pride.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye: Pride, is what it will bring.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye: That—or, I thought I heard bee buzzing around, you know. Thank you very much. Yeah, so we hear about—as was being mentioned there, about the Borough of Arima. You know you hear—I have never been you know, but I have heard my friends talking about borough day, and south and they going here and they going there. It is a sense of pride and people are going there—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:—they are going there and they are having fun. I have

not gone as yet, but I have heard a lot of what is happening there. I have seen the photos in the newspaper and therefore, you see that people from all about are going to these places and having fun and spending money. So you not only getting this intangible thing that you call status you know, you are also bringing something into the economy of that particular borough. Now, that collective pride that comes from a new status, is something that we do not really think about, but it is very real.

When you get a national award, you do not get any money with it you know, Mr. Vice-President. You do not get any money, but you get a status. You are a member of the distinguished society of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

2.35 p.m.

So that question, that status of being a borough, to me, will bring to a community not only the pride but a sense of hope that there is something good happening in this place where there is so much crime. Where there is, you know, everyday we are reading about home invasions, perhaps it will bring together people who are bonded together in this new status and who will would look out more for one another.

So that question of the new status of being a borough, I can see helping to bring together a community where we have more of a relationship one to burgess to another and we right now have a lot of alienation in the society. So if there is something that we can bring people together, where they could feel mutual satisfaction that we are something more special than we were before, I say, bring it on. Bring it on and let us have something to look forward to that we are now, you know, you raise your shoulder a little higher, we are a borough, you know, and

maybe you can bring the borough up to the Piarco people as well, the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation.

So, I would say, there is in fact some benefit to be derived from being a borough. It may not only be something that is monetary but it is something sometimes something in the soul because the soul of the nation needs to be restored and whatever can be done—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:—I would say, let us do it. So, I have been recently, not too long ago, for the first time I visited Siparia. Well I mean, they use to call it Siparia in the days when they use to beat us in Best Village. Nobody mentioned that today, you know. But we feared Siparia because they were winning all the time. So that I have seen a lot development there. I did not know it but the person with me, my family member was saying, you know, “I grew up around there as a child for sometime when my father was in charge of some business there and there has been a lot of development”. So, I understand the population has increased exponentially, so that bring on the borough and maybe the things that can happen when people put their collective heads together they can see how they can raise money to offset the moneys that you are going to have to spend. Maybe you can have competitions for the signs for the borough. There are many things that can be done on the computer that you would not have to change all these letterheads by spending a lot of money. There are many things that can be done if people would get together and think creatively of what could happen. It is not just about the money. It is also about the soul. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Minister in the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts.

Senator.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, may I remind you, I am the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. Mr. Vice-President, I want to thank Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye for her contribution.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: She took away my entire speech.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: But I want to adopt entirely the contribution of Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Mr. Vice-President, I will start off by responding to Sen. Roberts. Sen. Roberts stood up here for all of three minutes. Mr. Vice-President, if the Opposition, if the Opposition does not wish to come here and debate and carry out the will of the people of Siparia and Diego Martin, then they “doh” have to come. We will sit here and we will pass the Bill. So Sen. Roberts’ big point was, “you all make big people come out here to bathe to come here to debate a name change”. Well, Mr. Vice-President, through you, it is entirely within Sen. Roberts’ discretion whether he wants to bathe and change before he comes here. It is also entirely within his discretion to stand up in this House and debate good legislation as we have put forward here today. But what you do not do is come here and for three minutes insult the people of the Siparia and Diego Martin.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: For three minutes. And through you, Mr. Vice-President, I would say to Sen. Roberts, you see the three-minute contributions, he can save that for his personal and private affairs.

Mr. Vice-President, Sen. Lutchmedial went on about mamaguy. And in Sen. Lutchmedial's entire contribution, again, spoke about elections and trying to "Ravi-down" the whole debate. We are not here for that. On May 18th the Privy Council delivered its judgment. You "Ravi-down" the debate.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: The Privy Council delivered its judgment, Mr. Vice-President, and within three months, they will get their elections. If it is elections they want, "is elections they go get". But Sen. Lutchmedial spoke about corruption and in identifying her points on corruption she spoke about some reports in the media with gangsters, et cetera. But let me remind Sen. Lutchmedial about a man they called Glen Ram, the Chairman of the Mayaro Regional Corporation who was charged, who was charged for misbehaviour in public office for demanding and receiving bribes of \$1,500 from poor people, you know, out on bail.

Sen. Lutchmedial: Not big money for gangster in Diego Martin.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Let me remind Sen. Lutchmedial, as we are on the point of corruption about someone by the name of Councillor Anil Maharaj of Cumuto who in 2021 was charged for misbehaviour in public office. He is the chairman of the finance committee in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation. Both UNC members—

Hon. Senator: Wow.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:—charged for misbehaviour in public office for demanding and receiving bribes from a contractor. He too is out on bail. We are on corruption. Mr. Vice-President, would you believe, Mr. Vice-President, I have to remind you, would you believe that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is also charged and out on bail.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Sen. Lutchmedial has the temerity to come here and even utter the word “corruption”.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: I know! [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: And, Mr. Vice-President, we are the PNM.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: [*Inaudible*] Corrupt!

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: In recent times, Mr. Vice-President, you have seen defection after defection.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Yes!

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Lyder: Marcus Girdharie, Marabella South, Vistabella.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: My good friend.

Sen. Lyder: Mr. Vice-President—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder, I am on my feet.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Lutchmedial: 46(1). They fighting hard—

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Lyder, I am on my legs. I was actually on my legs before you stood up. Right?

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Minister, I must ask you to obey 46(1), you are veering very far off the debate.

Hon. Senator: What?

Mr. Vice-President: Albeit the horse has left the stable, I ask you bring in your points to more relevance, please.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: I am sorry.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: In complete deference, I take your guidance, Mr. Vice-President, but I have to talk about the defections because the defections tying into the response on corruption of Mr. Marcus Girdharie, of Sheldon Garcia in Arima Central—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:—of Samuel Sankar.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: And more to come.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: And more to come but they had defected because of the treatment, the acceptance of wrongdoing by the leadership of the United National Congress.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Yes!

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: And, Mr. Vice-President, before I move off of Sen. Lutchmedial, since 2015 we have been talking about reform, since 2015. We came into office on a manifesto based on local government reform. The UNC wanted no part of those discussions, no part. So now we are in the election season, we are in 2023 and would you believe now the UNC wants to talk about local government

reform? Now the UNC wants to promise that only they could deliver local government reform. We have been at local government reform for the past eight years and now my support for the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, we will deliver the reform.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: The people have asked for it and the people will get it.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Awww, with cake.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Mr. Vice-President, let me touch on Sen. Mark. You really have to give Sen. Mark a Tony Award, you know.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: He is an actor par excellence.

Hon. Senator: Par excellence.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Sen. Mark said, it was not the will of the people. It was not the will of the people. It was the will of the people. That is the way our democracy is built.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: Through representation.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: The people vote in, through an election process, their representatives and their representatives represent and act on their behalf. It was a democratic process that was at work. That is what the councillors are there to do. And Sen. Hosein, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, former Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, read it into the record but Sen. Mark kept asking, where are the documents, where are the documents? Well, I have it in my hand. Without wanting to display, I have them in my hand.

Mr. Vice-President, I have in my hand the Motion. I have in my hand the Motion. Motion at the 26th statutory meeting 2016 to 2019 term held on Thursday, 31st January, 2019 at the Siparia Regional Corporation. I have it in my hand here. But what I also have in my hand here and the Motion is very long. I will not read it into the record but I will read the resolution. The Motion has about seven recitals.

Be it resolved that this council through the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government petition the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to take the necessary action to designate the municipality of Siparia as a borough.

So this is the approval of the Motion. So before the Motion was read, supported and passed, which I will come to, the Motion had to be approved to be presented. So I have the approval here at the 21st day of January, 2019. And it is signed by Mr. Christopher Encinas Alderman the mover of the Motion. But it is also signed here by the corporation chairman Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh, UNC member. And it is countersigned by the Chief Executive Officer of the Siparia Regional Corporation, Mr. Ravindranath Gangoo.

Mr. Vice-President, as Sen. Hosein, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has said, the Motion was moved by Alderman Encinas, seconded by councillor Debesette and all members agreed that the Motion in the name of Christopher Encinas Aldermen in the Siparia Regional Corporation to designate the municipality of Siparia as a borough be approved.

And then further, the corporate secretary, the corporate secretary of that corporation, because present along with Minister Hosein were seven members, the servants, civil servants within the corporation, they were present at the meeting.

And the corporate secretary wrote to the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government on February the 6th, 2019, to indicate that:

Your urgent attention is drawn to the Motion as named above approved and ratified at the 26th statutory meeting held on January 31, 2019. A copy of Motion and relevant documents are hereby attached.

So that is where it is. But why would the Opposition Members now come to distance themselves from this?

2.50 p.m.

You know, Mr. Vice-President, what we are hearing on this side is when the leadership of the UNC heard of that dastardly act that the UNC members committed to support the elevation of status from Siparia from a regional corporation to a borough, she became very, very incensed, and she sent the Member for Oropouche West down to deal with those members. So I am not surprised—I know he loves his guitar playing ways, but I am not surprised at Dr. Glenn Ramdharsingh is removed as the chairman. I am not surprised. He betrayed them.

Mr. Vice-President, now, every time there is a debate in this House, there are opportunities to disturb my internal peace.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: And those opportunities are usually taken up by Members of the Opposition. But today, Mr. Vice-President, Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh's contribution really disturbed me, and I feel a little sensitive because I lived—I was a proud resident of the Borough of Point Fortin. I lived there for four years. I have the distinct privilege of being the son of a mayor of Point Fortin.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: So when Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh went on about the Borough of Point Fortin and what it achieved and what benefits accrued to the people of Point Fortin, I was disturbed. Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh raised the issue about cost; about cost. Cost is always an issue, as it was between the time 2010 to 2015, when every two months the United National Congress would change the name of a Ministry or expand a Ministry. And you would have to change—

Hon. Senator: Thirty-three Ministers.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:—33 Ministers; you would have to change stationery; you would have to change signs; you would have to change signs on vehicles, all of that. I understand that. But this is one change, the change from regional corporation to the change of borough.

Now, I speak here on behalf of the Minister of Trade and Industry, proud former Member of Parliament for the great people of Point Fortin—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: —but I also speak on behalf of all the communities in Point Fortin. I lived in Clifton Hill, but the people of Techier, Harriman Park, Mahaica, Cap-de-Ville, Gonzales, Egypt, I speak on all of their behalf.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: One of the proudest festivals, one of the proudest gatherings, second only to our national carnival celebrations is the Point Fortin Borough Day.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: The Point Fortin Borough Day is a festival—if Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh knows anything about Point Fortin, Point Fortin has a large diaspora. Lots of people from Point Fortin, they go abroad to New York to live

their lives and they come back every year. It is like a pilgrimage to the Borough of Point Fortin. And the borough celebrations are done through the funds of the borough corporation, but also through the very excellent sponsors that exist within the Point Fortin Corporation. We have Atlantic LNG. We have had Texaco come Trinmar, now Heritage Petroleum, and it is funded there. But the festival itself creates so much economic development and so much pride to the people of Point Fortin. One thing you “cyah” beat the people of Point Fortin on is the matter of pride and pride in their borough. So I have to disagree very sharply with Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh. It generates a lot of economic development.

As a matter of fact, Point Fortin is known for two things: one, being known as the cultural capital of Trinidad and Tobago because it has produced people like Super Blue, and Preacher, and Iwer George, and Naya George, and Fay-Ann Lyons. It is the cultural capital.

Hon. Senators: Jereem Richards.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Jereem Richards, Randall Mitchell.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Paula Gopee-Scoon.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: We have a very proud tradition. But the second thing it is known for, it is known for being the cleanest borough, municipal corporation in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Yes. Yes.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: It does not depend on CEPEP or any external force. Once Borough Day is done—and Borough Day is like a carnival, “plenty pan”—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Two weeks of festival.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: —“plenty parade”, J’ouvert. The very next day, by six o’clock, the borough corporation workers clean up the entire town centre of Point Fortin—entire town centre.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh spoke about roads. It is true that on the way to the Borough of Point Fortin that there are some bad roads, but what Sen. Deyalsingh—I am not sure if he is down there or if he has ever traversed or had the privilege of being within the Borough of Point Fortin, there are some geological formations. World famous. It is called the Pitch Lake and there is nothing you can do to engineer, to fix those roads going down. It is a part of the culture. It is a part of the culture. There is nothing—you pave it now and in two weeks the Pitch Lake says differently, and it changes. So what did we do as the PNM? The PNM, we are the ones who planned the highway to Point Fortin. There is a highway to Point Fortin being constructed right now.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: The PNM planned it, the UNC corrupted it and the PNM is going to finish it.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: So, Mr. Vice-President, on Sen. Teemal, I would say this about putting the cart before the horse. We have been here before. In 1853, we have converted the towns of Port of Spain and San Fernando into boroughs, and then subsequently we have elevated them to cities. In 1888, by Royal Charter, Arima became a borough through the approval of Queen Victoria. And in 1990, Chaguanas became a borough. We are not putting any cart before a horse. We are

simply putting purchase to the will of the people of Siparia and Diego Martin.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: So Sen. Thompson-Ahye stole “meh” speech a little bit, but I would say there are many intangible benefits for the elevation of status; many intangible benefits. And as the Senator said, pride, that internal pride—it is not always about money. There is that internal impelling force of community pride and purpose, a commitment to community that you get when you are elevated to borough status. There is that.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government gave the other examples. Leaving the status of municipal corporations aside, he gave the examples. When you become a doctor, whether a medical doctor or a doctor of philosophy, there is that pride that you get, a renewal of purpose, an elevation of status. When you are awarded the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, there is that pride. I do not know anybody who has been awarded the Order of Trinidad and Tobago who does not put “ORTT” after their names. None. And senior counsel. When you achieve, when you reach the criteria to become senior counsel or King’s Counsel and you receive the conferment of that status, there is a prestige that goes along with it.

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

There is a prestige known to all. There are people who apply for it who do not get it and are very upset, but there are also people, who understanding that prestige and status, confer it upon themselves, like the Member for Siparia. It is because of that.

Mr. President, as I welcome you to the Chair, I recall and I would just give a personal story here, in understanding the internal pride that you feel. I remember

being a Standard 2 pupil of the San Fernando Boys' RC School on the San Fernando Promenade in 1988 when San Fernando, under the leadership of Dr. Romesh Mootoo, we became—we were conferred upon city status. I remember as a Standard 2, we walked outside the school, we lined up on the Promenade, on the pavement, and we were a part of all the pump and ceremony. And as a child understanding that we were now becoming a city—

Hon. Senator: With pride, pride.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:—like Los Angeles, or like New York, we were becoming a city. And back then—

Sen. Lutchmedial: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: You know, Sen. Lutchmedial was talking about San Fernando is full of—you know, Sen. Lutchmedial, my very good friend, has lived all over Trinidad, but you know she came right back to San Fernando to live. Right back to San Fernando to live. She is a proud San Fernandian. “Doh bad talk San Fernando. Doh bad talk San Fernando”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: All right. First and foremost, we are getting a lil ahead of ourselves.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Mr. President: Two, as far as I understand, the Bill is about Siparia and Diego Martin. So as much as we are using San Fernando—

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. Lyder: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: Sen. Lyder, I am speaking. As much as we are using San Fernando to create context, can we remember that we are coming back to what is

in front of us? Continue.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. President. I am speaking about the elevation in status, I am speaking about the internal pride that one gets when your status for community is elevated—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:—from either a regional corporation to a borough, or from a borough to a city corporation. And I stood there, Mr. President, very proud. Back then, we were taught—all the schools in San Fernando was given material and we were taught the new logo, this blue and yellow logo. We were taught the new Latin watchwords, *Sanitas Fortis*. We were taught all of these things and it felt—and it gave everyone ownership, uplifting, pride.

Up to now, Mr. President, when I talk to people from—my friends from Princes Town or Penal/Debe—I have friends there as well. When I talk to them, we get into a banter and it always—I always win the banter on, “Listen, I live in a city”.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: “I live in a city, I live within the city limits”. That is a source of the banter. I am proud to be a part of San Fernando. I still live in San Fernando. San Fernando has its own unique culture, and I am very happy to be a part of San Fernando. I still live in San Fernando East, and I am very proud to vote for the People’s National Movement.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: I am very proud to live in San Fernando East, and whether I serve as Senator or I serve as the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, I serve, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: So, Mr. President, why not Diego Martin and Siparia? Why not? Mr. President, over the last 33 years both regions have expanded in terms of their population and in terms of their commercial development, economic development. In the case of Siparia, you have the central business district town of Siparia with banks and government offices and Magistrates' Court, et cetera, the usual things you find in a central business district. But you also have, in terms of tourism and culture—and other Members have spoken about it, I will touch on it. Of course, you have the Siparia Fete, you have the legendary Deltones. Siparia has produced Machel Montano—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah, man.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell:—one of the greatest cultural icons of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: But in San Fernando as well—in Siparia as well, pardon me, Mr. President, you also have within the municipality, you have the Pitch Lake, a very unique tourism attraction.

3.05 p.m.

You have the Vessigny Beach facility, one of the best beach facilities in all of the country and it is fast becoming part of a sailing hub for young people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: You have the mud volcanoes all over the corporation. You have the mud volcanoes in Los Iros, you have mud volcanoes in Cedros. You

have the wetlands, all beautiful sites and attractions. You have Quinam Beach, where the people of Siparia go and they have and a very popular curry duck cook-off competition. You have a lot going on. And the elevation of borough status, along with the reform—I do not want to stay too long on the reform, but all of those things give the people of Siparia that renewed purpose for economic development, for the development of all of these sites to bring people into Siparia to enjoy what Siparia has to offer.

In terms of industry, the corporation of Siparia boasts proudly—and it is all tied to PNM development, you know. It is all tied to PNM development.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: You had the TRINTOPEC, it is now Heritage land operations. And by the way, those operations, the Heritage land operations, along with that in Point Fortin, that is the energy that powered Trinidad and Tobago. That is the energy that powered Trinidad and Tobago. So we have this massive economic generator in the form of Heritage Petroleum, and all the businesses in and around the corporation of Siparia, whether it be Fyzabad, Syne Village, La Brea, all over, are serviced companies that service Heritage Petroleum. You also have TGU and other plants in La Brea. You have the LABIDCO industrial estate, a massive economic generator. So why not the people of Siparia? Why not?

In the case of Diego Martin—as we know, we are close to Diego Martin. Diego Martin is one of the most popular places in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: It is.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Diego Martin itself has some of the most valuable properties in Trinidad and Tobago: a well-established Industrial Park in Diamond Vale; high-quality commercial properties and commercial experiences there in the

Diego Martin region; state-of-the-art sporting facilities; private and public health care. It is home to the yachting sector where we welcome yachties and there is a whole industry around the repair of yachts coming into our shores; home to the defence force; home to the entire Chaguaramas park.

I mean, Diego Martin—in Diego Martin, you know, you could exist and live in Diego Martin and not have to come out of Diego Martin because everything is right there, whether it be groceries, government offices, everything is right there in Diego Martin. So why not? Why not Diego Martin and why not Siparia? If you say it is a name change, okay, it is a name change, but there are intangible benefits that come with that name change, with that elevation of status, and that is what we want for the people of Siparia and for the people of Diego Martin. This is no election gimmick.

This Bill was laid in 2021, and prior to May 18th when Ravi appeared, it was in progress as being debated in the House of Representatives.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: This is no election gimmick. It was already on its way.

Hon. Senator: That is right.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: And we are the conduit. And I am a proud conduit as a member of the Cabinet, the Executive, bringing this to this House, supporting my colleague, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, in elevating the status of Siparia and Diego Martin. This is an opportunity for the people of Siparia and Diego Martin to reset, to reaffirm their commitment to their communities, to reaffirm their sense of pride to their municipalities. It puts the economic development and the standard and quality of life that those persons want

to experience and achieve firmly within their own hands with support of the Government.

So, Mr. President, I am very happy—very happy to stand here to support the people of Diego Martin and the people of Siparia. We support them in their will and their wish to be elevated as a borough from a regional corporation. There are studies—the studies are too much for me to get into—by Kairi Consultants Limited, reports on the Local Area Economic Profile of both the municipalities of Siparia and Diego Martin, and we support them. If the Opposition, United National Congress, does not support them; if the Opposition, United National Congress, wishes to dismiss them with a three-minute response, well, we will stand by them. We will stand by them.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: And we will do as we have always done which is, be as a People's National Movement at the forefront of the development of Trinidad and Tobago, its people and its aspiration, and with those few words, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Lyder.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Damian Lyder: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, as I stand up here to make a very short contribution on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia) Bill, 2021, I had no intentions of standing here today to contribute. I really did not. I really did not because, Mr. President, similar to my colleague, Sen. Mark, I also agree with him where he has indicated, why would we have a problem with seeing Diego Martin and Siparia achieve the status of borough? I am confused because when I listened

to my honourable colleagues in the PNM talk as though we are against this Bill passing—

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. D. Lyder: No, when we hear it, Mr. President, when we hear it, I have to get up and speak. But, Mr. President, that was one reason why. But when I had to listen to this Government get up in their desperate attempt to salvage what will be a trouncing at the polls in the next local government elections and politick—spend their contributions politicking here today while, of course, not being stopped for irrelevance—but when I listened to them politick here today, Mr. President, in my—I am feeling under the weather today, Mr. President, but I had to stand up and respond to this.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Take three minutes.

Sen. D. Lyder: Mr. President, I had to stand up to respond because I could not believe what was coming out of each of these representatives on the Government side. Mr. President, I thought we were living in Dubai. I thought we were driving on flat roads, kicking a ball in a field without grass reaching up to your knee.

Mr. President, I thought all of the facilities, whether it be sporting facilities, whether it be health facilities, I thought they were all in excellent condition. I did not think a single resident in Diego Martin or in Siparia had any problems with flooding. That is what I heard on that side. But, Mr. President, I had to stand up as a resident of Diego Martin to respond to what was said on this side. So every section I have here today is a direct response to what was said on that side, just in case somebody gets up under 46(1). I am telling you up in front.

Mr. President, but us not having a problem with seeing borough status for any of the 14 corporations, I said to myself I would not speak, and I sat here

quietly listening, sitting and listening to hear what would be the sweeping improvements that will come as a result of this Bill passing here today. I listened attentively with hope because I live in one of them, so I really wanted to hear that. Of course, the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government piloted the Bill and he spoke. I always enjoy listening to his contributions. Today, he reminded me of an old professor in Fatima with his history lesson on local government. Lots of history, but, Mr. President, you know what was missing? After the history, there was a lack of substance. There was a lack of substance as to, passing this Bill today, what would be the benefits.

Incidentally, I did not continue into Form 4 and 5 with history. I went into business. So I am less interested in hearing history today and more interested in what will be the benefits to the people living in Diego Martin and Siparia. That is what I wanted to hear today.

But I heard a hon. Independent Senator speak about pride. Yes, why not? Of course, I would have pride in Diego Martin. I listened to the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts speak about pride as well, Mr. President. But when you are standing up in knee-deep water in a flood in Victoria Gardens, how much pride do you have in your house at that point in time? When you drop your car and your axle breaks and you have to go to change your tyre and your rim, “ah standing up with pride in the tyre shop when ah dig in meh pocket deep”, where is the pride in that? Where is the pride in that, Mr. President?

When citizens through the Diego Martin—all through the valley of Diego Martin, Petit Valley and Diego Martin cannot get a proper supply of water, where is the pride? Oh yes, there is a beautiful big building built, hundreds of millions of dollars spent, but what pride do you have when the goods and services coming out

of these corporations are not delivered to the citizens and the burgesses? Where is the pride? That is what I want to know. I hear a lot about pride. But, Mr. President, I do not blame the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. I do not blame him today for not having much substance. I do not blame him today. You see, this is the same Minister—with all due respect, my friend—who came here in local government reform Bill to say that he was legislating himself out of a job. He admitted it. So I have sympathy today for the hon. Minister because I know the amount of licks he is getting internally.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]*—*in the doghouse right now.

Sen. D. Lyder: So I am not going to go any further with that. Let me get back to the Bill, Mr. President. I have sympathy. I know he is enduring a lot of licks.

But, Mr. President, but then I had to listen to Sen. Hislop, my dear friend from Tobago—oh God—who started off by criticizing my honourable colleague, Anil Roberts—

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

3.20 p.m.

Criticizing him, my hon. colleague Anil Roberts, saying that he trivialized the Bill and that reform was a bad word in the Opposition. Reform is not a bad word in the Opposition. Reform was not a bad word. Let me tell “yuh wats ah bad word” from the Opposition. Sufferation of the people, sufferation is a bad word.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Lyder: Fear of the people is a bad word.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. D. Lyder: Fear, sufferation, fear. And you know what is “ah bad words”, the PNM is “ah bad words”, Mr. President.

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

Sen. D. Lyder: The PNM, words. [*Laughs*] The People's National Movement.

Mr. President, you know Sen. Hislop many times, many times, it was like “ah stuck record”. Many times, I had to hear him talk about—he stated that today expresses the will of the people through their representatives. Several times he said this. They want greater powers. That is what he said. They want these greater powers for the benefit of the people. Yet this Government, this PNM Government, one of their first acts for the benefit of the people, for the benefit of local government is to come here in a finance Bill and to remove \$100 million and to remove a company, this company here, the Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited.

Mr. President: So, Sen. Lyder, I have given you quite a bit of leeway for the introduction and the—[*Senator remains standing*] Take a seat, take a seat. So I have given you quite a bit of leeway for your introduction to create context and tie it into what is before us and you are attempting to respond to what has been said before. So there are two things that I want you to take note of. First and foremost, at this late stage in the debate, if you are responding, it cannot be a rehash of what has been said before.

Hon. Senator: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: It cannot be a rehash of what has been said before. It then runs into tedious repetition. And two, the line that you are going down right now is not really relevant to what is before us so I would ask you to skip over that and bring in any new perspective that you have to enter into the debate right now. Continue.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Mr. President. You see Mr. President, knowing that you are a very fair President, again I would say this. I am responding directly to

what Sen. Hislop said when he called for greater powers. This is going to bring greater powers. Powers would be for the ability for this borough and those that represent the burgesses in this borough to have the resources to fix the ills in the corporation. That is power. So if the hon. Senator is saying that he wants this to pass today to give them more power, I am saying to you, Mr. President, power is being removed from them by the removal of this company.

You know why I said that? Because it was not me alone. I did not just sit down here and think about that. I looked at the *Guardian* newspaper. I looked at the *Guardian* newspaper on the 15th March, 2023 which indicated that \$200 million was being removed from the local government. That is the headline from the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited. But then on the 16th of March, it said:

“Regional corporations concerned about change to road company”
—being removed from this Ministry and under the Ministry of Works and Transport. So this was regional corporations screaming out. I would not go through the article, I read it, but there were a number of regional corporations screaming out about the loss of power that they now had by losing this funding that they were expecting. So I am responding directly. That is why I understood when the hon. Minister indicated he was legislating himself out of a job and handing it to the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Sen. Hislop, Mr. President, went on. He said that Diego Martin and Siparia could rival many other small islands: Antigua and Barbuda, St Vincent and the Grenadines and, Mr. President, that struck me as strange, how the hon. Senator could say that. He said I travel quite often to Antigua and Barbuda, St Vincent and the Grenadines. In fact, I spent the last 20 years traversing these islands. You

should see the infrastructure there. They have no oil and gas. They do not have the financial sector that we have. They do not have anything near the resources we have in this country and if you see the beauty of those islands. He was right. He spoke a lot about the THA, though it was irrelevant but he spoke about how beautiful it is and yes. Tobago is shining even brighter under new management.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. D. Lyder: Shining even brighter under new management. That new management—

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. D. Lyder: Yeah, shining, Tobago is shining. But you see before the end of the August, when they get beaten at the local government polls, we will see many of these corporations including San Fernando shine again under a UNC-led corporation.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Lyder: But I have to say it here to the hon. Senator, how could you make that comparison? When you see the level of decay, infrastructure decay in Diego Martin and Siparia, the level of flooding that is happening in Diego Martin and Siparia, the crime, the bad roads, the lack of water, joblessness, when you see that, Mr. President, how does that rival against these islands? I think he is wrong.

Mr. President: Take a seat, Senator. So I am starting to hear a repeat of the arguments when you started that is coming back around now. You would also notice that several Senators that have spoken before have been warned in relation to going too deeply into local government reform which then cascades into local government election, none of which are before us. As much as they are there for context in relation to what is before us, to go too deeply into them is to rehash

something that has already been dealt with. So I am going to give you a warning as well as I gave to all other Senators that went down that road, please do not go there because you breach relevance. So I would ask you now, new points only at this point, Sen. Lyder.

Sen. D. Lyder: Yes, thank you. Mr. President, I started off by telling you when I listened to Sen. Hislop, he repeated himself. I am surprised he did not get stopped on repetition for the amount of times.

Hon. Senators: *[Interruption]*

Mr. President: Again, have a seat, Sen. Lyder. It is not for you to tell me that you are surprised because if you were listening carefully, all Senators got stopped. So again, be extremely careful in the words that you are using towards the Chair. I have given guidance. Continue.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you for your kind guidance and of course I will always obey; by your guidance. Mr. President, Sen. Hislop further in his contribution came back again, speaking about why not give Siparia what they deserve. Those are the words he used. This is what he said, Mr. President. Give Diego Martin what they deserve. He said that they were suffering from a lack of resources, suffering from human resources. It is a new point, it is exactly what he said. Mr. President, and I agree with him. Because what the hon. Senator did was incriminate this PNM Government who has become famous and infamous for not providing resources to all 14 regional corporations in this country.

Hon. Senators: *[Interruption]*

Sen. D. Lyder: Yes, he said it. He said lack of resources, lack of human resources. So therefore, I take that to be an indication that the passing of this Bill today would provide resources and human resources. That is how I must take it.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. D. Lyder: No, that is how I take it, and that is how the population is listening taking it. But I am saying to you when we see this Government through the Ministry of Finance hold back subventions, hold back funding, what is the passing of this Bill going to do to alleviate the shortfalls when that is done? So no, there is no real benefit here other than pride in this Bill today and the hon. Senator admitted it. He admitted today. I hope he does not get in trouble like by the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. I hope he does not get in trouble for exposing the Government today.

Mr. President, but I will move on. I am a proud resident of Diego Martin, a very proud resident of Diego Martin, I have lived there all my life. I lived in all three constituencies: Diego Martin North/East, Diego Martin Central and currently in Diego Martin West. I lived there, yes. And Sen. Hislop spoke at length about a lot of brilliant activities and brilliant initiatives that were done by the hon. Prime Minister, by the Member of Parliament Diego Martin Central and the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East who also happens to be the Minister of Finance holding the purse strings. Yes man and that is why I am surprised. That is why I am surprised of the infrastructure decay in his constituency. But—

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President, point of order. Standing Order 53(1)(b).

Mr. President: So, a Standing Order being raised is one of tedious repetition, Sen. Lyder, and I have indicated prior that we have heard about infrastructure, we heard about what the name changes would do for the infrastructure and what it would not do for infrastructure. That has been put forward ad nauseam by several Senators that have gone before you. So I am asking once again if you have something that is new by way of it has not been raised in the debate thus far or a

new perspective completely, then that is allowable. Continue.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Mr. President. Let me take a new perspective here. You see when I listened to Sen. Hislop speak about the initiatives done, to me, it is sounds like someone politicking to the population. It is not relevant to this Bill, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Okay. I do not think you are understanding where I am coming from. So yes, you are saying that you are responding to Sen. Hislop. Sen. Hislop quite early in the debate would have made his comments and so forth. Several Senators would have responded to that already. Hence the reason why I am saying you are running afoul of the Standing Order as it relates to tedious repetition, which is why you would have to look at all that has been said and decide how you are going to bring something new to the debate. It is not enough to just say I am responding to Senators that have gone before because somebody else has responded to it already, hence why you are running afoul of tedious repetition.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Mr. President. So I continue on. Sen. Hislop, probably through tedious repetition, came back again and repeated himself.

Mr. President: Sen. Lyder, I think at this point I am going to have to end your contribution. Have a seat.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. President: Because the guidance, as much as I am trying to give, is not being adhered to and then I am getting comments coming back at the Chair. So thank you?

Sen. D. Lyder: Yeah.

Mr. President: Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to wrap up this debate. May I first of all say that my task has been made all the much more easy because of the spectacular contributions made today on this Bench.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I want to just thank my learned colleagues for their submissions, in particular, if I do say so without offending my other colleagues, Sen. Mitchell's contribution today was a stellar performance.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: A stellar performance and I thank him for making my task somewhat easier.

Mr. President, there is a word that captures the submissions of all of the Opposition Members. It is nihilism, N-I-H-I L-I-S-M.

3:35 p.m.

It is the opposite of existentialism. Why is it relevant? A quick look at the meaning. As a noun, it is:

“the rejection of all religious and moral principles...in the belief that life is meaningless.”

Philosophically, it is:

“the belief that nothing in the world has a real existence.”

Historically:

“the doctrine of an extreme Russian revolutionary party circa 1900 which found nothing to approve of in the established social order.”

I could not think of a more apt phrase, by way of noun, philosophical capture or otherwise, than that, to characterize the submissions coming from my friends

opposite. In fact, Mr. President, I have spent a lot of time in this Senate over the last eight years—seven years in particular. My dear friend Sen. Lutchmedial has become almost unrecognizable to me these days.

Hon. Senators: “Ohhh”.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The contribution today was a reflection of other contributions coming. It is not reflective of the charm and intellect of my dear colleague. And I do hope to see that person return to the Senate, Mr. President, where the contributions grind into progress.

Sen. Nakhid: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I will just simply say it that way.

Sen. Nakhid: That is what we need?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. President, let me deal with a short version of addition to what Sen. Mitchell did. Sen. Mitchell relieved me of the responsibility of responding to Sen. Mark’s call for a criminal investigation into the resolution, which caused us to come here today to stand behind the people of Siparia in respect of their resolved request that the borough be the status that they wish to achieve. And permit me to just say that Sen. Mark’s position in relation to that really borders on an apology being required, specifically to the following people:

- The Siparia Regional Corporation’s members of council:
- Chairman—the current Chairman still operating as Chairman, pursuant to section 15 of the Municipal Corporations Act, in post, past the expiration of terms on the May 18th marker. The chairman is Mr. Dinesh Sankersingh.

Past representatives:

- The Vice-Chairman, Alderman Ms. Chanardaye Ramadharsingh;
- Councillor Mr. Doodnath Mayrhoo;

- Councillor Mr. Deryck Collin Bowrin;
- Councillor Mr. Shanka Teelucksingh;
- Councillor Mr. Javed Mohammed;
- Councillor Ms. Romona Victor;
- Councillor Mr. Jason Ali;
- Councillor Ms. Dana O'neil-Gervais;
- Councillor Ms Arlene Ramdeo;
- Councillor Mr. Gerald Debisette;
- Ms. Christine Neptune as an Alderman; and
- Mr. Christopher Encinas as an Alderman.

All of those hon. people served the people of Siparia in local government representation in the period December 02, 2019 to May 18, 2023. And not one of them by resolution called the police, sought to rescind their resolution, sought to say that there was a trick being carried out on the people of Trinidad and the people of Siparia in the manner that Sen. Mark put forward today. That belief that something is wrong and nothing is good clearly occupies Sen. Mark's attention, but clearly none of these people that I have just mentioned occupy any form of bother that something is wrong with asking for municipal status to be changed to borough status. So I would just like to say that Sen. Mark is on his own.

If the hon. Senator pursues the obligation, as he has put on the record that he will, I would just simply say to him join the line of current investigations for theft, for misbehaviour in public office, for follow the money issues that certain corporations are now facing right now. And all that I will say, if you have belief, pursue it. But clearly the people of Siparia, the members of the Siparia council, the sitting Chairman have said absolutely nothing that would lead me to believe that

there is an ounce of credibility in what Sen. Mark has said.

3.40 p.m.

Second point, we heard hon. Senators speak about potholes in Siparia and they are not repairing roads in Siparia. And we heard about failure to fund development in Siparia. Again, I offer an apology to the people of Siparia and to the UNC Corporation of Siparia for the vicious attack levelled against them by Sen. Mark and the Members of the Opposition because, Mr. President, the Heads of funding in the Appropriation Act and in the Supplementary Appropriation Act reveal that the Siparia Regional Corporation in 2021 received an actual amount of \$10,957,333. The 2022 estimates took them to \$18,286,100. At 2023, this year, it is \$43,987,000. So let me repeat that by way of comparison. In 2021, which was higher than the UNC allocations, it was 10million. Siparia, this year, after supplementary appropriation, is receiving close to \$44 million. That represents 114 per cent over last year.

And the indictment levelled against the people of Siparia by Sen. Mark and the Members of the Opposition Bench today is that they, the Siparia Corporation, failed to repair their roads, their embankments, their pathways, the potholes on their roads. They have control under the law, by resolution of council, to fix those things. We do not need to go as far as the secondary road company, that Sen. Lyder was referring to, alluding that somehow it was taken away from the Ministry. I would have said something at the time but I was pursuing the Piarco case in Miami at the time and could not speak about the Siparia matter, as it relates to SRC, because there were other things that the Government was engaged in. By the way, that brought significant results for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, \$1 billion—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—in stolen money found to be returned. But the people of Siparia, in receiving \$43million, by way of supplementary appropriation, as it now rounds that figure to, Sen. Mark is effectively saying to Chairman Sankersingh and the entire UNC council that they are an absolute waste of time. How does a political party do that to their own people? Is that the reason why people like Marcus Girdharie have defected from the UNC?

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I do not really hear the blurting from my learned friends opposite. Let me repeat that. When we look at \$43 million, \$44 million Siparia, Sen. Mark is condemning Chairman Sankersingh and the entire Siparia Corporation in relation to—

[*Sen. Mark rises*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark. Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: 46(4). He is imputing improper motives. I never said anything like what he says. So I ask him to withdraw his statement.

Mr. President: Have a seat. Continue.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Sen. Mark is criticizing, condemning and holding in bad light, Chairman Sankersingh and all of the members of the Siparia UNC-run corporation by saying that they have failed to spend their \$43 million, which is on top of their \$18 million and their \$10 million year on year, because they have control over expenditure, Mr. President. And therefore I reject that argument and I stand up for the people of Siparia Regional Corporation to become borough council, as we now

do it, borough status for them. Because, Mr. President, there is no form of friendship or genuine support or existential belief for the people of Siparia, coming from the UNC, Mr. President. And that is just as simple as it is.

Mr. President, you know what is remarkable? They talk about discrimination of resources in the context of this Bill. Do you know what the Diego Martin Regional Corporation take on allocations is? With the increase and supplemental allocation to Diego Martin, Diego Martin is getting \$25.8 million this year, 25.8. Let me put that in context to Siparia; \$44 million for Siparia, 25 for Diego Martin. Now, does that sound like a government that is discriminating against a UNC-run corporation? Last time I checked, the Siparia Corporation is and has been a UNC-run corporation for a very long time, Mr. President. So I debunk and reject the argument coming from Sen. Mark as just being a perfect example of misrepresentation, Mr. President, at its lightest.

Mr. President, let us talk, in just a few points that I have to treat with left. Sen. Lyder raised the point by way of comparison in response to Sen. Hislop; how dare Sen. Hislop reflect upon Antigua and Barbuda and also the Grenadines, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and what is different inside of there. Do you know what is different? In the limited resources that those beautiful sister islands have, there are two material differences as to why progress may appear to be different. Number one, their constitutional structure is different from ours. They do not have the disturbance of requiring parliamentary majority support that has been withheld in the fashion that we have had in Trinidad, in the manner that we do, so they pass their laws quickly and they see effect fairly quickly. But secondly, there is a very important difference. They do not have the UNC there.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And, therefore, the personification of objection and nihilism does not exist in Antigua or in St. Vincent by way of example, Mr. President. It is the same way that Tobago does not have interruption either.

Mr. President, in talking about the borough status, I want to commend Sen. Teemal for an excellent discourse into some very important pivotal points.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I was riveted to Sen. Teemal's contribution. Sen. Teemal asked whether we are putting the cart before the horse. Should we treat with the issue of gauging and plumbing reform and then, very importantly, very commendable analysis, should we put in objective criteria through an objective methodology to then cause the consideration in the move from municipal corporation to borough to city. I think it is a brilliant suggestion.

But let me put where we are into context now, in addressing the hon. Senator's excellent submissions. We stand 33 years away from the 1990 Municipal Corporations Act; 33 years away. And, Mr. President, you know it is remarkable that we had decades of consideration in getting to where we are. We have been discussing local government reform, and through the course of consultation, just to put on the record, we had 1.1 million online contributions in local government reform, 1.1 million contributions. We had 32,000 in-person contributions.

We caused amendments to the law. Sen. Teemal is so right. He grabbed it really so you could feel the pulse. The breadth of reform that we considered in the joint select committee was so wide that the hon. Senator is correct, we did not look at this objective criterion model or even the use of the TTALGA, the association of local government bodies, as character or as a vehicle that could then cause this

position. Because we were focused on delivering the reform, 33 years later.

Mr. President, you know what is remarkable, which comes to the nihilism, which comes to the position of why Antigua and St. Vincent and the Grenadines looks different? When we look at the minority report of the Opposition, the loyal Opposition that says we need to do better. The loyal Opposition that says “dey didn’ do enough! Dey didn’ put local government reform in the Constitution!” Well the last time I checked, section 54 of the Constitution says if you are going to interfere with certain entrenched rights like service commissions, and there are service commissions that operate in local government, et cetera, you require more than a supermajority; a three-fifths, sometimes two-thirds and sometimes three quarters level.

But hear is what the summary; the four points from the Opposition’s minority report in answer to the cart before the horse submission. The Opposition said it disagreed with property tax being implemented; two, creation of the executive council, they say, excludes the minority; three, no provision for equity in population size; four, insufficient consultation with stakeholders. As the people say, wheel and come again.

So left up to the Opposition, “we go talk and talk and talk and talk and talk for another 33 years.” We will pass through a special majority that they enjoyed of 29 seats, never got it done. But, Sen. Mitchell really put it into context. The reason why we are doing this today, apart from the lawful obligation, the legitimate expectation of the people of Siparia and the legitimate expectation of the people of Diego Martin is that we at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, my colleague Sen. Hosein and I, we have received resolutions that we have to act upon.

The supreme law is the Constitution. Section 53 says we make laws for the peace, order and good governance and the only way to create the boroughs that they have asked for is by way of a legislative reform by the central government. But I do take the point and it is tremendously meritorious, that we ought to consider objective criterion to the movement in municipalities, to boroughs, to cities.

What is important is, we will now be implementing the gauge. Because it is in the reformed package that we will be able to see how it works. Because in that reform package; with the eight committees, the standing committees, with full-time executive councils, et cetera; with the ability to receive revenue, manage revenue, have accountability in transparent structures, improve the audit and accounting functionality, minority; just like how the PAC is run in the Parliament by a Member of the Opposition, the head of the audit committee is a member of the minority in the municipal corporations with public involvement as well. That is where we get to plumb the gauges.

Now, what is very interesting in the boroughs of Siparia and Diego Martin is the following information, Mr. President. Siparia received, as I told you, Mr. President 43, nearly \$44 million this year. Siparia asked, in their wish list, for \$104 million. So they asked for \$104 million, they got \$44 million. Similar asked in the years before. They asked for 44, they got 10 million. They asked for 100 million, they got 18 million, et cetera, they had 44. Do you know what the property tax yield in Siparia is likely to be? Penal/Debe is estimated to yield \$35 million. Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, from the north coast down to the Eastern Main Road will yield \$67 million. Siparia is conservatively estimated somewhere close to \$60 million. Last time I checked \$60 million plus \$44 million

is more than \$101 million. And what is standing in the way of that supplemental revenue is the UNC.

3.55 p.m.

I just read the minority report, but with that extra revenue we are going to have the ability now with accountability, with the public procurement law, which is, as difficult as it is, we at least have a better chance of causing a better environment where better societies may be yielded.

Now, what we have to bear in mind, and I have said this before many times, hon. Senators will know over the last eight years that I have always said this, just start. Sometimes analysis gets the better of us, we get into analysis paralysis when we came to urge for different systems in other ways. For instance, judge only trials we said just start. If we look at local government reform and we look at the borough status we are saying let us just start, 33 years of analysis is a long time. It is time to put this into action.

Sen. Lyder was correct, one of the gazzetted responsibilities assigned to me as my predecessor Sen. Haji Kazim Hosein had was to wind up the affairs of the Ministry of the Rural Development and Local Government. And that is specifically so because we intend to devolve the power onto the local government entities.

But Mr. President, in the current construct, we are looking at councils that do not support the Government at seven, councils that do support the Government at seven but we are looking for reform to be equal for all, so where could the discrimination be, Mr. President? Mr. President, I have—perhaps I walked out of comprehensiveness to address Sen. Roberts. Sen. Roberts' contribution was three minutes long. Sen. Roberts' contribution perhaps can be answered along the lines

of you know, there was a video once floating around. Somebody who is yet to be identified but famously this video made its way around and this video was quite interesting because a lot of people related to it. In this video the anonymous person said, “Two pull and ah done.” Perhaps that ought to be changed now to “Three minutes and ah done.”

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Because it really now echoes itself into the four corners of that contribution. But whoever that person is, whoever that person is, I understand that it is interesting.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Now, all that I need to say, is that I had left the Chamber for a short while with my colleague the hon. Sen. Reginald Armour of Senior Counsel, properly so, and we had the pleasure of engaging the hon. Prime Minister, and it is now a matter of public knowledge that the election date will be the 14th August, 2023.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And, Mr. President, in the creation—

Mr. President: Okay, okay. As much as the Minister is wrapping up, again, let us be mindful of the noise level in the Chamber. I would like to hear the Minister. Continue, Minister.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. President. So let me repeat that into one go now. It is now a matter of public record that not only was there always going to be an election. Not only is local government reform the centerpiece of that, but Mr. President, the fact is that the hon. Prime Minister has publicly informed that Her

Excellency has by writ of election, fixed the date by Prime Ministers direction for the holding of local government elections at the 14th of August 2023. In the context of this Bill, Mr. President, in the context of this Bill, what I can tell you is that local government reform is the genuine issue. Are you for or are you against it. Is the borough status of the law for or against it.

Mr. President, I know that some people are in the winter of their years. Mr. President, I know that some people are in the winter of their years. I know Sen. Mark is tired.

Sen. Mark: While we listening to you. To you!

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, you are getting—Sen. Mark—

Sen. Mark: Sorry, Sir.

Mr. President: If I have to raise again, I will be asking Members to take a walk until they could calm down. Continue, Minister.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I know that Sen. Mark is tired. He has laboured in the fields—

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, Sen Mark, Sen. Mark, I am raising to my legs over and over again. There will be silence now for the remainder of his contribution.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Let me begin again. I know that Sen. Mark is tired.

Sen. Lyder: Licks coming!

Mr. President: So Sen. Lyder take a walk please. Thank you. And you may return at the end of the Minister's contribution. Continue, Minister.

[*Sen. Lyder exits Chamber*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. President, I know my dear friend Sen. Mark is tired. He has laboured in the fields of futility his whole life, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: That futility found itself all over the floor of this Parliament today searching and hunting for criminal activity when it exists right there in the regional corporations that Sen. Mark supervises. Mr. President, when we understand that form of tiredness, I will tell “meh” friend Sen. Mark, it is okay, we will look after you. The Government is a caring government. You “doh” need to resort to two pull and three minutes. You could go home and retire hon. Senator.

From this debate Mr. President, it is clear that my dear friend needs a little rest and reflection. That rest and reflection is very much a reminder for me of the reasons expressed to me by the people that I have now come to know and understand, people who express their deep frustration with the futility of the United National Congress demonstrated in this debate. People who have been so compelled to put right over wrong and reason over nonsense that they have crossed the floor to the PNM. And the UNC, all I would say as I wrap up now, you are welcome to the loving arms of the People’s National Movement.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: This is the party for all. It is a People’s National Movement. It is one that will bring success be it by way of elevation to borough status so that your pride can be lifted, so that your status can be lifted. Lifted for you by your parliamentarians not by yourselves alone toiling. Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to say, I beg to move.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Senate in committee.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So Senators, this Bill before us has six clauses and a Schedule. There have been no amendments circulated. I am assuming that holds true as we continue to move forward. So I now invite the clerk to start the proceedings. Clerk.

Clauses 1 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

Senate resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Amery Browne): Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, June 13, 2023, at 10.00 a.m. and I give due notice of the Government's intention to debate Bill No. 2 on the Order Paper, the Arbitration Bill. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for two matters to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment of the Senate. Sen. Mark.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Migrant Children in Schools

(Attendance of)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Mr. President the first issue or matter I would like to bring to this honourable Senate's attention is the need for the Government to allow migrant children to attend government schools, or to attend public schools. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the

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Child was signed off by this country and the Government some time ago. And Mr. President, one of the provisions or articles of this particular convention, is the right of each child to enjoy an education. It is a right of the child. It does not matter, Mr. President, if that child is from Venezuela, from Africa, from India, or from China. And it is abominable for us to have agreed to provide licenses through registration to some 20,000 Venezuelans to live here legally, and to work here legally, Mr. President. And having given those persons the right to work, to live and to play here, Mr. President, it is heart wrenching to see young children, young children, even Mr. President, where our own citizens, male or female are the parents of these young children. But because they have a mixture between Venezuelan and Trinidad and Tobago citizens, in terms of whatever occurred, a child emerges. But even that child, Mr. President, is being denied access to education. So I have raised this matter today to get from the Government a definitive policy as it relates to education for young children, migrant, as I mentioned. And, Mr. President, it does not have to be Venezuelans. It could be any migrant. They could be from Africa, because there are many citizens, persons from Africa who are here and they are married and their children cannot, from what I have been advised and the Minister could tell me if I am wrong, that these children are not being given the right to attend our public schools.

I was quite heartened when I read recently, that our distinguished and hon. Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, only on the 19th of April, had a meeting Mr. President, with major stakeholders. They call themselves the Trinidad and Tobago Education Working Group, and they met with the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs. I have a picture, which I cannot display, but the Minister is in a picture with these people. And one of the main items they brought to the

Minister's attention is the need to pay attention to these children and to take measures to allow the education services of our country to be made more accessible to these children. I do not know what was the final outcome but what I can tell you is that as we speak today, Ministry of Education, Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, they all have a collective responsibility to coordinate with the various stakeholders involved in this particular episode, in order to ensure that whatever hindrances, whatever obstacles are in the pathway to allowing that flow of education or access, Mr. President, to education are removed.

We cannot continue how we are going. Mr. President, it is unconscionable to have this kind of arrangement being allowed to continue. Mr. President, could you imagine—I think it is the Catholic Board and through some platform, they are trying their best to see how they can allow young Venezuelan migrants to access online education. Right. I understand is about 1,000 or maybe just about 1,200, out of that 1,200, about 600 or a little under, are graduating but there are still challenges, Mr. President.

So, I believe that the Government has a duty and a responsibility to address this issue. Mr. President, is almost about three years going into four years, that we have had thousands and thousands of Venezuelans in our country in particular. There are other migrants, but I am focusing on the Venezuelans because they are affected directly. And the danger, Mr. President, that we face if we do not allow these children of these 20,000 to 25,000 migrants, not to forget, Mr. President, that there are many other tens of thousands, who are outside of the purview of what we are talking about, because they are not legally registered. We understand that there are over 100,000 migrants in our country. We do not know if it is true, it is untrue.

Mr. President: Senator, you have two more minutes.

Sen. Mark: We do not have any scientific evidence but the danger of that Mr. President, is that if you allow these children to grow from childhood, to teenager, to juvenile, to adulthood and they are without education, can you imagine, Mr. President, the tsunami of criminality that we can experience in our country. Because they do not have access to education. And education is the passport to freedom, to liberation and to emancipation.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: So, you have to do something about this tragedy that is facing our country. So Mr. President, I am speaking on behalf of all the children, be they from Venezuela, be they from Africa, be they from the Caribbean, be they from Latin America. I am calling on the Government, through you, to announce a definitive policy to allow these children to grow up like our children with education access, or access to education, and all the possibilities for growing up into dignified, decent, and citizens that we can all be proud of Mr. President. Mr. President, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this issue on behalf of migrant children in our nation at this time. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Minister in the Ministry of Education.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Mr. President, I speak on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and mothers of this nation. According to the UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency,

“Refugees are”—persons—“fleeing”—armed—“conflict or persecution”—
in their country of origin, and

“The protection of refugees...”—involves—“...safety from being returned to
danger”—they have fled—“access to fair and efficient asylum procedures,
and measures to...”—help them find—“...longer-term solution.”

Migrants on the other hand choose to move not because of a direct threat or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work or in some cases for education, family reunion and other reasons. If they choose to return home, they will continue to receive the protection of their governments. I make this distinction, Mr. President, because in this country, we tend to conflate the two terms, when in fact there are different legal requirements, processes and considerations relevant to each in turn. In Trinidad and Tobago, the non-national populations are subject to the provisions of the Immigration Act Chap. 18:01. With respect to education, Regulation 9(6)(e) of the Immigration Regulations states, quite clearly:

“No person shall admit to any educational or training establishment in
Trinidad and Tobago, any person who is not a citizen of Trinidad and
Tobago or a resident unless that person is in possession of a valid student's
permit issued by the Chief Immigration Officer.”

Regulation 9(6) states further at subsection (c):

“The Chief Immigration Officer may...issue a student’s permit if:

- (i) the person seeking to enter and remain in Trinidad and Tobago has been accepted as a student by such establishment;
- (ii) there is adequate accommodation for the student at such establishment;
- (iii) no local student has been displaced; and

- (iv) the person seeking to enter and remain in Trinidad and Tobago does not belong to a prohibited class.”

Our Government is committed to treating all persons including refugees and migrants with dignity and respect, and this includes access to education. The Ministry of Education is well aware there are school-aged migrant children in this country who are not in school. The Ministry is also aware of the risks the situation poses to the children in terms of social isolation, exploitation, and vulnerability to criminal behaviour, as well as loss of opportunities to advance their education and achieve gainful employment in the future.

Mr. President, I am happy to report that based on recent instructions issued by the hon. Prime Minister, the Ministry of Education has begun collaborating with the Catholic church on the programme of education they are currently providing to migrant children, and that possible arrangements that can be made to admit these children into school and or transitional educational programmes. Out of these discussions, recommendations for the integration of migrant children will be forwarded to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago for its approval. This report will be provided within the month of June 2023. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

HDC Towers on Todd Street San Fernando

(Construction of)

Sen. Wade Mark: Mr. President, the final matter on the Motion for the Adjournment. I wish to draw to your attention and through you, to this honourable Senate, is a need for the Government to explain its decision to construct three HDC

towers on Todd Street in San Fernando, in the face of objections by Town and Country Planning Division of the Ministry of Planning and Development and other stakeholders.

Now, Mr. President, this particular development has been almost tainted in controversy. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago through the HDC and as I said, contrary to a planning policy has embarked or has attempted to embark on the construction of these three towers on Todd Street which is supposed to house at least 100 or just under 100 multi-family housing units.

4.25 p.m.

Now, you know, the PNM has a habit of house padding. It is not only in south but they have destroyed, as we speak, Mr. President, very important nurseries in St. Augustine in order to build homes to thief, to steal the next general election in St. Joseph.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, no, no, that—again, that line and statement that you just made is just not allowed. It is imputing improper motives.

Sen. W. Mark: All right. So, Mr. President, I am saying, and I am guided by you, the Government, in the wake of 100 stakeholders—that is why they are going to get wallop in San Fernando—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark:—wallop in San Fernando, Mr. President, because over 100 stakeholders, including principals, including residents, including teachers, including non-governmental organizations, business organizations, and many others, they have told the Government, “Hands off Todd Street. Hands off our green space. Do not construct monstrosities in that area of the country”, but, Mr. Vice-President, as you would know, and I do not bring to the debate, as my

colleague would tell me, Sen. Hislop, “Stick break in PNM ears”. So even though, Mr. President, 100 stakeholders have told the PNM, “Do not construct any housing, any towers on this green space”, it is almost one hectare of land, Mr. President, that is involved.

So that Government has been told, “Back off”. Well, you know, this Government does not listen to anybody. The only person they listen to are two institutions, we and the Privy Council, nobody else. They do not listen to nobody else. So what has happened—

Hon. Senator: Who is “we”?

Sen. W. Mark: The “we” is the United National Congress—

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark:—that will give you a wallop when the local elections are called. Mr. President, so much so that the people of San Fernando have now taken legal action against Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley and his entire Cabinet. So when this campaign is taking place in San Fernando, you have an order from the court saying who is the defendant? Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley and his entire Cabinet; that is the campaign in San Fernando.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. President, in the High Court there is a matter that has not started. My information, Mr. President, I may be wrong, but my information is that sometime by the end of this year, maybe around October of 2023, the matter is scheduled for hearing in the High Court, but in the meantime I think wisdom and a certain degree of sensitivity—

Sen. Sagramsingh-Sooklal: Mr. President, respectfully, I rise on sub judice.

Sen. W. Mark:—will tell the Government, will tell the Government—

Mr. President: One second, Sen. Mark, there is a point of order. Have a seat. Point of order, Minister.

Sen. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: On a point of order, Mr. President, Standing Order 47, Sen. Mark did mention the matter is before the court, so I stand on—

Mr. Al-Rawi: That matter is sub judice.

Sen. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: Yes.

Sen. W. Mark: A judge is different from a jury.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, allow me to rule.

Sen. W. Mark: You know that.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, allow me to rule. Okay. So, Sen, Mark, as you have indicated, the matter is in front of the High Court right now and—

Sen. W. Mark: It is not before—no, Mr. President, I am addressing you, I have evidence today to show that the matter is going before the High Court on the 23rd of October—

Mr. President: So it is not—

Sen. W. Mark: It is not—*[Inaudible]*

Mr. President: Hold on. Hold on. Hold on. So it is not before the High Court—

Sen. W. Mark: It is not—*[Inaudible]*

Mr. President:—and you stand by that?

Sen. W. Mark: Yes. I—*[Inaudible]*

Mr. President: Continue.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Point of order—

Mr. President: One second. One second, Sen. Mark. Standing Order?

Mr. Al-Rawi: On the sub judice rule, if it is filed on the sub judice, may I have clarification, please, so that I know whether it is filed or not?

Mr. President: Sure. There is a seeking of clarification as to whether it is filed, which is what I am asking if it is before the High Court by way of a filing, or are you aware as to whether it is going there and it is not by way of a filing? He has asked for clarification. I am also seeking clarification.

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President, as far as I am aware, the matter will be at the level of the High Court sometime in October of 2023. That is what I have been advised—

Mr. President: Again, just for absolute clarification, is it filed right now or is it not filed?

Sen. W. Mark: I am not a member of that team. I am just telling you, based on what I have been advised, that is what is before us. But, Mr. President, may I—

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. President: Okay. So one second, this is not a back and forth and I am not engaging in a debate, so you stand by your words—

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, I stand by my words.

Mr. President:—that you are not aware that it has been filed or it is before the High Court as it is right now?

Sen. W. Mark: I am not aware, Sir.

Mr. President: Okay.

Mr. Al-Rawi: On the Standing Order and in light of what the hon. Senator has put on the record, I repeat, the Senator said the matter is going before the judge October 26th, you cannot have a date for hearing unless it has been filed, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Okay. So that being said, Sen. Mark, again, I am asking, do you stand by your words? There is clarification being sought as to whether this matter

is going before a judge, which means that it has to be filed and it is going before the judge. In other words, it is in the High Court proceedings, and in that procedure right now, are you saying that it is going before a judge in October, meaning it is filed and it is already part of the court proceedings, yes or no?

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President, may I? Mr. President, before I even answer this question—

Mr. President: No, no—

Sen. W. Mark: No. No. No. No.

Mr. President: I need the question—

Sen. W. Mark: I am just seeking clarification from you—

Mr. President: One second, have a seat. One second. I need the question answered so that we can properly rule on the sub judice rule that has been raised. So you have heard what I have asked for and the clarification that needs to be sought. You brought this up in the matter for the Motion on the Adjournment by way of the statements that you have made and I am asking you now, is it before the High Court?

Sen. W. Mark: Mr. President, I have been advised that this matter will be heard at the level of the High Court sometime in October of 2023. That is what I am clear about. I have been advised that it will be heard at the level of the High Court sometime in October of 2023. That is what I have been advised. And, Mr. President, what I wanted to clarify with you is this, when we talk about the sub judice rule, we are talking about a matter being influenced by a jury, not a judge; that is very clear. If this is a matter before a judge, nobody can come here and manipulate the sub judice rule to muzzle Members of this honourable House from raising issues, so I wanted you to clarify for the Senate this matter.

Mr. President: So, hon. Senators, on the ruling that has been brought forward by the Minister in the Ministry of Attorney General and the fact that I have sought clarification from Sen. Mark, Sen. Mark, you are standing by your words, and I will allow you to continue in that light.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you. So, Mr. President, what we are saying at this time is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has a duty to ensure, Mr. President, that the citizens of San Fernando and the stakeholders, the 100 stakeholders that are involved in this matter, that they are listened to—listened to. The Government cannot be wrong and strong in this particular matter. And therefore, Mr. President, I am calling on the Government to indicate to this honourable House, whether it intends to listen to the people of San Fernando, particularly in and around Todd Street, and the churches that are involved, all the mosques, the mandir, all the teachers, the principals, all the business people, the residents who are saying, Mr. President, they do not want the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to construct a tower, three towers, on that green space—

Mr. President: Senator, you have one more minute.

Sen. W. Mark:—that is available to the country—to the people, rather, of San Fernando. So the reason why I have brought this matter is for the Government to give an unambiguous, unequivocal undertaking that they will listen to the residents as we head towards local government elections—

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President, on a point of order, please—

Sen. W. Mark:—to ensure, Mr. President, that this matter is not addressed—

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, so you are ending your contribution there?

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, I will stop.

Mr. President: What is the point of order?

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President, I just want to go on record, I understand the exchange that occurred earlier with respect to Standing Order 47 and the comments made by Sen. Mark in this matter on the adjournment appear to a reasonable observer to represent a violation of this particular Standing Order. It is a matter, according to Sen. Mark's own words, that is awaiting adjudication, and he gave the date for that. The Senator's comments in this matter create a real and substantial danger of prejudice. I just want to go on the record, but thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: So as I have indicated and ruled, in the exchange that has occurred, Sen. Mark stands by his words in relation to understanding that Standing Order, and that is what has happened, and so we now move on. Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Adrian Leonce): Thank you very much, Mr. President. First of all, I would like to indicate that the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) has not initiated construction of three towers at Todd Street, San Fernando. I just want to put some facts out there. By letter dated March 10, 2022, the Housing Development Corporation engaged the Director of Town and Country Planning Division requesting feedback on the excision of a one-hectare parcel and a proposed use for multi-family residential development. In fulfilling the Government's housing mandate, the HDC undertook an exercise to identify available and suitable lands throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and, in particular, within the urban areas for which there is a high—and I would say, the highest demand for housing. In so doing, the HDC searched the greater San Fernando area to find available and

suitable lands that could be acquired to satisfy the record demand of the 20,524 housing applicants who identified San Fernando as their preferred housing location. And, Mr. President, it just reminds me of the Senator, Randall Mitchell's contribution and the pride that he would have taken being a "San Fernandian".

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Leonce: I am just saying, 20,524 persons put into the application that they wanted to live in San Fernando, so the HDC, in doing their job, looked to the greater city of San Fernando to find suitable lands to satisfy the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago, which is the job that the HDC is there for.

4.40 p.m.

By letter dated March 23rd, 2022, the Minister of Education provided a non-objection to the utilization of the parcel of land. Also, by letter dated April 7th, 2022, the Town and Country Planning Division indicated, inter alia, at that time that it did not recommend the site for residential purposes. The Town and Country further advised that prior to any development of the site, a non-objection letter from the Ministry of Education was required to change the utilization fraction of the one out of 10 hectares from a school site for four residential use.

As such, by email dated 6^h May, 2022, the HDC applied to the Town and Country for planning permission on the basis of the Ministry of Education's response, dated March 23, 2022. Subsequently, the letter dated July 29, 2022, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education informed the HDC that they are unable to accede to the request for the utilization of the lands.

So on September 8th, 2022, Cabinet agreed to the transfer of a parcel of state land situated at Todd Street San Fernando to the HDC, and noted that the approval would be sought via a subsequent Cabinet Note for the parcel of state land to be

vested in the HDC. What this means simply is that the Cabinet agreed to the proposal of the HDC, and that the HDC could commence exploratory work to determine the suitability of the land for the intended purpose.

By letter dated October 6th, 2022, HDC requested permission from the Ministry of Education to enter the Todd Street site to conduct land surveying and geotechnical surveys, and by letter dated October 11, 2022, the Chief Education Officer conveyed approval to the HDC to access the site located at Todd Street, San Fernando. This approval was to undertake the land surveying and geotechnical survey works.

Now these works, Mr. President, are works that are investigative for the suitability of the land for the said development. I would just like to reiterate that the HDC has not commence construction of any residential towers at Todd Street, San Fernando, and that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development remains committed to providing safe and affordable housing solutions to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

In light of the foregoing, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and the HDC have adhered to all lawful practices with respect to the relevant approvals associated with the planning and construction of housing units.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Feast of Corpus Christi

(Greetings)

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question I now invite you to bring greetings on the occasion of Corpus Christi. Minister of Trade and Industry.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):
Thank you very much, Mr. President. The feast of Corpus Christi, which we

celebrate next Thursday, is also called the “Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and the feast has its origin in 1246. It is a Roman Catholic festival, and a holy day of obligation. It honours the real presence of the body of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

The focal point on that day is the consuming of bread and wine, though, because of particular circumstances, we have not been partaking in wine from the same cup. But the celebration is observed in most countries on the Thursday just after Trinity Sunday. I believe that Thursday was chosen because it was the day that the last supper of our Lord was held.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the observance is commemorated with a public holiday, and all over the country from Scarborough, or to Point Fortin, Roman Catholic communities will engage in processions subsequent to the church services on that day, which will take place from the Wednesday evening until the Thursday morning. Most noteworthy is the devotional practice of the Eucharistic exposition and benediction as we note, which takes place subsequent to the holy mass, but before the procession.

Also, yes, this is a religiously diverse population, we are not all Catholics, but all are invited to share in this celebration which is inspired by Christian principles.

But while we honour Jesus in the holy Eucharist, there is usually quite some rainfall at this time, and it has started. Gardeners all, enthusiasts and novices too, they stock up on seeds and seedlings and plants in preparation for this day, in the hope of having the best and perhaps the most bountiful of outputs in terms of products and crops, and so on. So it is a day to be celebrated in every which way.

May I extend from the PNM Bench to all of the citizens of Trinidad and

Tobago, in particular the Catholic community, happy feast day of Corpus Christi, but may everyone else enjoy the day and enjoy the planting, and may the results be bountiful. Thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Nakhid.

Sen. David Nakhid: In the name of God most gracious, most merciful. I would like to thank my honourable Bench, Mr. President, for asking me to send greetings to the Catholics of Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean, and by extension the World, on this magnificent commemoration of what Catholics truly believe to be the body of Christ, Corpus Christi. It kind of embodies what the Minister said about being a diverse population and all can partake.

I thank Bro. Lyder, who asked me to give the greetings, knowing that I was raised in a very strict Catholic home, and from a very strict Catholic family. I understood in my growing up in that family, one of the concepts of Catholicism that appealed to me was the concept of Corpus Christi, and the sacrifice that that brought forward to me as I went from being in Rosary Boys' Roman Catholic School, Legion of Mary in St. Mary's College, acolyte at St. Joseph Roman Catholic Church.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: As a matter of fact I was at one time an aspiring priest, and I really understood. So rather than give an historical account of what Corpus Christi means, I would like to express to the population what it meant to me, having a mother and father who I saw for over three decades give the kind of sacrifice that Jesus Christ himself embodied to the world. I would see every year around Corpus Christi time 500 hampers being made by my family, and we all partook in that. We were all part of it, putting together those hampers for the poor in St. Joseph,

Tunapuna, into Laventille.

I think rather than just talk about the historical leanings of Corpus Christies, which became mandated by Pope Clement V, I think the 14th Century, catechism classes. I think what it brought forward to us is the role of the Catholic community in Trinidad and Tobago. I mean, the Catholic community has stood in the gaps. They have been there. I heard earlier the allusion to the Catholic community, how they have helped the migrants in many situations, how they have helped the poor all across for decades, and centuries.

So when we hear just the symbolism of Corpus Christi, the unleavened bread and the wine as the blood of Christ, it means much more than that to people who truly practise the Catholic religion. It means a kind of sacrifice where it is martyrdom.

I would like to leave with the saint who really spoke to Corpus Christi as a seminal event for Catholics around the world, that is Saint Thomas Aquinas, and his hymn was, which embodied the martyrdom, the sacrifice and that Christ made to the world for all of us, and it says:

Sing my tongue the mystery of the glorious body, and of the precious blood
shed to save the world by the king of nations, the fruit of a noble womb.

I think nothing else encapsulates what we mean to be a sacrifice, knowing that someone born of such nobility could give his life for what we know for the sake of humanity.

I would like, on behalf of our hon. leader, Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, the United National Congress, to wish to all Catholics here in Trinidad and Tobago, throughout the Caribbean, throughout the world, to my Catholic family who originally came from Northern Lebanon in Zgharta, grandfather Joseph Nakhid, a

Corpus Christi full of blessings and continued sacrifice. I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Seepersad.

Sen. Charrise Seepersad: Mr. President, on Thursday Catholics celebrate Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi is a Latin term that translates to “body of Christ”. It is a demonstration by Roman Catholics of their faith to the entire world on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday, which falls on the first Sunday after Pentecost. The celebration commemorates Jesus’ last supper with his apostles before his crucifixion. Rather than focusing on the passion and death of Christ, Catholics believe that he is here among us all the time. The consecrated piece of unleavened bread, known as the host, is synonymous with the body of Christ, and the holiday essentially celebrates the feast of communion.

The feast commemorates belief in the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, which is the central sacrament of the Catholic Church. The feast of Corpus Christi dates to the 13th Century, and was established by Pope Urban IV in 1264.

Corpus Christi is a time to celebrate and honour the profound mystery of the body and blood of Christ. As we gather in prayer and reflection, let us remember the infinite love and sacrifice that Jesus made for us. May this special occasion deepen our faith, renew our commitment to Christ, and inspire us to live our lives in accordance with his teachings.

The beatitudes or blessings of Christ, also known as “sermon on the mount”, demonstrates the common theme of compassion. For example, he said: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Foremost in his teaching was a message of love for one another.

I hope that the grace and peace of the Corpus Christi are with you today and always, and you receive abundant blessings from our Lord. May your journey of faith be strengthened, and you experience the blessings of love, unity, compassion and spiritual nourishment.

It is my honour, on behalf of the Independent Senators, to wish this honourable House, the Parliament staff and all of Trinidad and Tobago, a joyous and meaningful Corpus Christi filled with love, hope and the presence of God. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, it is my privilege to join you in bringing greetings to the Roman Catholic community on the commemoration of Corpus Christi, which is the feast of the body of Christ. The observance of Corpus Christies honours the body of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

The feast of Corpus Christi originated in 1246 when Robert II wrote Bishop of Liège, and ordered the festival celebrated in his diocese. By the mid-14th Century the festival was generally accepted, and in the 15th Century it became, in effect, one of the principle feasts of the church.

Roman Catholics observe this day in the belief of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and the meaning of one community or one body under God.

Although of many different religions, citizens hold reverence with the values of love, sacrifice, compassion and togetherness, which this day signifies. Let us keep these principles in the forefront of our minds as we interact with each other and support one another in our daily lives. Let us find new ways to exemplify these values in every corner of our community.

And so, in the spirit of love, unity and selflessness, please allow me on

Greetings – Feast of Corpus Christi
Mr. President (cont'd)

2023.06.06

behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, my family and myself, to wish the people of Trinidad and Tobago a blessed and happy Corpus Christi.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.54p.m.