

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 07, 2026

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS



[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PAPERS LAID

1. Audited Financial Statements of the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO) for the year ended September 30, 2023. [*The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development (Hon. Davendranath Tancoo)*]
2. Audited Financial Statements of the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme Limited (YTEPP) for the year ended September 30, 2025. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]
3. Audited Financial Statements of the Development Finance Limited for the year ended December 31, 2025. [*Hon. D. Tancoo*]

Papers 1 to 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: The leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for the public record, for today's Prime Minister's questions, the hon. Prime Minister is in the Chamber.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: However, we have been advised that the Opposition has filed no Prime Minister's questions, so we just wanted to register that for the public record. **Mr. Speaker:** I am not seeing any—all right, let us move to urgent

questions.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, can I respond?

Mr. Speaker: To me, nothing has been said.

Mr. Gonzales: No, Mr. Speaker, but he said something on the public record, and I need to respond to him.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Nothing has been said to respond to. Come on, let us move on to urgent questions.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, can I respond and explain?

Mr. Speaker: There is no explanation required. There is no order of business for which an explanation is required. No.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: It is simply to make an announcement. Come on, let us move on with urgent questions, please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

URGENT QUESTIONS

WASA Discoloured Water

(Measures to Address)

Mr. Marvin Gonzales (Arouca/Lopinot): To the Minister of Public Utilities. Can the Minister state whether any urgent measures are being undertaken by the Water and Sewerage Authority to address the issue of discoloured water affecting customers in parts of Diego Martin, Port of Spain, Central and South Trinidad?

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you most kindly, Mr, Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am a little bit surprised by this question coming from a former Minister

of Public Utilities. However, Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, WASA advised that the temporary water discoloration followed the scheduled maintenance shutdown at Desalcott, which is an annual event. Adjustments to the transmission system, followed by the restoration of normal pressures, disturbed sediment in parts of the network and resulted in temporary discoloration. WASA immediately commenced flushing in affected areas, and they have advised the public that the water remains safe for domestic use. Mr. Speaker, WASA has nothing to hide. The problem was identified, the public was informed, and corrective action was taken. Mr. Speaker, if you allow me, on September 14, 2022, the *Trinidad Express* carried the headline:

“WASA discoloured water supply to parts of central and north Trinidad.”

Mr. Speaker, therefore, that is why I am surprised, coming from a former Minister of Public Utilities. This happens from time to time, particularly where there are sediments impacting the watercourse. And I hear my colleague from Diego Martin North/East saying that this is untrue. I want to indicate to the Member for Diego Martin North/East that in a *Guardian* article in 2009, when he was a Minister of Government at that time, there was a headline that says:

“WASA says brown water good to drink.”

And that happened under two PNM administrations, Mr. Speaker. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Supplemental question.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in response—a supplemental question to the Minister: Is the Minister aware that there are a number of communities that are not served by the Desalcott or the Caroni Water Treatment Plant that are being impacted by discoloured water?

Mr. Speaker: Minister, seeing that he tied the question.

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, the challenges that have resulted from the shutdown of Desalcott and the Caroni Water Treatment Plant are not isolated or unique to those two facilities. It has impacted other areas that serve other parts of Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore, the challenges have remained the same. Those were two areas in terms of water treatment facilities that I have identified where we experienced that discoloration, but it is not unique or isolated to just Caroni and south Trinidad, Mr. Speaker. It has impacted parts of the north as well. I am advised by WASA that, because of the rains that we have seen recently, it has churned up the sediments within the water treatment facilities and, therefore, a filtration system—the lack of progress in terms of filtering out the sand and the dirt out of the treatment facilities has created some challenges there.

Mr. Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, supplemental question to the Minister: Minister, can you give an assurance or timeline to the customers who are so affected on when this matter is going to be resolved?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, WASA has advised that it is ongoing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

VISITORS

(Kanhai Presbyterian Primary School)

Mr. Speaker: Before we move on, on the Order Paper, kindly allow me to acknowledge the presence of students from the Kanhai Presbyterian Primary School from Barrackpore. Welcome.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL, 2026

Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 to establish the City of Chaguanas, and the Boroughs of Barataria, Couva, St. Augustine, and Sangre Grande; 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, and the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations, Chap. 48:50; and for other related matters [*The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Hon. K. Ameen*]

Question put and agreed to.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Khadijah Ameen): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 to establish the City of Chaguanas, and the Boroughs of Barataria, Couva, St. Augustine, and Sangre Grande; 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, and the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations, Chap. 48:50; and for other related matters, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is history in the making.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: The Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, enacted by the National Alliance for Reconstruction Administration, created 13 regional corporations,

which, with the Borough of Chaguanas and four older municipalities, made 18 corporations. The amendments by the PNM in 1992 reduced the 13 regions to nine, giving the 14 corporations that exist today. Then Minister of Government Ken Valley told the House of Representatives on the 15th of June, 1992, that the Government's own Cabinet-appointed supervisory committee had recommended eight regions, but that Penal/Debe was kept separate from Siparia, on:

...a representation from an Opposition Member.

That is in the *Hansard*. The reason was simple, Mr. Speaker: Without Penal/Debe, the People's National Movement had:

...an outside chance of winning Siparia.

Siparia was very marginal, and the UNC has taken control of Siparia Corporation now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: But, Mr. Speaker, the PNM supervisory committee, in their own report in April of 1992, laid in the House on that same day, records that the provisions of the Act:

...were discussed within the framework of the People's National Movement philosophy and the general views of the People's National Movement on the Act.

Those were the words of Minister Kenneth Valley, describing the 1992 boundary change as "minimum changes". And he announced in the Parliament that the boundaries committee, under one Mr. Eustace Seignoret, was to report within 18 months, and conceding in winding up that "we are not doing the reform now"; again, his words from the *Hansard* of 1992. Mr. Speaker, you know that committee never reported?

The interim arrangement of 1992 has stood for 34 years, and for 34 years, local government has been saddled with boundaries that are illogical and seem to have no reason but:

Within the framework of the People's National Movement philosophy and general views of the People's National Movement.

Mr. Speaker, they gerrymandered the boundaries so they could win in 1992.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, the *Hansard* has a number of contributions from MPs such as Ms. Pamela Nicholson and others who questioned, for instance, the merger of the then Couva and Tabaquite/Talparo region. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Chairman of Couva/Tabaquite and several other mayors and chairmen who are present today—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen:—because of the significance of this Bill to local government. Mr. Speaker, Couva/Tabaquite is an example of a region that starts on the west coast and goes all the way to San Pedro, almost to Rio Claro. There is no logic. There was never meant to be logic. It was PNM's logic.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, fast forward to 2013, 2016, 2019, 2023—for every local government election, PNM promised local government reform. They spent millions of dollars, you know. They had big meetings. They had white paper, and green paper. They had huge LED screens, massive presentations—talk, talk, talk, and very little or absolutely no reform.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: With the very little reform, Mr. Speaker, the PNM increased the term of local government from three years to four years. But you know why? Because they were trying to postpone the election of 2020.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: And they also had the Act of 2021, which they passed in the House and never, ever proclaimed. So that is to tell you the neglect that they had towards local government. All other improvements in local government were done by a UNC government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: We had proportional representation in 2013 for aldermen, rental of offices for councillors, hiring of secretaries, and monthly stationery allowance. That was done by a government led by Kamla Persad Bissessar in 2010.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: And you know, it was not until the UNC came back into government in 2025 that we had to increase those allowances. The PNM had those secretaries getting less than minimum wage. And thank God the UNC came back into government. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that these complaints are not complaints from the UNC. Some of these are words of former PNM councillors who served for many years under the PNM and got fed up. But, Mr. Speaker, the entire country got fed up of the PNM. They elected a new government. While they talk, the UNC is here to deliver.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, the Government led by Prime Minister the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar is bringing this Bill to modernize a municipal structure that will be fair and equitable. Our communities have grown, population centres

have shifted, and commercial and residential development has expanded. So, it is not simply about changing lines on a map. It is about bringing government closer to people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: It is about removing an imbalance where one region has an electorate of 17,000 people, and another region has an electorate of 180,000. Mr. Speaker, that is more than the population of Tobago. Tobago's electorate is 53,000 people. So, use that for comparison, and it will give you an idea of the vastness of the requirements for some of those municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, this Cabinet established a committee to review the municipal corporations' boundaries. This was announced via a post-Cabinet briefing, and it was well established in the public domain. The committee was established by Cabinet Minute 737 of the 28th of August, 2025, and received its instruments of appointment on the 28th of November, 2025. In its final report on the 16th of April, 2026, they record that they had consultations with stakeholder groups, including technical and administrative staff of regional corporations, councillors—both UNC and PNM—government Ministries and agencies, business communities and business chambers. They consulted with 18 Ministries and agencies, including the Highways and Drainage Divisions, Town and Country Planning, the utilities, housing, health, agriculture, surveys and mapping, homeland security, social development, community development, tourism, and the central statistical office, with the Confederation of Regional Business Chambers, as well as mayors, chairmen of the cities, boroughs, and regional corporations. They have the dates listed there.

The report, Mr. Speaker, compiles the stakeholder recommendations, several of which, including the communities within Point Fortin, are reflected in the Bill. There was extensive consultation with stakeholders. Written submissions, Mr. Speaker, were invited by the committee. The deadline was extended on three occasions to accommodate mayors and chairmen of the corporations controlled by the People's National Movement. Not one of them submitted. We have a record of the dates they were invited and how many times they put off. And you know what they told us?

Mr. Alexander: What is the reason?

Hon. K. Ameen: They told us that they were waiting for a directive from the leadership of the PNM.

Mr. Alexander: Which one, which one? Which leader?

Hon. K. Ameen: They said that they had to meet with their political leader to put together their views before they send their recommendations in writing. They had the opportunity to make an input. I do not know who was responsible for calling that leadership meeting over there, but it is clear that the leadership of the PNM—I am not calling no name. The leadership of the PNM failed their own local government representative.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Because they had the opportunity to have an input, and they deprived their local government members of having a say. And today, they will get up and speak on behalf of themselves—no consultation, none. Mr. Speaker, do you know that in 2019, the central executive of the PNM, headed then by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, appointed a committee chaired by one Mr. Masasai, to make recommendations on local government. They did their research; they

interviewed UNC and PNM councillors, mayors, chairmen—“big thing”. I am advised, Mr. Speaker, that the recommendations were tabled at a PNM General Council meeting, and PNM MPs rejected them. They rejected their own councillors’ recommendations for reform. So today, they have no moral authority to come here and criticize any recommendations we make.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: This Bill, Mr. Speaker, has been 14 months in preparation through a committee, an independent assessment, and Cabinet, and the commission’s detailed elimination will come back to the House before a single vote is cast with the new boundaries. The chairman of that committee, Mr. Speaker, is a well-established public servant who recently retired, I believe, from the Ministry of Planning—I think head of the Town and Country Division. And interestingly, after the appointment of the chairman of our boundaries review committee, I understand that that person was also appointed under the PNM, under Minister Franklin Khan, then Minister of Local Government, to chair a similar committee back in 2019. So, they cannot even chastise the person who was appointed to our committee because when they were in government, they saw the technical knowledge of that person and appointed that person to do something similar. They produced a report, but again, PNM did nothing with the report. We are about action, Mr. Speaker.

So, this Bill, Mr. Speaker—I am also reminded that when the PNM brought the 2023 Bill to create the boroughs of Diego Martin and Siparia—they brought it eight weeks before a local government election because they had no achievements to show going into the election. So that was their big achievement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, again, they had zero consultations. When they came in the still of the night with the Bill in 2021 to change the Tobago House of Assembly from 12 seats to 15 seats, they said it was to break a deadlock. “Dey get 15 nil in dey waist, Mr. Speaker.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: And what? They broke the deadlock, Mr. Speaker. What consultations did they have? They had zero. They do not participate in meaningful consultation, whether they are in government or in Opposition. So, they have no moral authority to criticize any procedure that we undertook in the months of preparation for this Bill. Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet-appointed committee identified disparities in the number of people represented by individual councillors and the burden that places on effective representation. I will give you an example. Councillors in Point Fortin represent 2,500 persons on average. Councillors in Couva/Tabaquite, and Tunapuna/Piarco represent 10,000 and 11,000 people on average. Some are more, some are less, and they all get the same pay. Mr. Speaker, how could that be fair?

In arriving at its boundary realignment recommendations, some of the factors the committee took into consideration included population size, density, and growth or declining trends, economic development, and social and infrastructural conditions. They looked at business and commerce. They looked at service delivery coverage, when you speak about health, employment, culture, and so on. They were intended to promote balance and growth and, Mr. Speaker, to look at geographical features such as rivers and highways to be used as unambiguous boundaries, so that you will remove some uncertainty as to where one region ends and another one begins.

So, Mr. Speaker, the need is clear, and to create those unambiguous characteristics as well between subdivisions in terms of the number of people in a city, borough, and region. So, for example, now we have Diego Martin Borough, which has roughly 89,000 electors, Chaguanas Borough has 71,000, and Point Fortin has 17,000. All of them are boroughs, but you can see the disparity. So there is no consistency; there is no formula, perhaps except the 1992 formula for the PNM to win.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill will be very effective. This Bill will establish the city of Chaguanas. This Bill will establish Barataria, Couva, St. Augustine, and Sangre Grande as boroughs. It will expand the city of Port of Spain, the Borough of Arima, and the Borough of Point Fortin. It will create the Tunapuna region, the Tabaquite/Talparo region, and reduce the size to more manageable in San Juan/Laventille region, the Diego Martin and Siparia Boroughs. The Bill will address the alderman council deadlocks and vacancies, and provide transition arrangements. This is structural reform, not simply a name change like the People's National Movement did.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, Chaguanas is well justified, as it has grown significantly, and its municipal status should recognize that reality. City status rarely reflects the development and the increasing importance as urbanized and commercialized area that it is. It is not about giving Chaguanas a title for appearance. It is about recognizing that Chaguanas has already become a city.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, there are several clauses that deal with the boundaries—the actual lines. Clause 4 deals with a revision of the list of aldermen.

Political parties will now be able to submit revised lists for aldermen where circumstances change. And we know that circumstances change. There are changed circumstances on both sides of the political divide. And I know that there are Members on that side who will be very happy to have the opportunity.

Mr. Alexander: Who? Who?

Hon. K. Ameen: The EBC, Mr. Speaker, remains responsible for receiving the list of aldermen and declaring the persons appointed as aldermen; that remains. The objective is clear, and it is following a lawful process. Mr. Speaker, clause 5, section 12B presently provides that the purposes of the list of aldermen. The word “party” includes an independent candidate, so that an independent candidate must file, just as a political party, a list of aldermen along with the names of councillors to be elected, an independent candidate. Clause 5 changes this.

11.00 a.m.

So, “party” will not include an independent candidate. It is practical. An independent candidate therefore no longer will need to recruit a whole list of prospective aldermen in order to be nominated. It will make it easier for independents to contest and to relieve the administrative burden of the EBC’s returning officers. This facilitates democracy. Democracy wins, everybody wins.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I move now to clause 6. Clause 6 amends section 13 with regard to a declaration of aldermen from a revised list. So, clause 6 makes the changes to section 13, which follows from clause 4. It allows for the filing of a vacancy in the office of aldermen and is amended so that the substitute is drawn from a list or a revised list, so that the list can be revised by the political party, and the EBC remains in charge of that.

Clause 7, very simply, changes aldermen—aldermen are currently deemed to be elected. They are elected on proportional representation. They are, in fact, appointed by their political party. So, this corrects that terminology. Instead of being referred to as “elected”, they are—aldermen are referred to as “appointed”. “Dey cyah vex with dat”.

Clause 8: Section 14 deals with a tie for mayor and deputy mayor. Mr. Speaker, legal luminaries like yourself will recall that in 2019, there was a debacle. There was a deadlock in the region of Sangre Grande, after one Rohan [Inaudible] Sinanan failed to entice the people of Sangre Grande north-west, and the UNC and the PNM tied 4-4 in the region of Sangre Grande. We all remember that. But, Mr. Speaker, there were no provisions to break that deadlock. In the region of Sangre Grande, when the council met for the elections, himself took the chair and himself voted for himself to be chairman. That is against the spirit of democracy, and so, today, the UNC is correcting that.

Mr. Alexander: He shook his own hands.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, this Bill provides for a lawful mechanism for resolving a deadlock in the selection of a presiding officer, the selection of a mayor or chairman, and the selection of a deputy mayor or deputy chairman. Where the council is tied, the spirit of democracy will prevail. The votes cast by the electorate will guide and the will of the people must prevail. Mr. Speaker, democracy wins, everybody wins.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I move now to clause 9. Clause 9 is what I refer to as the “crossing of the Floor” clause.

Mr. Alexander: Like San Fernando East, he wants to come across.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Ameen: It amends section 27, which deals with vacancies on the resignation or expulsion from a political party. Section 27(1) of the current Act, Mr. Speaker, sets out circumstances where a corporate office, the councillor or alderman, becomes vacant, so, for instance, failure to make a declaration of office; absence from Trinidad for more than 30 consecutive days without leave; failure to return within three months after an election; death or resignation; loss of qualifications. Because there is a list of qualifications, you could become disqualified. Currently, a change in political allegiance is not amongst them.

By contrast, I just want to refer—we in this House are governed— sections 49(2)(e) and 49A of the Constitution require a Member of the House of Representatives who resigns from or is expelled from his party to vacate his seat. Clause 9 in this Bill now adds a new ground for a councillor who was elected of a party under section 11, or an alderman who was appointed on the alderman's list by section 13(11), vacates office upon resigning from or being expelled by that party.

So new subsections (1A) and (1E) supply that machinery. The Member is deemed to have resigned or been expelled when a written notice of resignation, signed by the Member, is delivered to the party, or when a written notice of expulsion by the party is served to the Member. In either case, a certified copy of that letter goes to the Chief Executive Officer. The CEO then forwards it to the mayor, who must, within seven days, convene a special meeting at which that notice will be laid, and the council declares the office vacant with effect from the date of the declaration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: It goes further, Mr. Speaker, that if that meeting is not called within seven days, the office is deemed vacant on the expiry of that period. “Talk done”. Straight to the point. Democracy wins, everybody wins.

Mr. Speaker, what happens after a vacancy in the office of councillor is then filed and you have a by-election—we have had several by-elections when councillors die, for instance—and where you have a vacancy in the office of an alderman, the party will then appoint from their list or their revised list. Mr. Speaker, an independent councillor is not affected by this section. The grounds only apply to those who contest on a party ticket. Of course, the rationale, just as it is for us here in the House of Representatives, is that the people of that electoral district vote for a person on a party ticket and the aldermen are allocated on party votes, so that a member who changes sides after the election alters the balance of the council without reference to the electorate. That, Mr. Speaker, is not in keeping with the spirit of democracy. So, the clause gives the party’s own notice conclusive effect. The council’s role in declaring the vacancy is formal, just as it is now for the other conditions, including the death of an office-holder.

This amendment binds an elected person to the will of the electorate. You cannot take the people’s vote with a white jacket and change to a black jacket after you attain office, or show up in our UNC Christmas dinner and expect no action to be taken from me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, this Bill establishes what happens when a councillor or alderman resigns from or is expelled by the party through which that person enters office. I know that Members on both sides—because there are

people who are involved in selection of councillors and aldermen, and are recommending people, and they are disappointed, because sometimes you put faith and confidence in people—the electorate puts faith and confidence in them, and then, you know, it is part of the natural ups and downs of politics. So, I know this is a welcome clause from both sides of the House.

This Bill establishes what will happen to a councillor and alderman if they resign, if they are expelled from the party, and there is written notification, there is a defined statutory process. It is very clear. The mayor must convene a special meeting after seven days of receiving the notice. So, there is no uncertainty about when such a vacancy is legally determined.

Mr. Speaker, clauses 11, 12, and 13 deal with the configuration of the new boundaries of the municipal corporation. I want to share with you, Mr. Speaker, that the Parliament has now, as it did in 1992 and 1990, to determine the regions, the boundaries of the municipalities. The Parliament also has the power to decide the number of electoral districts in a city and a borough. The EBC has an approved formula to apply in regions to determine the electorate of each electoral district, that will give you the number of electoral districts.

I want it to be very clear: This Bill does not remove the statutory rule of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. This Parliament has the legal authority to treat with the municipal structure. The law is very clear. The EBC continues to exercise its statutory responsibilities in relation to electoral districts, in relation to managing the elections and the list of aldermen. The Bill itself, in fact, gives the EBC specific responsibilities in relation to aldermen and the electoral arrangement that follows these reforms. The Bill does not interfere with the independence and the statutory role of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

Mr. Speaker, I move now to clause 15. Clause 15 treats with protecting workers. The United National Congress has been on the side of workers and labour since its inception.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Very critical to this forming of new boundaries is the status of the collective agreements and union representation. You recall, Mr. Speaker, that this Government had to come to this House to bring a Bill to allow for former Petrotrin workers to be properly represented, because the PNM failed to ensure that their collective agreements and union representation was part of the law when they shut down Petrotrin.

This clause 15 protects the employees of the three regional corporations whose territory is divided by the Bill. Upon commencement, any collective agreement affecting workers employed by the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, Tunapuna/Piarco, Tabaquite/Talparo continues with effect and binds any successor by which those workers are employed. The trade union, which represented those workers, continues to represent them so that their industrial relation structure remains intact.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, this clause is designed to protect workers. The PNM would have never done that. They had the opportunity when they shut down Petrotrin and they failed the workers of Petrotrin. We must not allow that to happen. We will not allow it. So, in this Bill, we mention those three corporations. There is no need to mention the others, and I want to make it very clear: The clause is confined to those three corporations. Its extension to every affected and successor corporation, so that no worker loses their job, no worker

loses employment, terms and conditions, representation by reason of this Bill is recommended for the committee stage.

They like to go out there and “wild up” people, Mr. Speaker. They like to go out there and be dramatic and claim that corporation workers will lose their jobs. I want to tell you—I was a corporation worker, and I want to tell you that this Government stands with the workers in local government. Nobody will lose their job.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, this Bill expressly preserves existing industrial relations arrangements, the collective agreements and the trade union representation for all affected employees. Reform does not erase the rights of the workers. In 1990, when they shifted from county councils to regional corporations, the workers then, at that time, were reassigned. It is similar, but we are ensuring that that protection remains by putting it in legislation. We are restructuring institutions; we are not discarding workers. The existing obligation will not disappear because the municipal boundaries change. The rights, the property, the assets, the liabilities, the obligations are preserved with this transition, and that is very important.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make one thing very clear: This Bill requires a simple majority. This Bill will come in force from a proclamation, after which the EBC has 90 days to submit what is called a delimitation report. Elections on the new boundaries will follow when the necessary Order is made. This Bill does not postpone local government elections. It does not.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I recall that—what year they came in the still of

the night with the THA Bill? 2021? We were on that side, Mr. Speaker, and I recall that, in a very short space of time—I think the EBC had 90 days and they were ready, they reconfigured the boundaries. They changed the polling divisions, the polling stations. They did all that was necessary to have the THA election conducted within 90 days of the then PNM Government bringing that Bill to Parliament. We are months away from an election.

11.15 a.m.

I have no doubt that the EBC will be proactive as this Bill is in the public domain. When this Bill is debated, Mr. Speaker, it is not unusual for staffing, financing, and other resources to be increased to the Elections and Boundaries in a time of heightened activities. For the EBC, heightened activities are usually before a general election, a THA election, or a local government election. They hire and train additional staff, and they set up offices for returning officers, and so on, so there is ample time for that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to speak to the setting up of the new municipalities, the staffing, the premises, the accommodation, the financing, the standing orders for those new cities and boroughs, the transfer of assets which change hands, and the position of employees of the Chaguanas, Diego Martin and Siparia Corporations are not dealt with in this Bill, simply because it does not require legislation. It is separate administrative and financial measures.

I also want to put on the record, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is ready, willing and able to put all mechanisms in place to establish these municipalities.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I also want to take this opportunity to mention,

present in the Chamber, Permanent Secretaries, Mr. Peter Mitchell, Mr. Stephen Boodhram of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and our head of legal department who are very, very invested in this Bill. I thank them for their work and their support.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is fair, it is proportionate, and it is equitable. This Bill, Mr. Speaker, corrects 34 years of PNM-imposed gerrymandering. That is what it was.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, the evidence is very clear in the Seignoret report, their own report, where they made a decision to collapse all the work that was done before because the election results did not suit them. I also want to tell you, we are not changing these boundaries for the UNC to win.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Ameen: We are returning fairness and equity.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. K. Ameen: I want to tell you also, Mr. Speaker—because “daiz wha dey saying out dey, yuh know. Daiz wha dey saying out there.”

They held a press conference; I could barely see some people behind the podium yesterday. They held a press conference, Mr. Speaker, and they are claiming that this Bill is for the UNC to win. Let me tell you, had the boundaries remained as fair and equitable as they were in 1990, we would not have, today, a map of Trinidad with one-quarter of it red, three-quarters of it yellow, and 7-7 UNC/PNM corporations. We would not have had that today.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: So, Mr. Speaker, I hear them in the public domain; they are

talking about “gerrymandering”. The gerrymandering started in 1992 with the PNM Cabinet and the PNM report. We have the evidence. We have the evidence. This Bill returns equity, rationale and logic.

Where the PNM had Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation collapse into one, when logically—and it was separate, two corporations, and they did that so that the UNC will get one corporation instead of two. That is what it was, you know. Because Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo is a solid UNC corporation, and instead of being two corporations—so, today, if Couva/Tabaquite had remained as it was, UNC would have had eight corporations. So, they collapsed it into one, so we have seven instead of eight. But I want to remind this House and the population that three-quarters of the map today is yellow. Three-quarters of the map is yellow.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: So, Mr. Speaker, as our communities evolve, populations grow, you will have shifts in development. Years ago, everything was centred in Port of Spain and San Fernando. Those were the cities. Who would have thought that Chaguanas would have been such a bustling commercial centre as it is today?

So there is change and there is always shift in development, and there is no doubt that local government boundaries will evolve again. But the political imposition that forced this country to look at that map with three-quarters yellow and one-quarter red, and to be told that it is 7-7, the “maths not mathsing”, Mr. Speaker. After today, certainly we will have a more fair and equitable election. In 1992, I remind this House, the PNM imposed boundaries to make sure that they win. Mr. Speaker, today, these boundaries are recommended so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago win.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to mention—perhaps it is because she entered politics in local government first as an alderman in the then St. Patrick County Council in 1987 to 1991. Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has been a leader with her finger on the pulse in local government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I recall, as an elected local government councillor myself, sometimes you are out there in the flood and the rain by yourself.

The Member for Chaguanas East was a councillor, a mayor; Member for Moruga/Tableland, we were councillors, when Kamla Persad-Bissessar became leader, we never stood in the rain alone. I recall in 2010, when the new Government came into office, I was a councillor, we had massive rain and floods throughout this country, and the then Prime Minister took her oath of office, took off her high heels, put on her boots, and started in the east. I remember—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Ameen: No. No. Before we reached Diego Martin, we were in Piarco. I have a photograph in Piarco. I had on a football jersey, and we were out there in the flood.

We were in Piarco, in those areas that were flooding, and then she came down the East-West Corridor, Aranguez, and then she ended up in Diego Martin. In Diego Martin, a man lost his life, Mr. Speaker. This is a Prime Minister who stands with us in local government. She really stands with us. Mr. Speaker, I want to also ask the population, because sometimes, I think, that when we come in this House—

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have just one minute.

Hon. K. Ameen: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, when we come in this House, there are people who speak on behalf of themselves. Today, we speak on behalf of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: This Bill brings equity and fairness to local government, and so, Mr. Speaker, it is a landmark piece of legislation. I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in listening to the presentation of the Minister, the only description I could give of the Minister is that she is a stranger to the truth.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: In fact, the only truthful statement made by the Minister is that this Bill increases the number of corporations from 14 to 17. That is it. Everything else she said was inaccurate or untruthful.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, let me deal with some issues that the UNC has been putting into the public domain, because over the last month or so, they have been coming to us at the last minute, a day before, with complex legislation, none of which has been the subject of formal consultation with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This is another one, and when you tell them that, they say, “Well, we put it in our manifesto and that was consultation.” Well, I searched the UNC 2025 manifesto with respect to reform of local government. There is nothing—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—in the 2025 UNC manifesto, nothing, nothing that in any way resembles any part of this Bill, nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I mean, I did not say a word when the Minister was talking. Why it is that she has to talk as soon as I start to talk? Mr. Speaker, I am asking for your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Well, alright. It is early in the day, let the Member speak in silence, even though he normally does not afford that courtesy to everyone else, but let us give him that today, please. Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I did it this time, okay, this time.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Yeah, this time.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: That is not so. But, anyway, the fact of the matter is when you look in the UNC 2025 manifesto, there is nothing that even vaguely resembles this legislation. So they cannot use that excuse that they have used with the drinking age, and so on, to say, “It was in our manifesto.” It is not in there. So that is the first issue we need to deal with.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, let us look very closely at what the PNM did, because another colossal untruth uttered by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government was, “The PNM has never done any consultation on local government.” That is a colossal untruth. Because following the 2015 general election, the then Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Franklin Khan, undertook an

island-wide public and stakeholder engagement focused on local government.

There was a two-tiered approach. There was a ministerial—

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, they are muttering over there; I am asking for your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Come on, come on, allow the Member to proceed in some silence.

Mr. C. Imbert: I know every time I expose their untruths they get jittery.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. C. Imbert: So in 2015, the Government established two committees, a ministerial committee and a technical committee. I will come to the technical committee in a short while to show the difference between PNM and UNC. There was an island-wide consultation; a series of 14 public town hall-styled consultations were conducted across Trinidad's municipal regions, starting in San Fernando and concluding in Diego Martin, to gather direct feedback from burgesses.

Sessions were opened with protocols and broadcast live across national television, radio and Internet to maximize public reach and participation. The consultations were structured as communication and feedback, allowing questions and answers, suggestions, public proposals, and also clarifying issues with respect to what the PNM had in mind for local government reform.

At every consultation, there were high-level ministerial attendance, including the Prime Minister, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, and so on. That is what the PNM

did after the 2015 election. That is what you call “consultation”, not this pappy-show that the Minister referred to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So that is 2015 consultation on local government. I am going back to 2009, because the Minister decided to go into the Stone Age and quote from 1992, which is completely irrelevant to the matter at hand; 34 years ago. But let us go to 2009, Mr. Speaker, and in 2009, the then Minister of Local Government, Mrs. Hazel Manning, had a structured, multi-tiered public consultation framework. It started with a Green Paper in 2004. The publication and laying of a Draft Policy Paper, a Green Paper on Local Government Reform in the Parliament. Then you had stakeholder and public consultation, which was national consultation, regional forums, stakeholder meetings, focus groups, and public-private interface. More than 36 groups were consulted in the 2004 consultation. Let us move on.

11.30 p.m.

After that, that was the initial phase; then you had something like this, laid in Parliament in 2009, a White Paper on local government reform. A White Paper in 2009. Then the Bill was sent to a joint select committee for consultation with stakeholders, with interest groups, with regional corporations, with political parties, and so on. But after 2004, under Hazel Manning, more than 14,000 people were consulted in these various town hall meetings—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—and forums. Mr. Speaker, I know when I am debunking the untruths on that side, they get jittery. I am hearing them again. So, Mr. Speaker, that was the 2009 consultation, 14,000. You know what is interesting? The 14,000

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people who gave feedback on the 2004—starting with the Green Paper in 2004 and going up to 2009, 14,000 people gave their feedback, and this heavily influenced—if one looks at the Green Paper, and then one looks at the White Paper and looks at the documentation on the feedback between the Green Paper and the White Paper, you will see that feedback—

Mr. Padarath: *[Interruption]*

Mr. C. Imbert:—Mr. Speaker, now the Leader of Government Business is muttering. You will see that the structure of the White Paper was heavily influenced by feedback from the population between 2004 and 2009. These are the features that came out of public consultation. This is why, as I go further, I will debunk this mythology about reform. This is not reform. This is classic gerrymandering. I will come to that in a little while.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. C. Imbert: So, in the process of consultation between 2004 and 2009, the participants called for the THA model of governance. They wanted local corporations to function with greater autonomy, similar to the Tobago House of Assembly. That led to a proposal for a revolutionary executive council. Where is the executive council in this legislation? “It ain’t there. It ain’t there. Dis is ah gerrymandering Bill.” But we will come to that. So, the council would consist of a mayor and a chairman along with six specialized secretaries collectively responsible for managing local portfolios like health, infrastructure, community services, and so on. The 2004/2009 proposals, Green Paper, White Paper, joint select committee, and so on, led to a proposal for a reduction in the number of local government bodies, including the elimination of a PNM corporation. Completely opposite to what these individuals are doing on the other side. We looked at the

map. We decided to rationalize corporations—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—and in fact, were deleting the Diego Martin Regional Corporation. In those proposals—I know they think it is funny—there was a proposal from the public for full-time representation. Right now, local government representatives are deemed to be part-time. Also, to give the councils the authority to make their own decisions, get rid of the bureaucracy—remove the heavy weight of the public service bureaucracy from councils. That is the 2009 position. Then, Mr. Khan, in the 2015 period also developed that.

Then we come to the 2022 Bill. Because, you know, there are some intellectuals or pseudo-intellectuals in this country who just write rubbish in the newspapers and on social media. Act No. 11 of 2022, which was passed, rewrites the Municipal Corporations Act on eight related laws. It turns corporations from council-run administrations into bodies with a mayor-led executive, gives them a fixed list of functions and divisions, their own staff and a dedicated income stream by way of property tax. It gives them the authority for planning approval. It also puts the financial arrangements of corporations into a better format. For example, who runs a corporation under Act 11 of 2002? A PNM law, by the way. Because I see rubbish being perpetuated in the public domain that the PNM never did any local government reform. Nonsense. The PNM enacted Act No. 11 of 2022—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—and was in the process of doing the administrative change necessary to implement these proposals to give executive authority to councils. What does this Bill do? “It just move around some boundaries, look for clusters of UNC votes and create imaginary boroughs.” I will come to that in a little while.

So, in the 2022 Act, which is law, but they are refusing to proclaim that or repeal it for that matter—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: *[Interruption]*

Mr. C. Imbert:—who runs—Mr. Speaker, why is the Prime Minister talking while I am talking? I beg your protection.

Hon. Members: *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I beg your protection.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You did not proclaim anything.

Mr. Speaker: All right. Hon. Prime Minister. Members.

Hon. Members: *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. C. Imbert: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Yes. But come on.

Mr. C. Imbert: No. I am not coming on.

Mr. Speaker: As I have said before, no Member in this House has the moral authority to insist on the strict adherence to the Standing Order that demands that Members speak in silence.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker: That Standing Order is observed more in the breach. I have tolerated the crosstalk once it is moderate. You, yourself, Member for Diego Martin North/East, have engaged in it. Last week, when the hon. Attorney General was winding up, I had to intervene, even though the hon. Attorney General did not object. So, come on. Let us stop. All of us. This is not directed to any particular Member here. But let us stop adopting a glorified cry-baby posture.

Hon. Members: *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Let us deal with it. Come on.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, you have just taken away a minute of my time with that lecture. So, let us move on to what is going on here. The Act No. 11 of 2022 changed the entire structure of local government, fundamentally and meaningfully, not superficially like this nonsense Bill before us. It created an executive council. The most important change in Act No. 11 of 2022—if the UNC was serious, they would have reviewed Act No. 11 of 2022 and implemented or modified those provisions that they felt that they could live with. “But dey not serious. Dey not serious. Dey know dey in trouble. Dey know dey will get wipe out in de local next election and the next general election.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: The most important change in Act No. 11 of 2022 was the CEO must now act under the supervision and direction of the mayor, which is a problem in local government. The council passes resolutions, and the public servants ignore them and do not implement the wishes of the council. This happens in both UNC and PNM corporations. That is the fundamental change that is required for local government. But this Bill does not do that. Let me go to this Bill. So, I have dealt with this whole nonsensical argument about, “The PNM did not do consultation”. Absolute nonsense. In fact, with respect to Act No. 11 of 2022, there was consultation mainly on social media. There were 32,000 contributions via Twitter, 11,000 visitors to the interactive web portal set up by former Minister Al-Rawi, generating over 200,000 recommendations for reform in local government and a cumulative total of 512,000 proposals coming from the public.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “Half de population.” Half of the population commented, resulting in Act No. 11 of 2022. That is what you call consultation, not this

fictional, imaginary consultation. No town hall meeting. No national consultation. No Green Paper. No White Paper. “Yuh ask nobody.” You asked nobody whether they want to—and with respect to that allegation about PNM mayors and chairmen, that was nonsense. When this was proposed, the PNM mayors and chairmen asked the Minister, what are you proposing? Do you intend to shift the boundaries? Let us see what you planned. Let us see the new map that you want to—and the Minister point-blank refused to write that information because we knew what they were up to. They were going to gerrymander the boundaries. They want to see how they are going to gerrymander the boundaries first before you could make a comment. “We not stupid, Mr. Speaker.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So, let us move on to the other nonsense uttered by the Minister. The Minister said that giving the EBC 90 days to, you know, correct or adjust internal boundaries is enough time. Nonsense. In section 4(2) of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act Chap. 25:50, the interval for working out boundaries given to the EBC is a minimum of two years. Two years. The Act sets the interval at not less than two, not more than three years from the previous report. Over the years, EBC has had difficulty in even getting to the three-year. We have a Bill before the Parliament right now to extend the time for the submission of a boundaries report. So, the norm is somewhere between two and three years; quite often they go over. “Yuh want to give them three months? Three months to do this? Where you are adding three new corporations, and you are radically interfering with other corporations. Obviously, they are putting the EBC under pressure, deliberately.

But let us go to the Bill itself. What does the Bill do? It essentially changes

the number of corporations from 14 to 17. As I said, that is the only truthful statement made by the Minister. But the Bill also deals with problems that the UNC has. Right now, in the borough of Siparia, we have a situation where one UNC councillor became so disgusted with the UNC that he resigned from the UNC and joined the PNM. Similarly, one alderman became so disgusted with the UNC that he resigned from the UNC and joined the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And then—Mr. Speaker. You know, Mr. Speaker, “ah hope ah doh get another dolly house lecture”. I am hearing noise from that side. I am asking for your protection.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Let us afford the Member the courtesy. Please. Let us try. Hopefully, when it is another person’s turn to talk, the Member will return the courtesy.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I hear them muttering. Nothing to say. Rubbish. I have just debunked the untruth about consultation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Three separate consultations over a period of years, consulting with 500,000 people.

Mr. Padarath: Rubbish.

Mr. C. Imbert: Those are the facts. That is the truth. “You cah run from dat.” Mr. Speaker, are you going to allow the Leader of Government Business to shout, “Rubbish”, at me? Are you going to allow that?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

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Mr. C. Imbert: “Yuh going to allow dat?”

Mr. Speaker: I tried to get everyone. Even when the hon. Minister was moving the Bill, you were saying rubbish and I ignored it. But, please, let us try to allow the Member to finish his contribution.

Mr. C. Imbert: I certainly was not shouting across the Floor.

Mr. Padarath: Rubbish.

Mr. C. Imbert: There he goes again.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: You know, this is quite tiresome. Come on. Let us move on.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is tiresome that they shout across the Floor at me. I agree. So, the only truthful statement made by the Minister is that we are moving from 14 to 17. I will deal with all the other untruths in the remaining time. By the way, how much time do I have left, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: You have actually 22 minutes left.

Mr. C. Imbert: That is more than enough, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So, what does the Bill do? The Bill gives the—

Mr. Speaker: Sorry. My bad. You are not—I am reminded that your first 30 finishes at 11.54. I took the note wrong here, but the Clerk has reminded me. So, you have 11 minutes of regular time.

Mr. C. Imbert: Right. So, I have 26 minutes. Thank you very much. If you would give me the 15. Right. That is more than enough time. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: What does this Bill do? This Bill could be called the “Siparia

Borough Bill”. One of the things on the UNC’s gerrymandering Bill, too. Those are the two names I would give to it. So, that in Siparia, we have a situation where, as I said, and I want to repeat, a UNC councillor became disgusted with the UNC, resigned from the UNC and joined the PNM, and a UNC alderman became disgusted with the UNC, resigned from the UNC and joined the PNM. Then we had the regrettable, unfortunate demise of a UNC councillor. So now the PNM has seven votes out of 12, and the UNC has five. So, this is designed to deal with that. To deal with that problem that they have in Siparia. The hypocrisy of the Minister. The hypocrisy about black jacket and white jacket—

Hon. Member: Baliram, again

Mr. C. Imbert:—they forgot Vincent Lasse and Rupert Griffith, PNM-elected MPs, who were enticed to cross the Floor and join the UNC in 1996?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: It was good then. “It was good then and it bad now.” Okay. It was good when those two PNM MPs, elected by PNM voters, crossed the Floor to UNC. “But it bad now” that two UNC officials got disgusted with them and came across to the PNM. That is hypocrisy. Total hypocrisy. It is good when it suits you, and “it bad when it doh suit you”.

11.45 a.m.

So, the Bill deals with that. And then you have some consequential clauses that allow them to—after they tried to get rid of an alderman, they could change up the list however they want, and put in a next one, and appoint that person. That is what that Bill does.

But one of the errors in this Bill—to show you how incompetent the UNC is. Does the UNC have any understanding of what happens when you create

a borough? Clearly, they do not. Because section 12(3) of the Municipal Corporations Act makes it mandatory that one of the aldermen in a regional corporation must be representative of a village or community council. And by changing all of these regional corporations into boroughs, you have now eliminated that mandatory requirement for community involvement as an alderman in a regional corporation by converting all these regional corporations into boroughs, or creating new boroughs out of thin air. So clearly, they talk the talk, but they cannot walk the talk. So, you are now removing the requirement for a village or community council to be an alderman, or somebody with experience in a village council or community council. “Yuh gone with dat”. It just shows how anti-people you are and it shows how incompetent your drafters are.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: They did not see that.

But let us go to what else this Bill does. So, it attempts to deal with the problem they have in Siparia. It also deals with a problem—you know, since 1966 or thereabout, the opponents of the PNM have pushed for proportional representation, but they have failed. They do not like this first-past-the-post thing at all, so that when you look at what is happening when you have a tie, they are introducing an element of proportional representation in the belief that it will favour them, but it will not favour them. “De amount of people that go vote for PNM in the local election, you could do wa yuh want”.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “We go win de proportional representation too, as we did in 2013”. You know, the Minister is looking at the map as it relates to 2023. “Why yuh doh look at the map as it relates to 2013?” You will get a surprise.

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Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Because in 2013, the PNM won eight out of 14 corporations outright and got the majority of the votes in 2013.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “So, doh assume, doh assume”. People so vex with the UNC at this point in time, “doh assume” they will vote in 2027, or whenever this election is going to be, the way they voted in 2023. That would be a very mistaken belief. We will wipe the floor with you, as we did in 2013, 2016 and 2019.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: We will change the colouration on the map, “you doh worry about dat”. We will change it, okay?

But, Mr. Speaker, let us get now to what is the definition of “gerrymandering”, because the Minister has no understanding, or if the Minister has, she is deliberately trying to mislead the House. What is gerrymandering? It:

“...is the practice of drawing...electoral districts...”—boundaries to give—

“...one political party or group an unfair advantage...”

And it uses two—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, come on, you and all must agree that they are making too much noise. I beg your protection again.

Mr. Speaker: It is silent now. Go ahead.

Mr. C. Imbert: Only for a second. So—

Mr. Speaker: Must you always have a retort? It is tiresome. Just proceed.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am an elected Member of Parliament, I speak for the people.

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Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: I speak for the people, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but must you always retort? Just proceed. Must you always have a retort?

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, I speak for the people that have elected me.

So, let us now go now to the two strategies that are used when a political party engages in gerrymandering. The first strategy is called “cracking,” where you spread voters from an opposing party or groups across many different districts, diluting the voting power.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Try, please. Let us be silent in the hope that the Member will return the courtesy later.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, “cracking,” you spread voters from opposing parties across many districts. You are trying to dilute the voting strengths of the—that is “cracking”. And then “packing”, which is what this Bill all about, this Bill is all about “packing”, concentrating as many opposing voters as possible into a single district. So, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, let us look at what the UNC is doing. Let us look at what they are doing. They looked at the corporation of San Juan/Laventille, and they looked at where the PNM votes are concentrated and where the UNC votes are concentrated. The UNC knows that with the existing boundaries, they could

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never win San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. “Is licks for dem in San Juan/Laventille”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So, what did they do? What did they do? There is a cluster of UNC votes in Aranguez and El Socorro, so they went into the corporation and carved out this little piece—it only has as many voters as a constituency, this new borough of Barataria; borough.

Hon. Member: Borough.

Mr. C. Imbert: A borough deals with a certain status—“ah” little, little area, with only 30,000 voters, has as many votes as I have in Diego Martin/North East, but they are calling that a borough and they are putting five districts into it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So, they go on in there, and they look—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid, whatever your admonition, they are screaming at me. I beg your protection again.

Mr. Speaker: All right. It is silent now.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: “Shh.”.

Mr. C. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, I am not telling you. Why are you—

Hon. Member: Mr. Speaker, do not let him rile—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, sometimes this—look, I really do not want to say so early in the morning what I had in mind to say. It is silent now. Perhaps we should give the Member the environment of a funeral home to proceed.

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Mr. C. Imbert: That is fine with me, or a church. “Ah could take ah church too”.

Mr. Speaker: Churches in Prague, they are actually quite noisy on a Sunday evening.

Mr. C. Imbert: No, no. It is all right. In my church—my church is silent.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: So, anyway, the fact of the matter is, let us look at what they are doing in San Juan/Laventille. They have carved out areas which traditionally support the UNC and created an imaginary borough, which has as many voters as my constituency, that is what they did there.

Then, what they did with to the southern part of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, they know that, as you go south of the Eastern Main Road, except for one small area in the Caura area, again, the voters in that area traditionally tend to vote for the UNC. “So, dey take out da piece” of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and create the Borough of Siparia.

Hon. Members: Siparia?

Mr. C. Imbert: I mean, they are not fooling anybody—sorry, St, Augustine. So, they have created this new borough of St. Augustine by just hiving off the part of Tunapuna/Piarco, the area where UNC votes are concentrated.

Ms. John: “And wa wrong with dat?”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Classic packing.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Gerrymandering.

Mr. C. Imbert: Classic packing—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Gerrymandering. That is what gerrymandering is.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let us see what else they have done. They know that in Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, the votes are predominantly UNC, so they cut it in two. They make two UNC corporations. That is what they are doing. So, they have redistributed the boundaries across the country to create three new boroughs where, if you do the analysis, you will see the majority of the persons in there traditionally vote UNC, so they do that just so they could play the numbers game; the numbers game, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not mean to disturb you. Do you want—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course, I want the 15 again. I already said that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. And then, what have they done in San Fernando? They tried all how to win San Fernando, “dey cyah win”. We are always beating them in San Fernando. So, what did they do? They bring in polling divisions from Pointe-a-Pierre and Claxton Bay, which traditionally vote UNC, and add them to San Fernando, hoping that will assist them to get the balance of power in San Fernando. They are not fooling anybody.

Where is the reform in this Bill? Where are all the features of executive authority that have been asked for, for decades, by persons who live in local government regions? For decades people have been asking for local government bodies to get more autonomy, to get more control over their resources, to be more efficient. There is nothing in this Bill that even smells of reform, Mr. Speaker. This is pure and simple classic gerrymandering just to suit a political purpose.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: They are not fooling anybody. “Ah feel even dey own hardcore supporters, dey eh fooling dem”. I am sure their hardcore supporters know exactly what they are doing, creating these clusters of UNC voters, as called in the literature, “packing”. They are not fooling anybody.

And what did they do to Arima? What is the rationale for doubling the size of Arima and this nonsense about making Chaguanas a city?

Hon. Members: What?

Mr. C. Imbert: You know—yes, it is nonsense. I will tell you why. I will tell you why. Because in our proposals, we proposed to make Chaguanas bigger, to give Chaguanas control over more land area and to make Chaguanas a city. What have they done? This is a political fraud, Mr. Speaker. What have they done to Chaguanas? It is a political fraud. They have reduced the number of electors in Chaguanas from 70,000 to 43,000. It is now a borough, Chaguanas is now a borough. It has a certain geographic area. It has—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, come on. Why are you tolerating this, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Members, please. The Member requires silence to concentrate. Let us afford him that small courtesy.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The nonsense that they are proposing with Chaguanas is to cut Chaguanas down in size, make it smaller; smaller—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—much smaller, from 70,000 voters to 43,000. That is what they are doing. They are cutting Chaguanas in half and then calling it a city; big joke. What the PNM was seeking to do was enlarge the boundaries of Chaguanas—

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—and call it a city. We are the first ones that proposed a city in Chaguanas.

Mr. Hosein: “And yuh never do it”.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yeah, sure. It is in our Bill, all you had to do was proclaim that. You just had to proclaim Act No.—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, all that had to be done was to proclaim—

Mr. Speaker: So, who are you addressing? Me or are you addressing the other side?

Mr. C. Imbert: You.

Mr. Speaker: Well, turn this way.

Mr. C. Imbert: Sure.

Mr. Speaker: You know—

Mr. C. Imbert: I said, sure.

Mr. Speaker: I just said that facetiously to demonstrate this insistence on speaking in silence, when the disturbance is moderate. And I mean, constantly, to be on my legs, you know, come on. Let us move on with it.

Mr. C. Imbert: I am sorry, I beg to differ, the disturbance is not moderate. Can I continue my contribution?

Mr. Speaker: I hope I do not have to remind you of that later.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is not moderate. Let me continue in my opinion, Sir, respectfully. Let me continue.

So, they have reduced the size of Chaguanas from 73,379 voters to 43,808 votes; cut it in half and call it a city, and they have taken vast areas of the current

Chaguanas—Cunupia, Longdenville—taken it out and shoved it into this new Tabaquite/Talparo “ting”, just to maintain control. So, what they have done with respect to Chaguanas is they have made sure they have—again, packing—concentrated Chaguanas into the areas which traditionally vote UNC and get rid of PNM voters in Chaguanas. That is what they have done. They are not fooling anybody. Anybody who does a statistical analysis of this Bill—now, how can you justify cutting the size of Chaguanas in half, instead of leaving it the correct size and making it bigger, as the PNM proposed when we first proposed to make it a city? How can you justify that, but you are more on than doubling the size of Arima? What is the point of that?

So, Arima is, right now, 29,883 votes. You are making it 64,711. You are more than doubling the size of Arima and you are cutting Chaguanas in half. But all the talk about how Chaguanas became commercialized and nobody would believe how developed—Mr. Speaker, I am talking to you—Chaguanas became, but you are reducing the size of the population that will now be served by the city of Chaguanas, but you are more than doubling the size of the Borough of Arima? Where is the logic in that? There is none.

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And another untruth that the Minister uttered was they are trying to rationalize the number of voters. Nonsense, nonsense, Mr. Speaker. How many voters will we have in the new borough of Barataria? Six thousand, more or less, per district. How many are we going to have in Diego Martin? Almost 9,000, Mr. Speaker. Almost 9,000 in Diego Martin, 8,630 to be precise. How many are we going to have in Princes Town? Eight thousand, four hundred. How many will we have in Penal/Debe? Seven thousand, eight hundred and seventy eight, but only

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6,000 in Barataria. It shows you that Barataria is a fictional creation of the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: It is fictional. You go through all—look at it. Port of Spain, 4,000; San Fernando, 5,005; Chaguanas, 5,004; Arima, 6,004; Point Fortin, 4,002; Diego Martin, 8,006; Siparia, 8,000; Barataria, 6,002; St. Augustine, 7,003; Sangre Grande, 7,006; San Juan/Laventille, 7,005; Tunapuna, 6,003; Mayaro/Rio Claro, 4—“Yuh eh touch dah one at all. The tiniest little corporation in the country. Yuh eh touch it at all.” Four thousand, three. Princes Town, 8,004. Come on. None of these numbers are rational. None of them make sense.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: None of them match the rhetoric of the Minister. None of them match the rhetoric of the Minister, where the Minister claimed, we are trying to rationalize things to make sure that the number of voters in a district is more or less the same. Nonsense. Absolute nonsense. And, you know, the Minister made a comment about not interfering with the EBC. “You can’t. Yuh don’t have de necessary constitutional majority to do dat.” Thank God.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank God that we have an independent, constitutionally appointed EBC that you cannot interfere with. “Thank God fuh dat.” As someone told me this morning, “Thank God for small mercies.” And, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Yeah, that is fine. That is fine. “You cud say wuh yuh want. It doh matter.” You know, Mr. Speaker, speaking to you hearing soto voce, what was hurled across the Floor to me, that was an interesting thing in a commission of enquiry into the EBC. You know, a particular voter had died and he appeared on a

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list. And in the enquiry, his son appeared. His son, with the same name, as is common in certain families. The son appeared with the same name, and said, “Is me, is not meh dead father.” Come on. That is what happened. You cannot fool me. That is typical of the UNC—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert:—because it was a UNC supporter who appeared and impersonated his father. “Dais wuh went on.” I mean, that is what they do. That is what they do all the time. That is what they do.

“So, you could say wuh yuh want, inno, Mr. Speaker. They not changing facts, inno. I know dis UNC, yuh know. When yuh have dem under pressure. When yuh ketch dem telling untruths. When you ketch dem being dictatorial. When you ketch them being oppressive”—

Dr. Gosine: Mr. Speaker, 48(6).

Mr. C. Imbert: What? What is he on about?

Mr. Speaker: No, and I will tell you why. Because of the nature of the legislation, we are going to boil it down to rhetoric, and I am just going to leave it as neutrally as that. But I am not going to stop the hon. Member. Thank you very much. Sorry about that, Chaguanas East.

Mr. C. Imbert: “Mr. Speaker, I doh know why you apologizing.” The fact of the matter is “when we ketch dem being oppressive, dictatorial, undemocratic, deceitful, dishonest, when we ketch dem, dey resort to ad hominem insults.” I have endured that for 34 years. It means nothing to me. “You cud say wuh yuh want about me.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “It will just bounce off. So, doh waste yuh time. Doh waste yuh

time.” Let us go back to the matter at hand.

The matter at hand is that the Government has used the fact that local government is not enshrined in the Constitution to gerrymander local government boundaries in Trinidad by packing areas with UNC clusters of votes in order to give themselves a political advantage. That is what they have done. But the mistake they have made is that the population is so upset with them. The population is so angry with them. “The thousands and thousands of unemployed people on the breadline right now who cyah feed dey children, who cyah survive, who cyah pay dey rent, who cyah pay dey light bill because of this wicked and oppressive Government.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: They will vote you out. You could change any boundary you want. You could interfere with any boundary you want.

Mr. Padarath: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Imbert: You know, Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to speak over the screams of the Leader of Government Business, you know. “It hard.” But the fact of the— “Mr. Speaker, it hard, but I will try. As you always say, I must ignore dem. So, I will try to ignore dem.”

You see, what I particularly want to challenge is the nonsense written by pseudo-intellectuals in this country. None of them have looked at this Bill. None of them, the people who are supporting this rubbish. None of them have looked at it. They have not looked at Act No. 11 of 2022. They have not looked at the White Paper that I brought into this Parliament. They have not looked at the fact that the UNC could simply proclaim the relevant sections of Act No. 11 of 2022 and bring meaningful change to local government. They are just pandering

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to death. Some of these commentators are deceitful. Some of them are dishonest.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Some of them are just plain stupid. Some of them just want to try and deceive people. We have seen that before. We saw that with this comment about your predecessor having passed legislation in favour of the UNC. Simply untrue from what I would call a pseudo-intellectual who practises to deceive in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: All the UNC is doing is changing the boundaries, gerrymandering, packing votes, creating clusters of votes where UNC voters are to give an impression that they have won the next local election. But as I said, as night follows day, they will get licks. They will be wiped out in the next local and the next general election. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Hon. Saddam Hosein): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate. Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, it was clearly a delusional man suffering from political tabanca—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—after that massive wipeout that they got on the 28th of April, 2025 last year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, he is reeling from so much political tabanca that I will not stand here

and be lectured by a Member who was not born in this country about how people should vote here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I will not take him on. And, Mr. Speaker, he said, what? That the Member for St. Augustine is a stranger to the truth? Well, let me give you what the record says, Mr. Speaker, because he raised the Commission of Inquiry into the EBC, the Deyalsingh Commission. And I want to quote from that report, Mr. Speaker, where one:

Colm Imbert made objections about people being dead, people not living in particular addresses, and that they have not been registered to vote. There was one—

Mr. Speaker, and I am quoting from the report:

Vinul Sookram was objected to on the ground that he was deceased. Vinul Sookram was a gardener who lives in Diego Martin and was alive.

And he objected and said the man was dead.

Hugh Simmons was objected to on the ground that he was unknown. He gave evidence that he and other members of his family have been living at the registered address for many years.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, point of order 48(6).

Mr. Speaker: I do not want to take up too much time.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no, hold on. But it is a bit rich for a Member to invoke 48(6). You want me to read everything you said? “Deceitful”, “dishonest”, “stranger to the truth”.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no. What I am saying, it is a bit rich to invoke 48(6). Overruled.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You see, he does not want to hear the truth, Mr. Speaker. I am quoting again.

Gail Debbie John Francis, he objected to her on the ground that she has changed her address. She gave evidence that she and her mother have been living at the registered address since 1990.

He is lying on people, Mr. Speaker. He is a stranger to the truth.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And, Mr. Speaker, he even lied on the EBC. The report said: Mr. Cayenne denies telling Mr. Imbert that in retrospect the EBC was not ready for the 2001 election.

The EBC Chairman had already communicated to the President its considered judgment as to the readiness of the commission for an election. As a chief election officer, he did not contradict the commission to Mr. Imbert.

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]*—in the hope that you would return the courtesy but you sit there—*

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I am happy you are taking my point because it is demonstrative of the remonstrations I have had to raise against you before for the same thing you complain of.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, these are matters of public record that the Member has been telling untruths on people because when the PNM is in trouble, Mr.

Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—they will go to every single length and breadth to destroy the reputation and character of people. I want this House to recall and remember a Member from this House called Sadiq Baksh, what they did to him. Not a single charge was laid on him, Mr. Speaker, but they planted missiles and other items in his water tank just so that they could win that seat, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is the ends that the PNM will go to secure political victory in this country, but we will stop them, Mr. Speaker. We will not have any of that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We respect the will of the people and today we are doing the people's business. Why is it you have a problem when anybody after the lighthouse is getting government services? Why? He goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, what? "We doing nonsense in Chaguanas." What? People of Chaguanas are not the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Yesterday, he was in Port of Spain surrounded by some—"I doh know, dey look like security guard or something." He said that, "There is nothing special about Barataria." Mr. Speaker, I represent the people of Barataria/San Juan and they are special people, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: They are special. "Just because you cannot, just because allyuh get real licks in Barataria/San Juan, that means dat de people not special."

Mr. Lee: You represent both PNM and UNC.

Hon. S. Hosein: I represent all of them. You then said that "There is nothing special about St. Augustine" yesterday on a press conference. The people of St.

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Augustine are special, Mr. Speaker. They are special.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Today, I want to commend a very special Prime Minister who has taken a courageous decision, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—because this is not a matter that she has thought of overnight. The Prime Minister has been fighting for this particular position since 2003, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Point of order. Point of order, 44(8), and I reserve my right under 44(8).

Mr. Speaker: 44(a)?

Mr. Imbert: 44(8).

Mr. Speaker: You are asking to be heard again? In the middle of the contribution? Well—

Mr. Imbert: At the end, at the end.

Mr. Speaker: At the end of his contribution?

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Alright, we will revisit that.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, because the Member had nothing to say in 45 minutes, he should not be taking up my time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: He will take away my time. You see, the hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, has been a practitioner of local government who made her way up to the highest political office of Prime Minister in this country, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lee: Twice.

Hon. S. Hosein: Twice. And today, we stand on the shoulders of that very strong Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Who was sworn in as the Prime Minister for the second time, said, “That there are people beyond the lighthouse.” That there are people beyond the lighthouse. But every time we try, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we spread government services and the resources to people beyond the lighthouse, my friends opposite are exceedingly angry about that. They are angry. They are angry.

The Member said that what? I want to address this issue of Chaguanas because he dealt with Chaguanas in terms of we are doing nonsense in Chaguanas. He said, “How could we reduce Chaguanas and call it a city.” Mr. Speaker, the current electorate of Chaguanas is right now 71,000 persons, 71,000 spread across eight electoral districts. The electorate of Port of Spain currently is 37,000 spread across 12 districts.

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Port of Spain is a city. Thirty-seven thousand spread across 12 districts. San Fernando has 50,000 persons spread across nine districts. Nine districts, which we are now proposing to be 11. Chaguanas 71,000. But we are doing nonsense. We are doing nonsense. When you have a corporation like Point Fortin that has 17,000 people, and you call it a borough, you are complaining about the borough of Barataria.

You see, Mr. Speaker, they are complaining because they will never be able to convince people in this country again to vote for the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: After you have suffered them for 10 years. After you sit down on a couch in the Hyatt and laugh at them and say, “I am going to raise gas prices and dem ah riot yet”? You are suffering and paying the political price for that statement and that contempt you had for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Because the people of Barataria, the people of Mount Hope, the people of Bamboo will now form themselves into a borough, you have a problem with that. Because the people of St. Augustine will now have a borough, you have a problem with that. Because the people of Couva will have a borough, you have a problem with that. But you have no problem with a borough having 17,000 people in Point Fortin.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You have no problem with that. You see no issue with that. You see no issue with that.

Mr. Speaker, as a parliamentary representative in this Parliament, we represent close to 25,000 to 30,000 people. One of us alone. One. Yet you have one borough corporation called Point Fortin that now has 17,000 persons with six councillors and four aldermen, 10 persons, and you see nothing wrong with that? We are going to spread the resources of this country equitably across the land. We are going to do it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: So, you can jump, and you can complain how much you like. It will be done, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: This was too long coming. We have waited too long for this, and the time is now, and the time will be happening now.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go on to some history. Because this local government issue did not come up yesterday. It did not come up last night. In 1989, under the NAR Government—a then NAR Government would have found it necessary to ensure that there was a decentralization of government services across Trinidad and Tobago.

In fact, there was a report, Mr. Speaker, and I have a copy of the report here. This report was done, and it was dated May 1990: The decentralization process for regional administration and regional development in Trinidad and Tobago, proposals for reform, May 1990. Mr. Speaker, in this particular report, they talk about giving services through Diego Martin, Laventille, San Juan, Tunapuna, Piarcó, Sangre Grande, Couva, Talparo/Tabaquite, Rio Claro, Siparia, Penal/Debe, Princes Town, and Mayaro.

And based on this particular report, Mr. Speaker, the then NAR Government went to the Parliament, and they passed Act 21 of 1990, which establishes 18 municipal corporations, Mr. Speaker. I want to go through the list here because the Member for St. Augustine mentioned it, but I think it is instructive that the country knows the history of this particular matter. The corporations were—that was the law. This was the law, Mr. Speaker, in 1990.

Port of Spain, San Fernando, Arima, Point Fortin, Chaguanas, Diego Martin, Laventille, San Juan, two separate corporations. Tunapuna, Piarcó, two separate corporations. Sangre Grande, Mayaro, Rio Claro, Princes Town, Tabaquite/Talparo, Couva, separate from Tabaquite/Talparo, Penal, Debe was even separate from Penal, and Siparia. It was 19 corporations.

The NAR then left government, Mr. Speaker. Then comes the PNM. Then comes the dangerous PNM. They saw this, Mr. Speaker. This was in fact the law.

Mr. Speaker, I am holding a very large document in my hand. You know what this was, Mr. Speaker? This was the first report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the new Municipal Cooperation Act for the local government elections.

So, the EBC had already done all of the work with the 19 corporations. But what the PNM did, Mr. Speaker, is that they said they are having none of that, bringing it down to 14. And I will explain how we reached 14, Mr. Speaker. But I want to go through this particular first report of the EBC in the 19 corporations. And these are the seats that would have belonged to the separate or singular corporations.

So, the region of Laventille: You had a district of Beetham/Picton; a district of Mon Repos; a district of Morvant North, Morvant South, St. Ann's/ Cascade; St. Barb's/Chinapoo, Chuma Monka. Then you had the municipality of San Juan, which was the electoral district of Barataria, Bejucal, Aranguez, Caledonia, El Socorro, Febeau/Bourg Mulatresse, Maracas/Santa Cruz, Mount D'Or/Mount Lambert, San Juan East, and San Juan West/Malick. You had Tunapuna, Balthazar/Tunapuna, Caura West/El Dorado, Curepe, Macoya/Spring Village, St. Augustine/Pasea, St. Benedict, Valsayn North, and Valsayn South/Warrenville. Then you had Couva, which was separate from Tabaquite/Talparo, and in Couva you would have had Balmain/Preysal, Calcutta/Mc Bean, California/Point Lisas, Claxton Bay North/Forest Park, Claxton Bay South/Pointe-a-Pierre, Exchange, St Mary's, Freeport/Chase Village, Waterloo/Perseverance. But they would not have none of that, Mr. Speaker.

So, you know what they did? They said, listen, let us merge. Let us merge. So, you took Couva, and you put it in Tabaquite/Talparo. You took Penal, and you

made Penal/Debe, and they wanted to make Penal/Debe/Siparia, eh. They wanted to make those three into one, you know. The Member of Parliament then had to fight, and also the hon. Prime Minister at that time in the local government fraternity, to fight a separate Siparia out of Penal/Debe. Then they joined San Juan/Laventille.

But what they did, Mr. Speaker, doing that always gave the PNM the political advantage. This was not based on science. This was not based on the electorate. This was not based on government services. It was always based on whether or not they would win the local government election.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: So, when they want to talk about gerrymandering. They are the parents of gerrymandering.

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

Hon. S. Hosein: You see, Mr. Speaker, it is important that we know the history of these matters, you know. Because this first EBC report, the EBC was ready to have an election with the 19 regional corporations. But they knew that if they had called an election because they had just won office, they would have lost that 1992 local government election.

So, what did they do, Mr. Speaker? They scrambled. They scrambled. I will tell you why I say they scrambled. Because we have the Cabinet documents and the reports. Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the Cabinet report here that dealt with this new recommendation to merge these regional corporations. And it is called the Sergeant Report, Mr. Speaker. But what is interesting is this. When you listen to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, he said, “Well, this is Stone Age, doh talk about 1992”.

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Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from the Cabinet Minute. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, who were the Ministers responsible for determining this merger or the re-designation of these corporations from 19 to 14?

One, the Minister of Local Government, Chairman, Mr. Kenneth Valley;

Two, the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Keith Sobion;

Three, the Minister of Works and Transport, Mr. Colm Imbert.

Hon. Members: What!

Ms. Ameen: From the Stone Age?

Hon. Member: You did it.

Hon. S. Hosein: So, he was involved. This member, Mr. Speaker, was involved in that exercise with respect to gerrymandering and merging corporations, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: So today, when he comes to give us a lecture about packing and stacking. They were packing and stacking since 1992.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is what they were doing. So that is why, Mr. Speaker, we could have listened to him with authority because he knew exactly what they did in 1992. Mr. Speaker, the Sergeant Report is attached to the Cabinet Minute and the Cabinet Note, and it is very instructive to look at this report. It says, Mr. Speaker, that:

The Supervisory Committee was appointed in January 1992, and they first met on 29 January, 1992 and had to report by 26 February,

1992.

So, they gave them one month, one month to report on a boundary change for the local government election, reducing the corporations from 19 to 14. They had already made up their mind. This committee was a sham. And let me tell you why I say that, Mr. Speaker. This is what the committee report says—the Executive Summary. They said that:

The provisions of the Act—which means the Municipal Corporation Act for the 19 corporations—

It says this:

The provisions of the Act were discussed within the framework of the People's National Movement philosophy.

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh.”

Mr. Lee: Repeat that. Repeat that.

Hon. S. Hosein:

The provisions of the Act were discussed within the framework of the People's National Movement philosophy, and the general views of the People's National Movement on the Act.

So, they did not look at the NAR. They did not look at any other party. They were always designing the boundaries in 1992 based on the philosophy of the PNM. That is classic gerrymandering, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is the definition of gerrymandering. In fact, *Oxford Dictionary* should now change the word gerrymandering to the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Those two names are synonymous.

Mr. Speaker, the report goes on. And I think what you have to look at is the members of the committee that looked at this. The Steven Sarjeant report: he was a former PNM mayor. He was the chairman of it. One, Augustus Williams, Mr. Speaker. I believe Augustus Williams was also a mayor. You had Hazel Rogers-Dick, who then became the mayor of San Fernando. Then you had Victoria Mendez-Charles, who was a retired PS, and then she became a retired High Commissioner to Ghana, a political appointee. And then, Mr. Speaker, you had Eustace Seignoret, who the Member for St. Augustine referred to, was the permanent representative to the United Nations.

These are the people who sit down and draft boundaries for the PNM in one month. The report goes on to say this, Mr. Speaker. It says that:

They had so little time that they now had to create a subcommittee of the supervisory committee just to deal with the boundaries.

And this is what it says, Mr. Speaker. It said that:

The boundary commission—that they set up—has considered the views and the recommendations.

And what they said is that:

- a. A comprehensive study be carried out to formulate recommendations for the redefinition of local government.

But this is what is important in this report. They said that

Until such time that that detailed study is carried out, the existing local government boundaries be maintained in the 1990 Act.

You understand what they are saying? But then it goes even further. They said, “Okay, let us leave the construct of the regional corporations”. But it

says that:

In light of the urgent need to restore representation of the people and the need for a detailed study of the boundaries, the undermentioned regions be considered for the holding of early local government elections pending the detailed study of the boundaries.

Merge regions: San Juan/Laventille, Tunapuna/Piarco, Rio Claro/Mayaro, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Siparia/Penal/Debe. Regions that stand on their own: Diego Martin, Sangre Grande, Princes Town.

Cities: Port of Spain, San Fernando.

Boroughs: Arima, Point Fortin, Chaguanas.

So, what they have done, Mr. Speaker, is conduct an election on a temporary arrangement because they knew that they would have secured victory based on how they would have arranged the regional corporations. Gerrymandered the corporations at that particular time, and said, "Well, we will get a study thereafter". Mr. Speaker, the study was never done.

It takes a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration in 2026 to finish the work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: To finish the work. To finish the work. Mr. Speaker, so they came very hurriedly. The committee reported in February. They reached in the House of Representatives by June 1992, passed the Bill, election 1992. Classic gerrymandering, Mr. Speaker. Classic gerrymandering. Packing and stacking.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Packing and stacking. Packing and stacking.

But, Mr. Speaker, you see, when the Member accuses us of gerrymandering. I want to be very clear here because it seems as though the Member has this

obsession about giving us the interpretation and opinions on law. He is not qualified to so do. In fact, I do not think he is even a good engineer. He might be a good fabricator but not a good engineer. Mr. Speaker, the Member has to be very clear. The law is very pellucid.

12.30 p.m.

The Parliament can set the boundaries of the municipal corporations. That is the law.

Dr. Moonilal: Correct.

Hon. S. Hosein: That is the law that has always existed. So, if Chaguanas is four blocks, the Parliament could say, no, it could be now five blocks, six blocks, whatever. Mr. Speaker, but when you have that municipal corporation, what the Parliament cannot do is draw the seats within the municipal corporation. You know why? That is the job of the independent Elections and Boundaries Commission.

So, when the Member says that we are plucking and stacking and packing, and so on, that does not apply, because the EBC has to now go ahead and cut the seats within the municipal corporation. And then he complains, what? The EBC, what? We are pressuring them. I think he said that, right? He said that we are pressuring the EBC. Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, let me take him back into history. When they did the THA amendment in 2021, this is what they passed in law, eh. They said for the year 2021, for the purposes of the creation of 15 electoral districts in Tobago, within 90 days of the proclamation of the Act, the EBC has to report.

So, you were not pressuring the EBC in 2021? We just came out of a pandemic, you were not pressuring them, but we are saying in this particular Bill

that the EBC now has time to go and do their work in terms of the cutting up of their seats, and whatever, and they have a period of 90 days on the proclamation of this Act. So, you could do it, but we cannot do it.

Dr. Moonilal: Hypocrisy.

Hon. S. Hosein: That is hypocrisy at its highest level, Mr. Speaker. That is hypocrisy. And the Member thinks—and he tries to fool the population that we are packing and stacking. That is not true. Let us look at the numbers, Mr. Speaker, because that is in fact the evidence that will bear us out. And he will run from the Chamber because he does not want to hear this. He will run away.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Ms. Ameen: Oh, he is running away?

Mr. Lee: Packing and stacking. He is leaving. Packing and stacking.

Hon. S. Hosein: He said that we are cutting up and that we are pulling away little pieces and so on. Mr. Speaker, let us look at the numbers—the historical numbers. There was a comparison between the year 1992 and 2023, in terms of the size of the electorate. Arima Borough Corporation, in 1992, had 20,000 persons; in 2023, it increased to 29,000, so 9,000, right. Chaguanas Borough, 1992, had 37,000 people; in 2023, it went up to 70,000 people. Big growth.

Mr. Lee: Double, double.

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, 1992, for Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, 97,000 persons; it climbed to 153,000 in 2023. Diego Martin, 1992, 66,000; in 2023, it went down slightly to 89,000. Mayaro/Rio Claro, in 1992, was 21,000; slightly increased in 2023 by 30,000. Penal/Debe, 54,000 in 1992; 2023, it went up high to 78,000. Point Fortin, in 1992, had 12,000 people.

Dr. Moonilal: “Wa? Dais one district?”

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Hon. S. Hosein: One district, right—2023, it went up to 17,000, only 5,000 persons. Mr. Speaker, 1992, Princes Town was 61,000; it went up slightly to 84,000 in 2023. San Fernando, 1992, 43,000; in 2023, it went up to 50,000. Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, 1992, 36,000; 2023, 60,000. It went up about double. San Juan/Laventille, 109,000 in 1992; in 2023, 136,000. Siparia, in 1992, was 56,000; in 2023, it went up to 72,000. Tunapuna/Piarco, in 1992, it was 113,000; by 2023, 183,000. So, Mr. Speaker, I went through those points to show the increases in this. The only one, right, which is strange was Port of Spain, and that was the only Corporation where we see a decrease in the number of electorate from 1992 to 2023.

So, let us look at the Bill in context. Let us look at Port of Spain first. What the Bill does is increase the population size of Port of Spain. Why? Because the population size decreased from the inception, 1992, to present. So, the size of Port of Spain City Corporation will now be increased. What is wrong with that? What is the ulterior motive with that? It is equalizing the votes, as the Prime Minister would have said.

Dr. Moonilal: Value for money.

Hon. S. Hosein: Because when one particular citizen in a regional corporation is entitled to a certain amount of money based on the resources, as compared to the others, what we are doing is equalizing across the board.

Let us look at the other one: Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. This has had the largest growth of 69,000 people. What did we do, Mr. Speaker? The Government has agreed that the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation will now be the Tunapuna corporation and the borough of St. Augustine. This is based on the science.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is not based on “gerry” or “mander”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is based on the science.

Hon. Members: Based on sense.

Mr. Lee: Data, data.

Hon. S. Hosein: Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, it went up to 52—

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have a minute again, unless you want your 15?

Hon. S. Hosein: I would appreciate that time, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Mr. Speaker, it went up to 52,000 persons. That is the increase, eh. Therefore, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo will now becomes, what? The borough of Couva and the regional corporation of Tabaquite/Talparo, and I see them very beautifully in the public gallery in their beautiful jackets.

Mr. Lee: Yes, yes.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: The Chaguanas Borough Corporation, Mr. Speaker, went up to 36,000 people, but when you look at the sizes of the other city corporations, like Port of Spain and San Fernando, you are now equalizing the number of votes within those particular city corporations. So, they remain equal, Mr. Speaker. But they do not want—

Mr. Elder: Equity.

Hon. S. Hosein:—equity, Mr. Speaker. They do not want that.

When you look at San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, which went up

to about 27,000 votes, we are saying that that now becomes the region of San Juan/Laventille and the borough of Barataria. I am so happy that we have a borough of Barataria, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lee: Well done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I declare my bias.

Mr. Speaker, we did not touch anything in Penal/Debe, Princes Town, the Mayaro corporations because you see slight increases in those. It is based on a science. When you look at the corporations that now have increased population, Point Fortin Borough Corporation, their increase in that 1992 to 2023 period was only 4,000. So therefore, Mr. Speaker, you increase the population size of Point Fortin. What is wrong with that? It means that you all will have more activity, you all will have more electorates, you will have bigger borough celebrations in Point Fortin now. The celebration could go wider. You have a bigger borough.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: San Fernando City Corporation, that has now increased in its size, Mr. Speaker, because when you look at the map and when you look at the 1990 arrangement, you would have seen that San Fernando goes further north. But what they would have done is bring it down south and therefore, pack and stack. That is what they were doing, Mr. Speaker.

Arima Borough Corporation went up by 9,000 votes in that period between '92 to 2023. Arima is now a bigger corporation. I know the Member for Arima has some troubles in her party, but now she may—I do not know if she is complaining that she have more work to do now in the borough corporation because it is bigger, but, Mr. Speaker, I see nothing with that. What is wrong with

that? What is wrong with that?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, we also—they are talking about—I think the Member for Diego Martin North/East is attacking these unknown persons. He did not call their names and is saying that they are commenting all over the newspaper. But when you look at the *Express* editorial today, anonymous sources. They speak to ghosts and dead people, eh.

Hon. Members: Yeah.

Hon. S. Hosein: There is an editorial today in the Trinidad *Express*:

“On the road to local govt reform”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And when you read through this, Mr. Speaker, the article says that—it quotes the Prime Minister. It says:

“Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has made a persuasive case for the increase in corporations. ‘Everyone knows that local government has been under-performing for years. Service delivery is poor and citizens are not getting value for money,’ she said in a statement on social media. This is inarguable.”

The article then goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, and this was a very, very good conclusion:

“Nevertheless, with these changes come the implicit promise of improved performance. Whatever happens, the UNC regime can be commended for beginning the process.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: This is real local government reform. They had blue paper,

green paper, red paper—

Dr. Moonilal: Toilet paper.

Hon. S. Hosein:—white paper and no paper, Mr. Speaker. We on this side have performance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: “Performance beat ole talk”, green paper, white paper, red paper anytime, Mr. Speaker. Performance beats it. They have an Act in 2022, all of this local government reform. Ms. Hazel Manning, she went across the length and breadth of this country talking; Franklin Khan, God rest his soul, was talking; Al-Rawi was talking, and they did nothing. The Member for Siparia, she said, “Talk done, action now.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: How much do you want to consult again? How much do you want to consult again? You will end up in analysis paralysis.

Dr. Moonilal: Correct.

Hon. S. Hosein: Analysis paralysis. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the 2022 Bill, an Act, Diego Martin North/East said this, he said, “Just proclaim the section, it will make Chaguanas a city.” “Yuh hear lie”, Mr. Speaker? That is lie.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: “It have nothing there, it have nothing there about dat”. Mr. Speaker, when we look at the 2022 Act, it had so many provisions there. You know which is the one that they went hurriedly and proclaimed? The one to extend the terms of aldermen and councillors from three years to four years. They did not come to Parliament, you know. It was an attempt to postpone the local government election in that year. That matter ended up, where? In the Privy

Council. The Privy Council found that that was an unlawful exercise. They had to come thereafter with a validation Act, Mr. Speaker, to validate the terms, the date in which the councillors term expired to the calling of the election, when the former Attorney General Armour had to come to the Parliament and do that.

Mr. Speaker, what the Privy Council said is this—and it is very instructive. The Privy Council said that:

“33. A democratic society will necessarily engage other rights—freedom of expression...”—and so on.

But:

“32. The rights conferred by a democratic system of government are not only individual rights enjoyed by each person entitled to vote. It is also the right of all members of the relevant community to be governed by representatives chosen democratically...

34. It is inimical to a representative democracy that the representatives are chosen by anyone other than the electorate. It is not for Parliament, still less the Government to choose the representatives.”

That is what the Privy Council had to say. Because what they were doing, Mr. Speaker, is a sleight of hands saying, “Let us proclaim this section quietly, extend the term so we do not have to come to Parliament with a Bill in order to extend the local government life. Let us just do it through proclamation.” The Privy Council “run dem down to Trinidad” and said, “No, no, no, you cannot do that, come with expressed legislation if you want to postpone the election.” But they were afraid, Mr. Speaker, and for the next local government election, they will be wiped out. It could be leader Young—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—it could be leader Beckles, it could be leader Manning, it could be leader Rowley, it could be leader Gonzales, “is licks in dey tail, Mr. Speaker, is licks in dey tail. It will be licks in the borough of Barataria, it will be licks in the borough of St. Augustine, it will be licks in the borough of Couva, it will be licks in the Borough of Siparia. It will be licks, licks, licks right around, Mr. Speaker”.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I thank you very much.

Ms. Ameen: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, 44(8).

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, I have considered it. I am not going to entertain that. We are going to take the break for lunch now.

Mr. Imbert: What?

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

Mr. Speaker: It is an evolving debate. There are other—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You have other avenues for that. You have other avenues for that. Okay. We are going to break for lunch now—

Mr. Imbert: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker:—and we are going to return at 2.30 p.m. Thank you all very much.

Mr. Imbert: Please allow me to correct the record.

12.44 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Kareem Marcelle (*Laventille West*): Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I want to start, Mr. Speaker, by telling the UNC that they can try to rig this election game, but they would not be able to fake influence in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: This proposed amendment, Mr. Speaker, is an attempt by the UNC, facilitated by their UNC party group called this municipal corporation review boundaries committee.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: A UNC party group. A party group that has conspired against the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to steal the next local government elections.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: I heard my friend Members opposite, Mr. Speaker, refer to the 1992 debate concerning the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill, then brought by Mr. Kenneth Valley. Now, when we look, Mr. Speaker, at that committee that was set up by the then PNM administration, you would realize that when you compare and contrast, you would understand which political party places party before country and which political party places country before party, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, the committee set up in 1992 by the PNM, involved—the vast majority of these persons, Mr. Speaker, were from unions, Town and Country Planning, and from the respective Ministries. Therefore, combined together, along with both PNM local government representatives and UNC local government representatives, Mr. Speaker, they formed this committee and made the recommendations and brought it to the House to be debated. I want

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to go through that list because I want to get to the composition of this committee and this UNC party group that has conspired against the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

You had Mr. Stevenson Sargeant, a management consultant and a former PNM mayor.

Mr. Hosein: Right.

Mr. K. Marcelle: You had, Mr. Augustus Williams, another PNM mayor.

Mr. Hosein: Right. Good.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Mulchan Seuchan. “I ain’t hear dem. I ain’t hear dem. Dey stop.”

Hon. Members: *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. K. Marcelle: A former UNC councillor and the first Chairman of the UNC Chaguanas Corporation.

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

Mr. K. Marcelle: That is who the PNM sought and saw it fit to invite, Mr. Speaker. When we look, Mr. Speaker, Ms. Debra Alleyne, an attorney-at-law in the Ministry of Local Government.

Mr. Hosein: “And where she is now”?

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, Mrs. Victoria Mendez-Charles, the Director of Town and Country Planning Division, a public servant.

Mr. Hosein: She was a political appointee after.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, if you are going to allow the Member for Barataria/San Juan to continue to interrupt me, then I do not know what is the sense of the Standing Orders. So I beg and plead for your protection against

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Barataria/San Juan, please.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Barataria/San Juan, I also am hearing you. All right. So, let us allow the Member to proceed in a measure of silence. I am going to—any way. Let us just—today is not that kind of day. So, Member, continue.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mrs. Merle La Croix, public servant in the Ministry of Local Government and Secretary to the Committee. Mahadeo Jugmohan, an Area Representative for the South National Union of Government and Federated Workers Union. Ms. Sandra Turpin, Assistant Secretary of the PSA. Mrs. Marlene Coudray, Deputy Town Clerk of the Point Fortin Corporation, who turned out to also be a UNC Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: Years after.

Mr. K. Marcelle: You had Mrs. Poonia Beharry, Planning Officer at the Ministry of Local Government. Dr. Eugene Laurent, Principal Medical Officer. You had Ms. Joycelyn Lucas, the Chief Elections Officer of Trinidad and Tobago. You had a wide range of public servants, UNC politicians, and PNM politicians coming together to form one of the most balanced committees you could have found in 1992.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: That shows you, Mr. Speaker, that even in 1992 the PNM continued to put country before party.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Then we come to November 28th 2025, where the Cabinet appointed a committee. The Committee for the Review of Municipal Boundaries in Trinidad. On the 28th of November 2025, the Member for St. Augustine presented these letters of appointment to this Committee. I want to take some time to go through this because, for the benefit of the viewing and listening public, Mr. Speaker, it is important to know how we came to this House today to debate this piece of legislation. We came to debate this piece of legislation because of a committee that was set up by the Cabinet, a UNC party group, to form and review the boundaries in Trinidad and to come to Parliament with these recommendations to become law. You would think—my friend from St. Augustine said, Mr. Speaker, that they engaged the stakeholders. It was so widespread and so on. I will get to that. But let us look at the composition of this Committee, Mr. Speaker. You have Ms. Tara Ramlogan as the Chairman.

Mr. Hosein: Stara.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: “Yuh know yuh friends and the Chairman of yuh party group very well Barataria/San Juan. ”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: “Very well yuh know dem”. Ms. Stara Ramlogan, apart from being appointed the Chairman of this Committee, was also appointed as Director in the RDC by the UNC administration and Cabinet.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Are you trying to pretend as if this Chairman is all of a sudden independent? Which member of any state board, where you put political appointees remain independent?

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: How? So, you put MsD. Ramlogan to chair this Committee. Let us hear the other the further composition of it. Mr.Feroz Khan.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Young: Minister of Housing.

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

Mr. K. Marcelle: Feeroz Khan, Mr. Speaker, is the UNC's campaign manager. The UNC put their campaign manager on this Committee to come to the Parliament to present an independent account and an independent recommendation as to which seats and which boundaries should be shifted. Which corporations should be formed. Which corporation should be salvaged. Which corporation should be cut. You put your own campaign manager, and come here today in the most—

Ms. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Marcelle:—what?—hypocritical approach to pretend as if it is an independent committee. Independent committee where? And how?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr.Feeroz Khan is also the Chairman of HDC. They will say “dais ah independent position, too”. Mr.Feeroz Khan is also the head of the URP. “And yuh notice the Member for St. Augustine not shock” because the country would believe that URP closed down. “But Mr. Feeroz Khan still getting pay by the URP”. He sits on this Committee, when he is not trying to undermine the Member for Caroni Central—

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

Mr. K. Marcelle:—and is doing a terrible job. If he would just allow the Member for Caroni Central to do his job and stop trying to be the Minister. If he would just

allow Caroni Central to do his work.

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Mr. K. Marcelle: “And de next two social media clowns”. You have, Mr. Speaker, Sabrina Mowlah Baksh. Barataria/San Juan seems to know the Members on this Committee better than everybody. I am almost tempted to ask him if he selected this committee.

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

Mr. K. Marcelle: Apart from that, I saw that the Cabinet, last year, would have given Ms. Mowlah Baksh a national award in the last National Awards Ceremony. Cast no aspersion on Ms. Baksh.

Mr. Sturge: “Dais de President doing dat”.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Then you have—you see, Mr. Speaker, Toco/Sangre Grande probably is apart “ah de second or the third tier in the Cabinet”

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Mr. K. Marcelle: So, they keep him out of some of the decisions. So, he is a bit surprised at some of the things we are saying now. So, I will forgive him. I will forgive him.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. K. Marcelle: Barataria/San Juan smiled. He knows he is in the first tier.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, you have Ms. Christlyn Moore. Ms. Christlyn Moore, a respected attorney-at-law. No problem with Ms. Moore. But it cannot be said that Ms. More is an independent person on this Committee. Ms. Moore is a former UNC Minister. She serves right now, Mr. Speaker, in the Tobago Regional Health Authority, aligned with the TPP. So, how could that even mirror any

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semblance of independence? Then we move, Mr. Speaker, to Dr. Assad Mohammed.

Ms. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Poor Chaguanas East. You know, I want to get to Dr. Allen Sammy. Right. Dr. Allen Sammy, apart from receiving also another award from the Cabinet that Toco/Sangre Grande did not know about. But Dr. Allen Sammy was the Chairman and CEO of the Land Settlement Agency, respectively, between 1999 and 2002, and 2010—2012, under the United National Congress. Further to that, please, Mr. Speaker, he served as the advisor to the Member for Oropouche East between 2013 and 2015. “When dey find dey campaign manager was not enough, dey start putting dey advisors on de committee”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: That same Dr. Sammy served as the Deputy Mayor of San Fernando and later as the Chairman of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation for 14 years across two terms. All under the United National Congress.

2.45 p.m.

Then you have Mr. Speaker, Vijay Gosine. Now, Mr. Gosine really wanted to sit where Cumuto/Manzanilla was sitting. Because he screened for UNC for Cumuto/Manzanilla last year and he served—as soon as the UNC came into power, they put him as the CEO of the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprise Limited. And he also appointed him in a politically-appointed position as the Chairman of NIPDEC.

Mr. de Nobriga: He inside. He inside.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, how could we sit as a Parliament—

Mr. Sturge: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Marcelle:—and to even try to convince the right-thinking and fair-minded observers in Trinidad and Tobago and tell them that the Cabinet has put together a committee that seeks to amend and change fundamentally the issues concerning local government representation and consider this committee an independent committee, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Members: Shame—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: We look at Cornelius Price. Cornelius Price served as a director in the infamous LifeSport.

Hon. Members: What?

Mr. K. Marcelle: Under the guise—

Mr. Manning: He had one foot in prison.

Mr. K. Marcelle:—under the leadership or “misleadership” of the former Minister of Sport.

Mr. Sturge: You cannot be attacking Senators and going to—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Then you have.

Mr. Sturge: Careful.

Mr. K. Marcelle:—Mr. Peter M. Kanhai.

Hon. Member: Wow!

Mr. K. Marcelle: “Mr. Speaker, yuh tink it cah get worse, you know”? Peter Kanhai is the General Secretary of the United National Congress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: What? “Nah man”

Mr. K. Marcelle: “So not only yuh put your campaign manager, yuh put yuh advisor. Yuh couldn’t find no other person to put but the General Secretary of the UNC.” That is a sanctimonious hypocrisy of the UNC.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Wow!

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Peter Kanhai is also serving as Chairman of the NCC.

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: “He late wit dey money”

Mr. Sturge: The greatest Carnival ever. The greatest Carnival ever.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Toco Sangre Grande, his continuous outburst is continuing to interrupt me, and I beg and seek your protection. I tried to ignore him for a very long time, but he is continuing, please.

Mr. Manning: He cannot help himself. He cannot help himself. “He difficult”.

Mr. Speaker: Toco/Sangre Grande, let us stop that. Shall we?

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker. And then, of course, you have “Dennesh” Sankersingh.

Mr. Manning: “Who is dat?”

Mr. Hosein: Dinesh.

Mr. K. Marcelle: If it is one thing, Barataria/San Juan knows the names and pronunciations well.

Mr. De Vignes: He knows the names. He knows them well.

Mr. Birchwood: “He in de party group.”

Mr. Hosein: “Ah could read”.

Mr. K. Marcelle: I am certain that Barataria/San Juan is the one that came up with this list.

Mr. Manning: “He in de party group. He might be chairman.”

Mr. Hosein: “Ah could read”.

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Mr. K. Marcelle: So, you have Dinesh Sankersingh, who is the former chairman, the UNC-appointed Chairman of the Siparia Regional, now Borough Corporation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: It is a firing squad

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, the UNC has brought us to this House today to debate the poisonous fruit that came from the most poisonous UNC tree called this Municipal Review Cabinet-appointed committee.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: It is a shame, it is a disgrace, and it is an attack on our democracy in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, many conversations and statements were made by St. Augustine and Barataria/San Juan concerning some of the statements made in terms of Mr. Valley at the time and talking about in terms of what were the recommendations and so on. And I thought it was important to correct the record because the UNC has a very conniving way of trying to distort history in this country. And I want to read briefly from Mr. Kenneth Valley's contribution in 1992 and put it on record with your leave, please, Mr. Speaker. And I quote:

“The Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, as I was saying, there was this letter from the Head of the Public Service, Mr. Reginald Dumas to Dr. Carson Charles indicating that there should be fewer regions and noted that:

‘...regions as proposed will separate homogeneous districts which have enjoyed traditional linkages and have experienced similar development problems and needs. Breaking up this homogeneity would reduce the functional efficiency which currently exists.’”

And I continue:

“We had the local government, the Association of County Councils as well as the head of the Public Service and the official Opposition at the time, counselling that although we agreed with the increased regions, going to that extent is simply too many. There was a requirement for change in some areas, but one ought not to have gone overboard. And our experience has shown that a proliferation of political regions, as now obtains, has resulted in a reduction of functional efficiency.”

And I go further down:

“As I said before, financial and human resource constraints would lead to inefficiency in the system if it is not changed. It is in recognition of these facts that the Hugh Wooding Constitution Reform Commission of 1974 rejected the suggestion that the country be divided into 25 municipal or corporate areas. Because the reality is that, if the benefits of local democracy, efficiency and economy are to be achieved, decentralization must be tuned to the demands of modern economy and technology. These two forces require broad geographical areas for the successful operation, and the related social and material problems which arise are dependent for the resolution on broader areas than any principle of regional identity can afford.”

Mr. Speaker, these were not just the words of Mr. Ken Valley, but he also quoted aspects of the Reginald Dumas, the head of the public service at the time, as well as from the Hugh Wooding constitution reform commission in relation to the amount of municipal corporations and so on.

Mr. Speaker, what is important to note is that sometimes the PNM makes

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governance look so easy and so fair—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Marcelle:—and so decent that the UNC thinks it is some easy road. **Mr.**

Sturge: [*Interruption*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: But in that very same 1992 Bill, that committee—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, point of order. Just one second, 51—let me see.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh want to raise ah point of order [*Inaudible*]”

Mr. Des Vignes: 53(1)(e) and (f).

Mr. Imbert: Just one second, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to be wrong, 53(1)(e); 53(1)(e), Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I am aware.

Mr. Imbert: But it is not happening.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: It is not happening on both sides. It is not happening on both sides. For the benefit of the public, 51(3)(e) is the Standing Order which says that non-speaking Members should maintain silence when another Member is speaking. This morning I was at pains to point out that no Member should really invoke that Standing Order because none of you observe it.

Mr. Imbert: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Could you not speak when I am speaking? A certain amount of banter is healthy, okay? And there is a lively banter—I do not want to relegate the Members down to the outer end. But come on, this constant glorified—look, I really do not want to repeat that, right. I really do not want to repeat that. But come on.

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Mr. Imbert: *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: I did not ask you for your views from a sedentary position. If you want to make a point and you want to challenge our ruling, stand up and do it. So do not sit and hurl an objection to me from a sedentary position.

Mr. Sturge: I thought he was standing.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Mr. Imbert: *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: No, we are going to move on because the Member's time is being taken up. The Member's time is being taken up, right. So yes, Members, let us bear in mind there is a rule for silence. Let us also bear in mind the tradition is a healthy amount of respectful banter. So come on, let us strike a proportionate balance, please.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleague for intervening and bringing some silence to this.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Sturge: "Tell Imbert he could sit down now"

Mr. Speaker: Alright, Toco—

Mr. Romain: Give him 15 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Toco/Sangre Grande, come on.

Mr. Manning: He needs to take a break.

Mr. Romain: Give him a 15 minutes.

Mr. Manning: He is very excited.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when this Bill in 1992, the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill came, some of the recommendations, some of the recommendations, if the PNM was to accept it at

the time, would have ended in terms of being beneficial to the PNM. And the PNM rejected it because they knew that it would have been, it would have sent the wrong message. And I want to quote from the *Hansard* from Dr. The Hon. Keith Christopher Rowley and his statement in that debate. If you will allow me very kindly, Mr. Speaker.

So the first thing, Mr. Speaker, according to Dr. Rowley:

“...you could not have wanted a more balanced committee to take a more balanced, sober and responsible view. I wish to commend this committee on the excellent work that was done with respect to pulling together ideas which were expressed by Government on its way into office.”

He goes further, Mr. Speaker, to say, Dr. Rowley states:

“...What this committee did was to review the entire situation and make a number of recommendations, all laid in Parliament.”

And I just pause right there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Up to now, the Member for St. Augustine has said that the Committee concluded its report since April 16, 2026. Up to this day, they cannot make that report public or to lay it in this House. What does this UNC party group have to hide in that report?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: I resume to my quote, Mr. Speaker:

The Government has agreed with most of the recommendations,

“...but there were a couple with which the Government did not agree. For example, the committee recommended that the number of seats be increased in some areas in Port of Spain and San Fernando. For those who

saw it fit to misrepresent the situation and to give the impression that the PNM was seeking to get some advantage, I would have thought that if that was the case, the PNM would have grabbed at the opportunity to increase the number of local government seats in those areas.

In fact, keeping an eye on the cost to the public purse and, also, having given a commitment to make in the not-too-distant future a more comprehensive review of local government as an institution, we saw it fit not to accept that aspect of the recommendation...”

Mr. Speaker, country before party.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Those were the words of Dr. The Hon. Keith Christopher Rowley.

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have just a minute and 15 seconds. If you—

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Would you like your 15 minutes?

Mr. K. Marcelle: I will take my 15 minutes. Thank you very kindly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

3.00p.m.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, this Government, who could barely afford to pay local government, especially PNM local government corporations, to pay their workers on time, could barely afford to send moneys even with a reduced budget, that they cut all seven PNM corporations with, they are finding it hard to even manage to send the resources needed for the PNM corporations to take care of the basic needs of the burgesses; not sending money for equipment, not sending money for maintenance, not sending money for the basic upkeep of our nation’s roads and

streets once it belongs to a PNM burgess. But they are saying that they are coming to this House and want to add three more corporations. If we think what the Member for Fyzabad did was bad last year, in the mid-year, and then even worse in the last budget, this move is to try to cripple the PNM corporations and starve them of funding.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: That is what this is about. And I listened carefully to the Member for St. Augustine. I was waiting for her to give the assurance to all the daily-paid workers in this country. That their jobs would not be lost.

Ms. Ameen: But I did.

Mr. Alexander: But she did. She did.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, she chose her words very wisely.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: She said—Mr. Speaker, is this a sandbox? Is this a glorified sandbox?

Mr. Speaker: Well, perhaps, you might be in a very good position to answer that. But come on, let us have some silence. You see, Laventille West, when you complain, you must not participate in it afterwards or prior to it. I accept that you need some silence, and I am asking them to give you some silence, okay?

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker. The Member for St. Augustine talked about the unions and the collective agreements being enforced and so on. A collective agreement and the union's representation do not stop a corporation from firing workers. It does not. If you are not getting the required budget to keep your daily-paid workers on your payroll, it means that there will be retrenchments. So, I stick a pin there and ask the hon. Minister, in her winding up,

to clarify to this country, specifically, whether no daily-paid worker will lose their jobs. And I await that, because we want to hold them to that because they are strangers to the truth over on that side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, let us go even further. The issue of consultations, the issue of, in terms of the stakeholders, not one PNM mayor, not one PNM chairman, not one PNM councillor invited to be on the committee; not one. Not one representative of the unions, not one public servant—gazetted public servant from any aspect of the public service on that committee; not one.

You have, Mr. Speaker, “TTAGLA”, the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities, the designated representative for local government representatives. Mr. Speaker, the mission of “TTAGLA” is to provide expert consultations on local governance to facilitate strategic planning and training. “TTAGLA” is also dedicated to empowering municipalities and enhancing citizen services. And the UNC party group appointed by the UNC Cabinet did not, for one second, consult with “TTAGLA”.

Ms. Mohit: “TTAGLA?”

Mr. Hosein: TTALGA, TTALGA.

Mr. K. Marcelle: TTALGA. Thank you very kindly. Barataria/San Juan, and that is one you should have included on your list, right? That is what you could have included. Mr. Speaker, the unions and their workers would be gravely affected by these things. Mr. Speaker, for example, if you have the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation as we speak, you are splitting that in half and you are creating now the borough of “Bar-tah-ria”

Mr. Hosein: Barataria

Mr. K. Marcelle: “Yuh shoulda tell yuh Prime Minister dat. How tuh pronounce Barataria.”

Mr. Speaker: You are complaining, but you are talking across the Floor.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: All of you all.

Mr. Manning: Who is all of you all?

Mr. Speaker: All of you, including you, San Fernando East.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am next to him, and I could hardly hear him over the din of those on the other side.

Mr. Speaker: I do not want to take up the Member's time. Member, continue, please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Speaker. I do not know why my friends are getting on so jittery and excited.

But, Mr. Speaker, there will be serious concerns in relation to the workers and no clarity is provided in this Bill, or by way of any statements from Members coming on the other side, to determine what will happen with the workers in terms of whether they would remain in the existing San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation or whether they will go to the new borough. If, Mr. Speaker, there is to be a split between the two corporations, the level of seniority is also a real-life concern for many of the workers. We have to put our minds to some of these administrative concerns. What is the associated cost for such a significant increase in such a short space of time?

So, you are saying now, for example, in San Juan/Laventille, Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of all the buildings, whether it is the Disaster Management Unit

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of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, the transport yard of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation—well, their head office that they are renting, but squatting and the UNC is trying to put them out from MTS Plaza—all of these administrative buildings, and so on, would now, under this new Bill, come out outside of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. What will be the effects on that in terms of the cost? Is it now that the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation has to go and purchase or rent new properties in that new region for the cost of millions upon millions of dollars that could have been saved but for the UNC's gimmickry?

These are real concerns, Mr. Speaker. And none of the speakers before, especially the mover of the Bill, has given any sort of indication as to this administrative nightmare that can occur because she can barely run 14 corporations. The hon. Minister is not even able to pay the Port of Spain City Corporation on time for them to pay their workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: You want to give the Member for St. Augustine more responsibility? Anyway, a reshuffle might be coming. It might make more sense. Probably Barataria/San Juan might take up—"super Minister" might take up—but to say, Mr. Speaker, that we have some serious concerns concerning this Bill, because all these recommendations and all these boundaries came from a UNC party group, parading itself as an independent committee. We reject the committee's formation, we reject the committee's recommendation and we reject this Bill wholeheartedly, Mr. Speaker.

I want to correct a point that Barataria/San Juan sought to trivialize when the Member for Diego Martin North/East was speaking, concerning the issue

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of the proposed status from “borough” to “city” of Chaguanas. And it is very unfair that Barataria/San Juan will do that, because in the 2009 Bill and its recommendation, it is the PNM, again putting country before party, that recommended, in 2009, that the Borough of Chaguanas be elevated to the city of Chaguanas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: I am looking at the former mayor, because right after 2009, the UNC won in 2010, and her colleagues did not see fit to elevate her borough to a city.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: But they come now to say, Mr. Speaker—they come now, Mr. Speaker, to say they are creating and elevating the Borough of Chaguanas to the city of Chaguanas. Mr. Speaker—

Ms. Mohit: The PNM—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Chaguanas East, you will have your turn. You will have your turn.

Ms. Mohit: Yes, I am waiting.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, but you cut the geographical area and the amount of burgesses within the Chaguanas Borough Corporation and you are proposing to make it less under a city, and name it a city. Mr. Speaker, it just does not make sense. It just does not make sense.

And, Mr. Speaker, as I close, I want to say—and I will say it again to the UNC, they can jump—

Dr. Gosine: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Marcelle: Chaguanas West, do not be in my firing line. Do not be in my

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firing line.

Hon. Members: “Ohhh”.

Ms. Mohit: Are you threatening our colleague?

Mr. Speaker: What is that, Laventille West? What exactly do you mean by that?

Mr. K. Marcelle: You want me to explain? I can explain.

Mr. Speaker: No, you know how that sounds? Do you know how ominous it sounds? You are a lawyer. You know how ominous that sounds?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: You look at a Member across the aisle and say, “Do not be in my firing”—what does that mean? What are the members of the public supposed to interpret that to be? Come on, Laventille West, stop that. Stop that. Stop it and apologize to the Member.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, I have two more minutes. I withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Apologize to the Member.

Mr. K. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me to speak, I am going to get there. You want to tell me what pace to say it at too? I withdraw, and I apologize.

Mr. Speaker: Good.

Mr. K. Marcelle: And I meant it in a political way and as a metaphor, not in terms of a literal way, but I move on.

As I wrap up, Mr. Speaker, the UNC could jump high or they could jump low, whenever the local government election is called, in every 14 or 17 corporations, the UNC must go, and I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Tobago West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Joel Sampson (*Tobago West*): Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the measure before this House. But before I go on, I want to address some things mentioned by the previous speaker. I heard he mentioned the term “rigging of elections”. If no shame had an acronym, it would be PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: Because the PNM are the kings of rigging elections. Let me take you back into history, you might have been young then.

In January of 2005, in the then THA elections, the former Chief Secretary, Mr. Orville London, defeated Anthony Arnold in the Calder Hall/ Scarborough seat by three votes. While the count was taking place, all of a sudden, there was a blackout in that area. After the blackout and the counting was finished, Mr. Orville London won by three votes. Now, tell me, if that is not rigging, what is rigging?

3.15 p.m.

We go forward. We fast-forward to December 2021 after the six-six tie and the redo. We went to bed 15-nil. Ms. Abby Taylor defeated then-minority leader Kelvon Norris by 28 votes, only to wake up and hear they had a recount and she lost by three. Three is a famous number in the PNM. And you talk about rigging. But I will talk about some more rigging as I get into the meat of my contribution. I also heard the Member state that they put their persons in positions. But, Member, you have no shame. You are my friend, but you have no shame.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. J. Sampson: Because you all took a die-hard PNM and placed them in an office that is supposed to be the most independent office in this land, which is the Office of the President and “alyuh” want to talk?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker: Bringing in the Office of the President—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. J. Sampson: I withdraw.

Mr. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, he must be allowed to withdraw and apologize for that statement.

Mr. J. Sampson: I withdraw.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*]

Mr. Marcelle: I rise specifically on 48(8), Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Marcelle: I rise on 48(8), Mr. Speaker, in relation to my friend bringing Her Excellency into this debate. And I ask him to withdraw that statement.

Mr. Speaker: Well, technically—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*] **Mr. Speaker:** Alright. I do not want to take up the Member's time, but technically, the Member did not “technically” infringe. I am asking him to—

Mr. Marcelle: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, the Standing Orders says:

“(6). The conduct of the President...”

The Member did not mention the conduct of the President. That is what the Standing Orders say.

Mr. Marcelle: It says function as well, Mr. Speaker. Please read the entire sentence.

Mr. Speaker: Alright. Member, continue.

Mr. J. Sampson: According to your former, former Prime Minister, “Somebody touch yuh deep down in yuh soul.” That one, like it “touch yuh deep down in yuh

soul.”

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

Mr. J. Sampson: Mr. Speaker, on the face of this legislation, it does not directly alter the governmental arrangements of Tobago. We are dealing primarily with the restructuring of municipalities in Trinidad and the withdrawal of municipal boundaries and the elevation of Chaguanas to city status. But Tobago has something extremely important to contribute to this debate. Experience and history. Because before every change to a boundary suddenly becomes a conspiracy. Before every attempt to reorganize administrative districts is labelled gerrymandering. Before Members opposite discover some new democratic principle that says Parliament must never interfere with lines on a map, I want to remind this House of what happened in Tobago.

This very Parliament has used its authority to change Tobago’s electoral arrangements before. A PNM Government did it. They defended it, they called it necessary, they called it proper, and they called it lawful. But today, suddenly, boundaries are sacred. Today, suddenly, redistricting is sinister. Today, suddenly, we hear wild conspiracy theories of gerrymandering. Well, Mr. Speaker, history does not lie, and Tobago remembers. Let us start with 2021.

On January 25th, 2021, the people of Tobago went to the polls to elect a Tobago House of Assembly. The result was historic. PNM six, PDP six; six-six. The great six-six that will always be talked about. I know that election personally, Mr. Speaker, because I was one of the candidates. I ran for the then Cannan/Bon Accord seat that somehow miraculously was gerrymandered while the counting was taking place. But that is done and dusted. And the TPP is there, and we are there forever.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: And I am here. I have appeared. When somebody said nobody lives here. But I am here to represent the people of Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: The electorate gave neither side a majority. There was a deadlock. The PDP offered power-sharing arrangements. We asked for a negotiation. We offered an opportunity for both parties to sit down and work out an arrangement reflecting the mandate that Tobagonians had actually given. The PNM did not take up those proposals. And while there was no properly constituted new assembly emerging out of that election, the administration of Tobago continued.

Millions of dollars continued to be spent, decisions continued to be made, and then, Mr. Speaker, the former, former, Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, came to this Parliament with legislation to change the rules. The Tobago House of Assembly had 12 electoral districts. His Government decided that it would now have 15 electoral districts. The 2021 legislation expressly required Tobago to be divided into 15 electoral districts, and the Bill passed the House by 21 votes to 18. Think about what happened. Tobagonians had just gone to an election in under a 12-seat arrangement. They had made their choice. It was six-six, and because the political result was inconvenient, this Parliament altered the statutory architecture under which the next election would be fought. There was no referendum in Tobago. There was no vote of Tobagonians asking whether we wanted 13, 14, 15, 16 or any other number of representatives.

Ms. Mohit: No consultation.

Mr. J. Sampson: No consultation. And as we talk about no consultation, Mr.

Speaker, may I be allowed just to share an article from *CNC*? It stated:

“Beckles: Govt trying to ‘steal an election’ with Local Government changes. Opposition Leader Penelope Beckles yesterday accused the Government of trying to ‘steal an election’ by redrawing municipal boundaries, describing its plan to add three corporations in...UNC strongholds and reduce the geographical size of three...PNM-controlled corporations as ‘unbelievable and unacceptable.’”

And what she is saying is that there is no consultation whatsoever. But in Tobago there was no consultation either.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: The PNM Government came here and chose 15. And the reason given was essentially, “We cannot allow another tie.” But, Mr. Speaker, I have always asked myself one very simple question.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. J. Sampson: If the sole objective was to prevent another tie, why 15? Why not 13? Because 13 is an odd number. And 13 cannot produce six-six. So why did Tobago need three additional seats instead of one? And, Mr. Speaker, this is where the story becomes even more remarkable. The three additional electoral districts did not emerge evenly across the Tobago space. Those three districts came from six of the PNM winning seats.

Hon. Members: Oh goshh!

Mr. J. Sampson: So, if that is not election rigging, I do not know what else is.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: And that was expressly raised in this Parliament when the EBC Order came for approval in September of 2021. The Member for Barataria/San

Juan examined the EBC report and told this House that the six seats which the People's National Movement currently hold in Tobago, the additional three seats came from those six particular areas. That is in the *Hansard*. So, follow this carefully, Mr. Speaker. Tobago votes: PNM wins the six, PDP wins six. The PNM Government decides Tobago must move from 12 seats to 15 seats, and then when the three additional districts are created, all three came from the geographical areas represented by the PNM.

The six PNM-held districts became the geographical source from which nine districts were produced. None of the three new seats was created out of a PDP-held seat. The new districts were Darrel Spring/Whim, Lambeau/Lowlands, Mt. Saint George/Goodwood. Mr. Speaker, if that happened today under this Government, Members opposite will not merely call it gerrymandering. They will call a press conference before breakfast. They will march by lunchtime and by evening they would probably be outside the courthouse. But when it happened in Tobago under a PNM Government, we were expected to accept that this was simply democracy taking its natural course. And today, those same voices want to lecture this country about boundaries.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: Mr. Speaker, that law tells us that the EBC is independent. I understand the constitutional position, but I am also a political representative. I have watched what has happened in Tobago. I have looked at the history. I have looked at the timing. I have looked at the patterns, and I am entitled to form a political judgment upon what I have seen. And my political judgment is this: I believe that the EBC has been in cahoots with the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Sampson (cont'd)

2026.10.07

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, a point of order, please, 48(6). Thank you very much. We are not in cahoots with the EBC. Doing what?

Mr. Speaker: Having regard—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Having regard to what has come from the two speakers before, I am not going to waste the time of the Member and read back, but I have it all written down. The most egregious statements. That is a—

Mr. Scotland SC: [*Inaudible*] about the EBC?

Mr. Young: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, come on. The Member framed what he had to say by saying he makes a political judgment. No, continue, Member.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, we have not attacked any independent agency in any of our—

Mr. Speaker: Have a seat. I have ruled. Have a seat. Continue Member.

Mr. J. Sampson: If it is one thing, sometimes I could look into the future. I know that “bear in big blue house” would have gotten up today to say something or raise a point of order.

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

Mr. J. Sampson: But, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Speaker, 48(6). How can the Member refer to the Member for San Fernando East as a cartoon name?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I do not think there was any reference to that. Diego Martin West, come on. Stop that.

Mr. J. Sampson: According to the old folks in Tobago, “Ah throw meh corn, ah

call no fowl, but fowl come picking.”

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

Mr. J. Sampson: But, Mr. Speaker, I am entitled to look at history and arrive at that political conclusion because 2021 was not even the first time Tobago experienced this. Let us go back to 2004.

Mr. Speaker, on November 05, 2004, Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas, the Minister of Local Government, and himself, a Tobagonian, moved the parliamentary motion approving a new Elections and Boundaries Commission Order, changing the electoral arrangements for the Tobago House of Assembly. And what was happening at that time? The Tobago House of Assembly had already been dissolved. Tobago was preparing for an election. Political parties were organizing, candidates were preparing, campaign strategies were being developed, and the then minority leader of the Tobago House of Assembly, Hochoy Charles, was publicly down-crying what was taking place.

Not 20 years afterwards, not with hindsight at that time. Ganga Singh brought Hochoy Charles concerns directly into this Parliament. The *Hansard* records the complaint that the PNM administration had a significant advantage because, according to the minority leader, it had possessed the EBC report while dealing with the boundary changes, while the Opposition was still attempting to secure the information. The parliamentary debate also recorded the allegation that the report had been circulating within the PNM fraternity in Tobago before it was formally laid. That was the controversy at that time, Mr. Speaker. And look at the scale of what was being proposed.

Tobago's electorate had moved from approximately 36,995 to 38,142 electors, an increase of only 1,147 electors. And yet, the proposed change affected

10 out of 12 of Tobago's electoral districts. Ten out of 12, Mr. Speaker. That was wild. An increase of just over 1,100 electors, and 10 out of 12 districts were being affected. And this was not taking place three years before an election. The THA had already been dissolved.

3.30 p.m.

An election was approaching. The Opposition was complaining. Hochoy Charles was publicly crying foul. He warned about realignment, changes to communities and the need for public education during what he described as a highly partisan and highly volatile election campaign. He raised complaints that geographically connected communities were being separated. Yet, what happened? The Government proceeded that very day—quick, quick, quick! The Order passed and Tobago proceeded into the January 2005 election under those new electoral arrangements.

The PNM regained control of the Tobago House of Assembly after that election and continued to govern until the end of 2021. That is roughly 16 years, Mr. Speaker. So, forgive me, Mr. Speaker, if I cannot take seriously this sudden discovery that changing boundaries is inherently some assault upon democracy. Because when Rennie Dumas came here in 2004, it was fine. When 10 out of 12 Tobago districts were affected, it was fine. When the Assembly had already been dissolved, it was fine. When Hochoy Charles complained, it was fine. When Ganga Singh raised the concerns in Parliament, it was fine.

When the PNM Government changed Tobago from 12 seats to 15 seats after the 6-6 election in 2021, that too, was apparently fine. When all three additional seats emerged from six areas represented by the PNM, we were told that was fine, but in 2026 suddenly, Members have discovered gerrymandering. Mr. Speaker, if

hypocrisy had a colour, it would be bright red.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: Mr. Speaker, this history is not merely interesting for political debate; there are practical consequences when electoral geography is poorly conceived. Tobago knows that. Look at the district presently represented by the Chief Secretary. It stretches from communities along the north side: Castara, L'Anse Fourmi, Parlatuvier, Bloody Bay, Hermitage, Charlotteville. It goes all the way around to the windward side, Speyside, and into the Delaford area. Mr. Speaker, that is not simply a district, that is a road trip.

Try meaningfully engaging all of those communities in one day—you simply cannot. A simple Christmas toy distribution drive will take you approximately two to three days because somebody in Charlotteville would say: “When Castara getting their toys”? Likewise, if there is a town hall meeting in Speyside, Castara would want a town hall meeting as well. So, another meeting has to be held in Castara. Meanwhile, other representatives with a compact district can engage most of his or her constituency in a fraction of time.

That is why lines on a map matter. Geography matters. Transport network matters. History matters. Culture matters. Family and community relationships matter. The natural way in which villages relate to each other matters. Administrative practicality matters.

Mr. Speaker, Tobago has lived through boundary exercises that did not always sufficiently respect those realities. So, when I support redistricting today, I am not saying draw boundaries any way you can please—quite the contrary. I am saying draw them intelligently, but do not pretend that the mere changing of a boundary line is itself some democratic crime.

Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the central policy argument: Why make municipalities smaller? Why create more manageable local government areas? Because government generally works better when responsibility is brought closer to the people who rely upon it. Consider the business of local government: garbage collection, drainage, minor roads, markets, cemeteries, recreation grounds, community facilities, public health, local infrastructure, planning and maintenance. These are intensely local matters.

A drain does not overflow nationally, it overflows in someone's village. A garbage truck does not miss the Republic, it misses somebody's street. A road does not collapse in theory, it collapses outside somebody's home or business. A recreation ground in disrepair affects a particular community, and when responsibility for those things becomes too geographically distant, communities can disappear inside a large bureaucracy.

More manageable municipalities can produce clear accountability. People who know, are responsible. Representatives know their communities. Problems can be identified quickly. Resources can be targeted with greater precision. Different municipalities can develop plans suited to their own social and economic character. That is what meaningful decentralization is supposed to achieve.

Mr. Speaker, we do not have to travel overseas to understand the principle. Look across the water. Look at Tobago. The Tobago House of Assembly has demonstrated for decades the value of bringing significant governmental responsibility closer to a defined population. Tobago has historically had access to a relatively small portion of overall national expenditure. Yet, look at the distribution of public infrastructure throughout Tobago: Community centres; health centres; schools and school places; recreational facilities; social programmes;

public amenities; local infrastructure.

There is a reason communities across Tobago expect to have access to government. Government is geographically and institutionally closer to them. Administrators know the island. Representatives know the villages. People know where to find officials responsible. That proximity produces expectations and those expectations produce accountability. The principle is also consistent with the broader observation that Tobago's governance structure evolved beyond ordinary county or municipal government with the assembly exercising a much more substantial governmental role.

Mr. Speaker, do not take my word for it. Listen to the former, former, Prime Minister. Former Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, stood in Tobago in October 2015 and promoted, essentially, this very philosophy. His government repeatedly argued that Trinidad's local government corporations should receive greater autonomy and responsibility along the lines of the Tobago model. Dr. Rowley also repeatedly spoke about greater responsibility being exercised closer to communities, so this philosophy is not alien to the PNM. They preached it. They campaigned on it. They praised Tobago as an example of it. The problem is that after years in government, they did not complete the transformation of local government in Trinidad to the extent that they promised.

They talked about greater autonomy. They talked about stronger municipalities. They talked about devolving authority. Today, this Government has an opportunity to move that process further.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: But, Mr. Speaker, let me add one qualification: Smaller municipalities alone will not solve anything. There is no point in simply dividing a

map into more pieces if new piece remains weak. Under-resourced and dependent upon central government for every significant decision. Smaller municipalities must be accompanied by authority, resources, professional staffing, revenue mechanisms, accountability and measurable standards of service. The point is not more politicians, the point is better governance.

If a community has a drainage problem, the responsible municipality should have the resources and authority to address it. If a road needs maintaining, citizens should not spend months trying to determine whether the responsibility belongs to a Ministry, or corporation, a utility, or somebody else. If waste management fails, responsibility should be clear. Local government reform succeeds when the citizen knows this is the institution responsible. This is the person accountable, and this is where I go to get the problem fixed.

Mr. Speaker, let me turn specifically to Chaguanas. I support the elevation of Chaguanas to city status.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: Because the economic and population geography of Trinidad has changed. For generations, we have had a major city in the north, Port of Spain, a city in the south, San Fernando but central Trinidad has grown enormously. Chaguanas is no longer simply a town halfway between somewhere else. It is an economic centre in its own right. A major commercial centre; a major residential centre; a transportation hub; a centre of retail; a centre of entrepreneurship; a centre of professional activity; a centre serving a much larger catchment than its formal boundaries might suggest.

So, there is a powerful developmental logic in recognizing a major urban centre in central Trinidad. Port of Spain in the north, San Fernando in the south

and Chaguanas in central. That gives Trinidad a more balanced urban structure. But I want to be clear: Do not merely change the sign. If Chaguanas becomes a city, city status must mean something.

Too many people in this country still have to come into Port of Spain for services that could and should be delivered elsewhere. That has to change. If we are serious about Chaguanas as a city, then government services must increasingly be decentralized into central Trinidad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: Why should someone living in central have to travel into Port of Spain to undertake routine government business that could be completed in Chaguanas? Why should every national administrative function congregate around one relatively small part of Trinidad? It is inefficient and inefficiency has an economic cost. Traffic is a productivity tax. Mr. Speaker, traffic is not just frustrating, traffic is expensive.

Mr. Speaker: You have a minute again, would you like your 15?

Mr. J. Sampson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: A worker sitting in unnecessary traffic for two hours is losing productive time. An entrepreneur sitting on the highway is not serving customers. A delivery vehicle sitting stationary is increasing the cost of goods. Fuel is being burned. Vehicles are depreciating. People arrive at work exhausted. Parents reach home late. Businessmen lose many hours. Government loses productivity. Now, multiply that by thousands of people every day, every week, every year. That becomes a very serious national economic cost. The country cannot continuously complain about traffic while maintaining an administrative structure that

unnecessarily forces people to travel toward the same geographic centre.

A stronger city of Chaguanas can become an alternative administrative and commercial mode. Move more government services there. Encourage offices there. Strengthen public transport connections there. Encourage commercial investment around those services. Develop professional service clusters there. Create employment closer to where people live. That reduces pressure on Port of Spain. It reduces commuting. It spreads investment. It increases commercial value in central Trinidad, and it helps create a genuinely polycentric national economy rather than one in which everything points toward Port of Spain. That is the economic opportunity presented by Chaguanas.

What about Scarborough, Mr. Speaker? Inevitably, someone will ask if Chaguanas is becoming a city, what about Scarborough? My answer is deliberate. Scarborough is already Tobago's principal governmental and commercial centre. It is where the Tobago House of Assembly is situated. It is Tobago's principal port. It is an important transport hub. It is where public administration, commerce, banking and many services converge.

Tobago has serious plans for the redevelopment of Scarborough, but neither Scarborough nor any other community in Tobago is being designated as a city through this exercise. I am comfortable with that. Why? Because that decision must come from Tobago. The future governmental status of Scarborough must originate with the Tobago House of Assembly and the people of Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

3.45 p.m.

Mr. J. Sampson: It should not simply be imposed by this Parliament. Tobago is not another Trinidad municipal corporation. Our institutional history is different.

Our government arrangements are different. Our aspirations for self-government are different. As Tobago moves towards greater autonomy, those differences must become more meaningful, not less. Greater autonomy must ultimately mean Tobago determining much more of its own internal governmental structure. That includes the status and development of Scarborough. That includes the relationship between our growth centres, and, yes, it must eventually include Tobago, determining how many electoral districts Tobago should have for its own House of Assembly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: Never again should Tobagonians go to the polls, produce an election result, and then have somebody in Port of Spain decide afterwards that the structure under which that election was held must simply be rewritten. Never again should this Parliament alone determine that Tobago will move from 12 to 15 districts, without Tobago itself having decisive authority over that question.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. J. Sampson: That is part of self-determination. The people of Tobago should decide for themselves how Tobago is governed and what the structure of their government should be. That is what meaningful autonomy must eventually deliver.

Mr. Speaker, there is no contradiction between supporting stronger local government in Trinidad and supporting deeper self-government for Tobago. The institutional models are different, but the democratic principle is the same. For communities in Trinidad, stronger and more manageable municipalities can achieve that; for Tobago, greater autonomy must achieve that. Different constitutional parts, the same underlying philosophy.

Mr. Speaker, anybody is entitled to examine the proposed boundaries. Anybody is entitled to question them, ask about population, ask about geography, ask about communities, ask about administrative efficiency, ask whether natural community relationships are being preserved. That is proper parliamentary scrutiny. But what I will not accept is selective outrage, because Tobago remembers 2004. Tobago remembers the 10 out of 12 electoral districts. Tobago remembers moving from 12 to 15 electoral districts. The PNM came here and did all of that.

The question should not be: Which party drew the map? The question should be: Does the configuration make administrative sense? Does it bring government closer to communities? Does it improve service delivery? Does it improve accountability? Does it respect natural communities as far as practicable? Does it allow resources to be distributed more intelligently? Does it promote regional development? Can citizens more easily access the institutions responsible for their daily local government needs? Those are sensible tests. If there is a proposed boundary that failed those tests, then debate it, change it, improve it. That is what Parliament is for. But do not pretend that administrative boundaries must remain frozen forever. Populations change, settlement patterns change, commercial centres emerge, transportation networks change, communities grow, governmental structures have to respond.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to say something to the Government: Passing this legislation cannot be the end of local government reform; it must be the beginning, because ordinary citizens do not care about the beauty of lines we draw on a map. They care about results. They will judge this reform by whether their garbage is collected, by whether their drains are cleaned, by whether their

roads are maintained, by whether public spaces are cared for, by whether permits and approvals become easier, by whether municipal facilities function, by whether local communities receive equitable resources, and by whether citizens feel that government has actually moved closer to them. So, boundaries must be followed by authority, authority must be accompanied by resources, resources must be protected by accountability, and accountability must produce results. Otherwise, we will simply create more boundaries around the same old problems.

Mr. Speaker, Tobago brings an important institutional memory to this debate. We learnt about 2004, we learnt about geography matters, we learnt about community matters, we learnt about consultation matters, we learnt about transparency matters, and we learnt about timing matters. Then, in 2021, we learnt something else; we learnt just how quickly Parliament can decide that 12 districts should become 15, when the political circumstances make the existing arrangements inconvenient.

So, nobody has to lecture Tobago about redistricting, we have lived it, but those experiences do not lead me to conclude that boundaries can never change. They lead me to a better conclusion: Boundaries must serve people. Governmental structures must evolve when communities evolve, and power should be exercised as close as reasonably possible to the people affected by it.

Today, Trinidad has an opportunity to create more manageable municipalities, to bring local government closer to citizens, to distribute services more intelligently, to recognize the emergence of central Trinidad as a significant population and economic centre, and to give Chaguanas the institutional status to match the reality that has already developed on the ground. But let us follow that city designation with investment. Let services follow. Let jobs follow. Let

decentralization follow. Let people in central Trinidad conduct more of their lives and their businesses without being compelled to travel to Port of Spain. Let Port of Spain breathe. Let Chaguanas grow. Let municipalities become stronger. Let communities become more empowered.

While Trinidad moves towards stronger local government, Tobago will continue its own journey towards something deeper: Meaningful self-government, a Tobago in which Tobagonians determine the architecture of their own government, a Tobago in which Tobagonians determine the future of Scarborough, a Tobago in which the Tobagonians themselves decide how many representatives they require in their own House of Assembly. Different paths, Mr. Speaker, but the same democratic principle. Government works best when power is brought closer to the people. For those reasons, Mr. Speaker, I support the measure before this House. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Stuart Young SC (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, this contribution brings me no joy, and I actually am somewhat angered by what I witnessed a short while ago, because my friend from Tobago West does not deserve to be set up in the way he just was.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: It is fundamentally wrong what we just witnessed, unfortunately. Mr. Speaker, through you, those who are tuned in and listening to this piece of legislation that, unfortunately, once again, the *modus operandi* of

those on the other side, now in government, how it got here, the country was first alerted via a specific reporter on a Monday morning, being briefed to shine the light forward as to what would be happening in the House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: It was on Monday afternoon, finally, as elected Members of Parliament, those who the population chose to sit here, to represent them, to debate important pieces of legislation, finally had sight of a Bill that was not pronounced by post-Cabinet press conference; was not pronounced by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the Member for St Augustine; was not pronounced by anyone in government, but rather by handouts to a particular reporter to be published on a Monday morning.

So, for the population to know, this is now the third or fourth piece of serious legislation that this Government is attempting to hijack the elected Members of Parliament with, by giving us less than 48 hours to peruse, to caucus and to debate. But we will have them know that whilst that is a continued attack on democracy, that they are becoming synonymous with, it bothers us not because we are here to do the people's work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: For the listening public whom we represent, this Bill, lest you, having listened to the previous speaker, are misled to believe it has anything to do with Tobago whatsoever, it does not. It has absolutely nothing to do with Tobago, which is governed by the Tobago House of Assembly Act.

But what those on the other side, and in particular the speechwriters, have just skillfully done, is they have used the poor Member for Tobago West, who has now left the House, to make an argument for a government that is intent on

attacking democracy at every step that they take, including with this Bill, and to use the Member of Parliament for Tobago West—and the irony of his utterances that he is talking about the same Parliament that he now stands in, should not be deciding certain laws, but to make the Member for Tobago West mislead the population, in particular with respect to Chaguanas, we can start there, because it is clear that if the Member for Tobago West even read the Bill, and in particular, read what is being proposed by the Bill with respect to Chaguanas, he would have quickly determined that his utterances are completely out of whack with what is in black and white here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: This Bill is actually cutting Chaguanas, and the size of Chaguanas by almost 50 per cent. But what we just heard the Member for Tobago West do, on behalf of the UNC Government, is come back with something that they referred to in 2010 to 2015, which is to decentralize the capital city of Trinidad and Tobago, Port of Spain, and to move everything south to Chaguanas, and to make an almost absurd contribution in an attempt to justify that.

If that was not offensive enough, when I get, Mr. Speaker, to dealing with what was raised with respect to Tobago, and putting the truth on the record and therefore, on the *Hansard*, unfortunately, to refute what my friend from Tobago West was given to speak and to read as part of his contribution, it would become even more apparent to those who are listening how offensive what was just done to Tobago once again by a UNC Government is.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill is not about local government reform. This Bill is the clearest possible assault on local government elections and democracy that has ever come to the Floor of this Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: What this Bill has done, without any independent oversight whatsoever—my friend from Laventille West was at pains to point out the alleged—well, no, the composition of the committee that is alleged to have written some fictional report, because we have not seen the report, that then became this Bill, or elements of this Bill. What this Bill is doing now is redistricting. What this Bill is doing now is admitting gerrymandering. What this Bill is doing now is cherry-picking, when they look at an electoral map, exactly where they think the UNC strongholds are, the UNC votes are, to play the numbers game and to pluck out, for example, out of San Juan/Laventille, a new borough overnight of a small area called Barataria.

Our contribution on this side has absolutely nothing to do with any degrading of any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, whether they be in Barataria, St. Augustine, Port of Spain, Siparia, anywhere. But what they have done is identified themselves, and I will come to the role of the EBC. The EBC has absolutely nothing to do with these pieces of paper that we are here debating. Their work begins when this legislation is passed. The EBC's sole role, Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Mr. Speaker, with this is now, if and when this legislation is passed—because they will use their majority. Even when they do not have a majority, they found a creative way to put a very unfortunate person in a position where they must use a casting vote.

4.00 p.m.

This Bill, when passed, then the work of the EBC begins. And I wish the Member for Tobago was still here. Because you see all that he spoke about in that prepared speech, and the prepared speech was not by anybody from Tobago, I can assure the

population of that—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC:—misled the Member as to how it went into Tobago, from 12 electoral districts to 15, and, in particular, who draws the boundaries. So, it is an opportune moment at this time, Mr. Speaker, to put on record that the 13 elected Members on this side will continue to protect every independent body in Trinidad and Tobago, including, and more so, the EBC, and we reject all the attacks on the EBC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The preposterous statement that was made, and the messenger carefully chosen by those on the other side, as to who would make the preposterous statement that the EBC is in cahoots with the PNM. Complete rubbish.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: . And the population should reject that outright because, if this so-called independent body that they always have a problem with, until they win an election, was actually in cahoots with the PNM, why are we, are we sitting on this side and them on that side?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Why, when the 15 seats were decided by this Parliament for Tobago after a 12-seat election went six-six, why was that election then the outcome, the way it is now? So, to continuously attack independent bodies, which is part of their modus operandi, which fits squarely into their continued attempts of tyranny and attacks on democracy, we reject that outright here today.

Now, to get to what my friend was saying in Tobago. There was, via legislation, put in place by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, lest my friend

forgets—Tobago holds two critical seats in the 41 seats of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. The legislation provided, rather, in a flawed manner, for 12 seats. We ended up with six-six coming out of a THA election. You would be absolutely foolish to then, in that climate, sit and say, well, go again, and waste the resources, the limited resources of Trinidad and Tobago, because elections cost money—and I will come to the administrative side of this Bill in a short while—to then say, you all go and try again nah, and see if you could break the deadlock, six-six, and go through the whole cost of another set of elections.

Where the 15 electoral districts came from, Member for Tobago West, is over two and a half plus years of public consultation in Tobago by a joint select committee of the Parliament that was appointed to look at giving Tobago autonomy. That is where the 15 seats come from. It did not come from the PNM. And then, when he says, “Well, why were three of those seats carved out from PNM areas?” Again, these things are done, that the decision, not of boundaries—the decision, sorry, in Tobago of boundaries is solely that of the EBC. It is not done by the PNM Government, by the UNC Government, although, knowing them, they will change the law, because that is what they do. It was not done by a PNM Government. All the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago did, based on years of public consultation that was done in Tobago, engaging everyone in Tobago. The same Hochoy Charles my friend referred to played a part in a role. Everyone who is anyone in Tobago was reached out to, spoken to, participated in, for over two years, a very public consultation process, and one of the things that determined was you should have 15 seats instead of 12.

I was trying to remember this. And that principle we learned from history, because it was in 2001, I was trying to remember, because I recall the 18-18

general elections. You do not sit down and say, well, 18-18, let us try again. So, it was changed, and that is how we ended up with 41 seats. So, we completely reject what my friend, to give him credit and to try and rescue him, was given to read in an attempt to mislead the Parliament, the origin of the 15 electoral districts in Tobago.

And now, when the EBC looks at the figures, because my friend was at great pains to talk about the Chief Secretary's district. There are similar constituencies here, right here in Trinidad, and the same will exist in Tobago, you know. That is the irony. If the Member for Tobago East was here today, he would tell you that when you look at the map, it is not a straight division. The way that these things are done is not based on geography alone; it is based on population.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: So, why I find it offensive is, why give my friend from Tobago West the unenviable task to literally talk rubbish? You look at the size, the square footage, the square mileage of Port of Spain, and, as example, an example, compare that to Mayaro in terms of square mileage, Cumuto/Manzanilla in terms of mileage, and Port of Spain is two constituencies. It is because the population, the numbers.

So, to come here and to say, well, three electoral districts were decided in Tobago, complete rubbish again. That would have been decided by the EBC based on the density of population, and that is how this is supposed to be done. But, you see, again, it is a distraction from what we are really here to talk about. Because what is done via the legislation here, actually for debate, Mr. Speaker, is a plucking out of particular areas to give the impression, when they get to local government elections, that they have won more corporations. And the PNM does not operate

like that because, between Diego Martin and Port of Spain, geographically and population-wise, density-wise, those two areas described as Diego Martin and Port of Spain are the most densely populated in the whole of Trinidad and Tobago, number-wise.

So, what should we do? If we apply UNC logic and the UNC attacks on democracy, we split Port of Spain into three, give Diego Martin four, and you call that seven. So, when it comes time for a local government election, you say, well, I win 12, I win 10 boroughs? That is what is going on here, Trinidad and Tobago. That is it, simple, plain and simple, stealing of elections.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And they are trying to decimate Tunapuna and pluck out St. Augustine. Just listen to them. They are not even creative enough to find names that could give you some sort of throw you off. Yuh know what? Let us look at the map. Barataria jump out.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Take that little piece out of San Juan/Laventille. And you know where we have a whole pocket of votes? Down in St. Augustine. Well, pluck that out too, and that, Trinidad and Tobago, is what you are seeing here. One thing, they are not afraid to do their nonsense in broad daylight, and that is what this is.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: And then to try and fool the population that this is about local government reform, there is absolutely no local reform, eh. In fact, remember today, through you, Mr. Speaker, the 7th of October, 2026, as this PNM Bench tells the population, when this is passed and they seek to implement it, it is going to be

an administrative nightmare.

Just think about it. You cannot just say, well, okay, all the workers from San Juan/Laventille, carve out that 20 and send them down into the new borough of Barataria. It does not work that way. Because for every single corporation, every single city corporation, borough corporation, it is a huge, not only administrative office staff, not only workers but equipment as well.

How are they going to do it? Is this another in-your-face, blatant attempt just to give financiers moneys to go and buy backhoes and this kind of thing, to rent new buildings? But every single new one and the ones that they are dividing now have to be properly manned, not only with people, not only with equipment, but money.

For years, we have been hearing, so when you are telling us about local government reform and Siparia telling us about efficiency, et cetera, you are not even funding the existing ones now. How are you going to fund the new ones? You cannot take the exact same budget because it does not work that way. There have to be increases in manpower, there have to be increases in equipment, and you will know, every time a Government changes, if they do something as simple as changing Ministries, so, for example, taking the Ministry of National Security, splitting it into three, Defence, Homeland Security and Justice, immediately, you now have to have three different sets of Permanent Secretaries, three different sets of accounting personnel, et cetera, et cetera.

It is going to be the same thing for corporations. So, where is the efficiency in that? Especially when we are facing the difficulties we are facing, and the Member for Fyzabad will come next week Monday to present the national budget to the population, where we know there are difficulties, where we know there are

difficulties. We are seeing people not being paid on time, no drugs in the hospital, all of these difficulties facing us, and now you come with this just so you could say you win more corporations? Just so you could say, well, we win more electoral districts? That is where you are taking Trinidad and Tobago, and, and in the most blatant forms of gerrymandering and stealing of votes. Unacceptable.

So, do not come here and, unfortunately, ask the Member for Tobago. The Member for Tobago just came to make the argument for the UNC Government, something in their craw, that we must get out of Port of Spain. So, let us move the Parliament down to Chaguanas. We just cannot operate that way. It cannot be, it cannot be that because you think. You think no—

Mr. Hosein: [*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Young SC: No, it has nothing—you all are the ones with contempt. You all are the ones with contempt. The PNM did not make Port of Spain the capital.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: This has been the capital and will remain the capital. There is absolutely nothing wrong, as it goes on right now, with different services, their headquarters moving to different areas. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is properly positioned where it should be under, under the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The Ministry of Agriculture used to be in St. Clair. What is the Ministry of Agriculture doing in St. Clair in this day and age? Move it down to Chaguanas, which is closer to where all of our farmlands are. You are talking about reform. Do not forget the period of 2010—2015, when this UNC had 28 seats in the House. Another majority, majority in the House. They did nothing for local Government, absolutely nothing compare that to a PNM Government that

won in 2015 with a mandate to try and reform local government.

4.15 p.m.

Immediately, I was part of it, with the then dear deceased Minister Franklin Khan, I was the Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General, mandated to go with Minister Khan to the 14 different corporations all over Trinidad. Open floors, they were not PNM meetings. This was not the UNC Monday night forum consultation. There were 14 consultations, open to the public, come and talk to us in all 14 corporations and you know, again, the irony, the transparency that exists in PNM versus those on the other side.

We heard, it was in November of last year, we saw the appointment letters being handed out by the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine to some cabinet-appointed committee to look at electoral boundaries for local government. The Member for Laventille West pointed out how heavy a party group of the UNC each member was and how that composition of that committee was all about party. So why do they not produce the report? Why was the report not laid right there in front of you, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: With the Bill.

Mr. S. Young SC: —with the Bill before we debated it? Why can we not see what these people were paid taxpayers money to do? What are their recommendations? Compare that to when it was the PNM looking at local government reform, through you, a public document was produced immediately, within a month of public consultations ending. The public consultations began on the 15th of December, 2015 and ended, the last one was on April 27th, 2016, and there is a report dated May 2016, report on local government reform consultations, 85 pages could be found by anyone in the world to see the results of those

consultations that then went into the production of legislation. And some of the PNM's local government reform was rolled out, but again it was opposition by those on the other side, trying to scuttle it at every single angle.

You have to fund all these new corporations you are coming up with. What we intended to do and what we sought to do was set up that the revenue earned from property tax in each corporation would go to the corporation. No, run to the courthouse, litigate it, delay it until eventually the Privy Council said, "yuh could go ahead". But that is the stymying of progress, that is the stymying; that is the treatment of real local government reform. Local government reform that was being proposed to change councillors and aldermen to make them full-time, more efficient, allow them to collect their own taxes from property to fund what they were doing. But now "yuh come today because you want to be able to beat on your chest at some point in time that yuh win more corporations".

And this is a body that was chaired by Ministers, supported by public servants that went all over Trinidad because at the time in Tobago shortly thereafter there were specific consultations with respect to Tobago and the move towards autonomy and my friend should ask what happened with those two Bills for Tobago's autonomy, including amendments to the Constitution and how those Bills were treated by those on the other side when they were then in Opposition. So do not come here and, through an innocent reader from Tobago West, try to rewrite history and mislead the population.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The electoral districts in that THA election with the 15 seats were decided completely and independently by the EBC with absolutely no interference from the PNM or the PDP at the time. And the history of where they

came from, as I said and now that my friend is back in the House, I will say for his benefit, although maybe it has to be put on a piece of paper for him to read in front of him, if I had notes, I could send it for him, is that it came from the consultations that took place in Tobago, and the Tobagonian stakeholders said go with 15 seats.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The administrative issues associated with this, once this legislation is passed, you would note, Mr. Speaker, the Government has put in a proclamation clause for the population of Trinidad and Tobago even though a proclamation is done by the President of Trinidad and Tobago, a proclamation is not a presidential discretion. A proclamation is done in accordance with section 80 of the Constitution on the advice of Cabinet, and why that is relevant here, is there is a proclamation clause.

Mr. Speaker: Before you continue, you have maybe just over a minute. Would you like your 15?

Mr. S. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Let us wait and see when they railroad this legislation through, when it is actually proclaimed and administered. Because every new corporation now has to be staffed, they have to get somewhere to rent and we will look closely to see where they are going to rent, they have to have equipment, they have to have not only administrative staff, they have to have workers. Where is the money going to come from? So they cannot proclaim it immediately and what the population needs to know is when it is proclaimed, the hard work now goes to the EBC who have 90 days within which now to work out the boundaries within these

new corporations that are new boroughs and new cities et cetera and the EBC will now look at the numbers.

So, for example, with respect to Port of Spain, they carved out a significant part of Diego Martin, dropped it down into Port of Spain when we look at the numbers, it adds significantly to the number of—

Hon. Member: Thirty per cent.

Mr. S. Young SC: —30 per cent now of the electoral population for Port of Spain and now every single electoral district in Port of Spain, the EBC is going to have to look at the numbers, how many people are living and shift it to ensure that the electoral districts are not more than each other by margins. So that is where the work comes.

But all this is, is a vanity project by those on the other side to be able to say, when they are declining in popularity and they are under pressure, they are looking now to carve out to say, “aye, no, we win Barataria, we win St. Augustine.” Maybe the population will give them a surprise because population is not stupid and they are seeing how their democratic rights are every piece of legislation that comes, how they are being eroded, how they are being taken away right in front of their eyes.

I had come in at the back end of my friend from Barataria/San Juan and he made this statement:

“It takes a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration”—to get something done. And, of course, I understand that beating of the drum because he has just gotten all the land in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Mr. S. Young SC: Well, in Trinidad.

Mr. Scotland SC: He will get Tobago just now.

Mr. S. Young SC: Well, the way Tobago is going, they will give it away themselves, but I want to correct that because the UNC, as I said, in that period of 2010 to 2015 did absolutely nothing for local government and I got it wrong, it is actually 29 seats they had, they did nothing. So now I come to my friend for Tobago West, who I really feel sorry for and found what happened offensive. The PNM had nothing to do, my friend, with any boundaries in Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Furthermore, as they continue to attempt to mislead you—

Mr. Sampson: The EBC ran the PNM.

Mr. S. Young SC: If the EBC ran the PNM, you think you all will have 15 in Tobago?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Boy, you know, if your “maths not maths in, stay out de maths class.”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Right? Then you talked about there was no consultation with Tobago boundaries. Again, completely untrue. If you were here, you would have heard where those came from, and the stakeholders. Go and ask Watson Duke, if “yuh could find him”.

Hon. Members: Ooooh!

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. Young SC: The EBC was and always will be, once they are protected as an independent institution, completely autonomous in their decision of boundaries, both in Trinidad and Tobago in a general election, in local government elections in

Trinidad and in THA elections in Tobago. And we in the PNM will certainly do all we can to continue to protect that independent body from the grubby hands of those who may want to influence it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: Unfortunately, again, in what was provided to my friend to read, he was quoting Dr. Rowley, about where he was speaking about autonomy for Tobago and he tried to work that in, or the speechwriter tried to work that into the Bill before us on—this Bill, if you had read it, has absolutely nothing to do with autonomy for any local government body.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: None. None. None. None. There is no such provision, none. So, it is quite unfortunate when persons come here and set up some of our Members, but also to try and put onto the *Hansard* something that is completely false that does not exist. Because the population is looking on, the population has been paying attention, the population has been seeing how persons have been voting on Bills and what is going on and they are very concerned. And, you know, the biggest red flag, or one of them now is “rush de legislation, doh give enough time for the public. It is not us, yuh know”, because the 13 of us are capable every single one of us—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Young SC: —of getting up on any piece of legislation. The disservice, Mr. Speaker, is to the population not having the time and the ability to digest what is taking place before it gets to the flow of the debate.

So, Mr. Speaker, we on this side, for good reason, will not lend our support to another assault on the democracy of Trinidad and Tobago, which is what this

Bill is. We on this side and other speakers to come will get into it in greater depth and detail. I heard my friend from Laventille West referring to the collective agreement provision, an area close to my heart.

But what I want to say with this, what this does not provide for, is when you are transferring workers from one corporation to the next, what happens with seniority? What happens with the position that you would have held before that you may have been acting in? How does that now go across to the new corporation, because those are not easy principles. What is going to happen with any gratuity? What is going to happen if there are any of them with pensions, et cetera, with these types of transfers?

So, Mr Speaker, what we are seeing once again, this one is a vanity piece of legislation. Rush to the House to appease whom, I am not sure, but it is not something that any right-thinking, civic-minded citizen can support because these types of changes should be done in a more structured manner and with a proper element of consultation. This hollow cry that we are hearing now, “no, there was consultation because we spoke about—” They did not speak about this in the election campaign, but we spoke about that in the election campaign and therefore, that is not how it works.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to have joined the debate. Unfortunately, a lot of it had to be spent on correcting the record and the unfortunate incident we saw unfold in front of us with the use of my friend from Tobago West.

Mr. Scotland SC: Misuse.

Mr. S. Young SC: The—well, no, they are using him for their own purpose, but that is for them. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

4.30 p.m.

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Jearlean John): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity. But after hearing the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St Ann's West berate my very honourable colleague from Tobago West—colleague and brother—I think it is very unfortunate because if he is claiming that our very honourable colleague got his history wrong, I think he too has his history wrong and his recollection of the facts.

Now, with respect to this, if I am to start with these 15 seats, how it came about, or this argument about consultation, there was no consultation for the 15 seats that Dr. Rowley presented in this Parliament in 2021.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: As a matter of fact, in the *Hansard* of that day—I listened to the debate, you know—Dr. Rowley at the time referred to an opinion from a senior counsel and he was begged to present that opinion. Some good Tobagonians—you know, I had to run quickly to kind of look at some little research that is on the computer. Some good Tobagonians, Dr. Winford James and Dr. Vanus James—Dr. Vanus James who is actually from the wonderful village of “Charville”; we call it “Charville”—they were asking, in an *Express* article of the 18 February, 2021, Dr. Rowley if he could indeed provide the opinion of the senior counsel. So, in fact, there was no consultation. None whatsoever, right? This just landed on us.

If there was any kind of reference to the Tobago people, it was by a gentleman called Mr. Orville London, who was then the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, and the former Chief Secretary, I do not know if they called him that at the time, Mr. Hochoy Charles. They had done some work in

Tobago and they had come up with the fact that there should be 15 seats, which Dr. Rowley—that was in 2013. Dr. Rowley, at the time, dismissed it. When he got the 6-6 result, as a good Tobagonian Prime Minister at the time, it was his moment to shine, but he projected that the PNM's 6 was bigger than Farley's 6, it appears. Because what they did at the time—that is the party of Mr. Chavez Farley—he said, “Listen to me, I will give you the Chief Secretary. I will give you the finance position. I will give you everything. Let us just sit down and move on with the business of Tobago”.

Mr. Tancoo: “Big man ting”.

Hon. J. John: “Big man ting”. The then Tobago-born Prime Minister found himself in the Parliament and he said, basically, “Listen to me, I am really not interested in what you have to say.” In his *Hansard* of 19 February, 2021, he said:

“I have heard it from the radio and the television about a council of elders...”

—he is a Tobagonian, we speak metaphorically. He said:

“I heard about a council of elders, a Robinson Crusoe coin toss, a grey beards association, let them run Tobago. All of these, Madam Speaker, are ideas coming from different quarters. None of that is in the law that governs Tobago...”

In fact, it is all “monkey coco”.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John: That is how he came up with 15 seats.

As a matter of fact, the Member for Siparia—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. J. John: No, it is in the *Hansard*, I can lend you the *Hansard*. The Member

for Siparia said, “There is a remedy in law.” He said, “I doh have time fuh dat. You take me to court, if dat is what you want.” Because he was hellbent on having 15 seats because he felt he could have won. “But God doh like ugly”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Today, we are talking about gerrymandering, and they are the kings and queens of gerrymandering. As a matter of fact, what the hon. Members on the opposite side tend to do, they want to use April—is it 28th, 2025?—as the baseline. That is when we started this experiment in democracy. But no, it went way back from then. You know, when they want to say, “UNC, hungry for power,” we are not hungry for power.

In 2001, as memory in this wonderful House—you know, somebody was saying, they are going back to the Stone Age. “Ah doh know if dat is de Stone Age”—there was an election in Trinidad and Tobago, and the UNC won 18 seats, and the PNM won 18 seats. And what happened? The then Prime Minister did not say, “Well, okay, we are going to—I am going to stick around, and I am going to go back to the electorate six months from now.” He could have done that. He said, “I will leave it up to the President at the time, Arthur Napoleon Robinson”—I think he have—Raymond, he has a next name— “to decide.” And on the 24th of December, 2001, that then President handed the Government over to Mr. Manning. “UNC eh throw no stone, we eh cuss nobody, we eh march, we take dat and we cool it.”

So, how on earth you could say UNC into gerrymandering? Should we not have gerrymandered there? When in the election of 2015, there was a sitting Prime Minister—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: But that is true, I sat in that negotiation. There were three people on the PNM side: Mr. Manning, Mrs. Joan Yuille-Williams and Dr. Saith. And on the opposite side, handing over the government, was Mr. Panday, Ganga Singh and Jearlean John. So, just as the Member for Tobago West had lived the experience, I lived the experience.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: “Jus so today I employed and tomorrow I not employed”, because they just handed this Government over and we just took that. That is democracy. Every time there is a time to stand up and be counted, to deem the democracy, to stand up for this country, there is a United National Congress Government that stands in the gap.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We stand in the gap.

In September of 2015, everybody is going about their business. The Constitution and the law, Representation of the People Act says, election must be held from 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. “There is a sitting Prime Minister who eh know”—never knew these wonderful people that they are talking about, you know, kept them protected—sent out a release: “Extension of Hours of Poll”, 07 September, 2015:

“Due to inclement weather The Elections and Boundaries Commission...wishes to inform members of the public that hours of the polls have been extended by (1) one hour...”

Did anybody in the UNC, sitting Government, know that? Nobody knew. “Yuh understand?” No, it was found to be illegal. And look, you see I have it here. Justice Mia Dean-Armorer—

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
Bill, 2026
Hon. J. John (cont'd)

2026.10.07

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. J. John: Please people, I never said anything when you all were speaking. The Tobagonian is speaking now—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: On behalf of a Tobagonian brother that they tried to disparage in this House.

Justice Mira Dean-Armorer in the Hall of Justice, Port of Spain, on the Friday afternoon of—I am seeing, Rishi Ramdass, August 18, 2016 article—said; she said:

“I have, in these Petitions, strove to hold a balance to protect the will of the majority...”

So, she went on to say all kinds of nice thing. She said—okay. She said that the decision of the elections officers to extend the voting time past 6.00 p.m. was not lawful.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: She said:

“Torrential rains and flooding on 7th September, 2015, may have impelled the EBC to issue the directive they did. Nonetheless, the uncontrollable weather conditions did not confer on the EBC the power to direct that the law be broken. The EBC, itself a creature of statute, ought at all times to abide by the clear dictates of the law and ought not to purport to dispense with those dictates even if faced with an apparently insurmountable problems.

Accordingly, it is my view and I hold that the extension of the poll on the 7th September 2015 was illegal and election officers who failed to close the poll

at 6p.m. acted in breach of Section 27(1) of the Election Rules.”

She said, “Okay. What dey do wrong, but the result must be right because the people already fastening dey seat. Dey already in the Government and let us move on.” What does the UNC do? “Dey had to take dat and cool it”. We did not riot. We did not march. What we did is for 10 years, we were there having our Monday Night Forum and they were jeering at us. You understand? When we felt Monday night forum was not cracking, then we had the Pavement Report. Not so, “Mr. Lion”? You understand? “Every Sunday, we in dey rutungkatungtung with Sunday press conferences”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: You understand? We were dealing with them. “So, Opposition not easy. So, dis thing allyuh want to talk about, just now allyuh back in government. No, it does not work like that. You have to earn government. Dey pelt you all out last year for a reason”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: “Pitch dem out, dat is how we talk in Tobago”. You understand? So, you have to earn your way back into government.

So, all of these wonderful things you all are talking about, that the UNC wants to do this and that—I do not want to respond too much to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West fella, you know, because he will take up all of my time. You know, because what I want to tell him is that “he too young to pong, he have to behave heself”. You understand?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. J. John: “Yuh too young to pong, man”. You understand?

So, this, 12 to 15 seats, it was wrong. It was wrong then and it is wrong

now, the way it came into being, you understand? So, all this talk about “attack on tyranny and dictatorship”, you are not talking to the UNC. “Yuh cyah talk to de UNC”, right? We are the people who hold this democracy together.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We hold this twin-island state together, right? We are the ones who give up our rights for peace. So, Mr. Speaker, I am trying to find my speaking notes, because I am getting to the age where I really need sometimes to be guided by my notes and I had them all here.

Hon. Member: He tried to throw you off.

Hon. J. John: “Didn’t he?”

So, I am getting back on track. So, Mr. Speaker, I remember, just as I get back on track—because you know, they belaboured that, whatever it is, that we do not stand for democracy and so on. Well, remember the debate has turned into a THA debate. But I know there is a man who used to write for the *Express*, every Sunday, a man called Mr. Martin Daly of Senior Counsel. “Dat is not a man you coulda say is ah UNC, because I hear dey saying everybody is ah UNC. Dey just calling people name and saying dey are a UNC. I doh know, eh. Everybody who go and do something on behalf of the country is ah UNC”. But this Mr. Martin Daly in his December 12, 2021, column, he said:

“In relation to the increase of seats in the THA and in response to other legitimate enquiries about the basis of decisions it makes, the Elections and Boundaries Commission has not been as forthcoming as it should. I am yet to understand the constitutional basis on which the Government could require the EBC to make boundary changes in Tobago simply in order to break the 6-6 electoral tie that occurred in January.”

So, everybody knew, except the speakers here today, that what they did was very wrong, including Mr. Martin Daly, as I said, who you can never accuse of being a UNC. He said:

“In relation to the increase of seats in the THA and in response to other legitimate enquiries about the basis of decisions it makes, the Elections and Boundaries Commission has...”

Well, okay, fine. He said that was not forthcoming. But then he had a bit of, again, to say—I was trying to find that other article where he said that Tobago gave the bullies a “calpet”. Go and read, Martin Daly, that article. It was a very good article.

So, Mr. Speaker, that legislation is not simply about changing the names of corporations. It is not simply about drawing new lines on a map. It is not simply about creating a city here or a borough there. It is about whether the structure of local government still reflects the values and the aspirations of the Trinidad and Tobago that we have today.

Local government is about kitchen table issues. It is about our day-to-day angst, the things that annoy us. Someone spoke about the drains that are not clean, and those drains are not just drains. Those are the drains eating away at your boundary, your fence is leaning. You have a manhole in front your yard and it has silted right up to the top, or it just there, open. Local government issues are not small. They are very important issues, and what we are doing here is beyond important. And we have decided “talk done”. All these consultations—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—every day is a new consultation. It is time for action. They are asking us to go out and consult again. Consult again about what? I think I saw

something in an article by Nafessa Mohammed, talking about the myriad of documents gathering dust because all the PNM does is to waste money consulting, and then they do nothing. And they expect us to come here and join the line and wine. We cannot do that. We are here by the people and of the people. And in fact, the UNC represents—of any party in this country, UNC represents the people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We have always—[*Inaudible*—]to the people. And I think we are the inspiration for that calypso, “de drum will carry us”. So, we have no fear. “Allyuh could say what allyuh want”, do what you all want, jump up, jump down, you know, swing high, swing low, sing sweet chariot of fire. We know that we are going to win. “We eh have to gerrymander anything”. We do not do that. We do not need to do that. We are about the ground and we are about the people. Okay? And we will always be honoured by those people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

4.45 p.m.

Hon. J. John: So, Mr. Speaker, the Bill creates the city of Chaguanas and the Boroughs of Barataria, St. Augustine, Sangre Grande, and Couva. It adjusts the municipal boundaries and so on, and everybody has been talking about that. So, Mr. Speaker, what we looked at as a practical party, communities change, highways open up. Even the Opposition, when in Government, they built a few highways, some of them to nowhere. “Is only parrot and douen in them place.”

Hon. Member: “Dey built a one-way highway.

Hon. J. John: No, not only that. “You coming off a highway, trying to find a next highway, and you gone in de bush, trying to find de highway. Some way up in de east. Somebody like me who go get lost in a teapot. You can imagine that.

You come up, up in de east there, you know that? Madam Sam, you must know that. You have to go in some bush to find a highway. It eh open up nothing. Is only bush on both sides.” So, I am hoping that something will come of it.

But what a highway does is that it opens up communities. It brings people to your door. It helps with productivity, because it makes your travelling time shorter. Those highways they built, I do not think all those metrics were in it, but we are hoping to do something. So, communities change, population centres grow. Development spreads. Road networks change, open up, and expand the community. You have new housing. It means those that they tried to stop the other day, but I know, Minister Lee, we will get going just now. New housing expands community. Commercial centres develop for traffic.

All of these new demands are placed on drainage, waste management, public spaces, markets, recreational facilities, local roads, and other municipal services. People come into everyone—all of us, the 41 Members’ offices. I mean, I do not know if our Members opposite go to their offices, but I know certainly I was there up to yesterday. And people are very emotional about their drains, emotional about potholes, emotional about David Lee, the hon. Member. They cannot get houses, and these are issues. People need to know where to go, and that is what local government solves. It solves these issues. People need to know where to go. And not only that, how to get these services—when? Not just now, now. They want it now.

So, a municipal structure that makes sense at one point in our development may no longer be the best structure of the communities that exist today. That is why a responsible Government, that is the United National Congress Government, has to be willing to review and renew institutions. Not because change is

fashionable. Not because there is some agenda. There is no agenda. We are about the people. When we say, when UNC, when everybody wins, there are things people cannot get because we have to open up the law. We have to come and amend the law to ensure that the people can get something.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: I was walking there the other day, and I am saying, but this place feels so safe. You know why this place is safe? It is because we took strong actions. We empowered the police. We support our Commissioner of Police. “You know dey vex as we said it?” We support the Minister of Homeland Security and so on. They take no action. You know, we are overrun with drugs. We are overrun with guns. We are overrun with gangs. People cannot get services. Everywhere you look in Trinidad, there is a dump and so on. And they are asking how we are going to pay for it. What do you mean, how are we going to pay for it? We have to pay for it. Because we believe, we are taking this action because we believe that the people deserve better. They deserve better.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So not because the name sounds impressive. I am really happy for my beloved Couva. But it is not because it is impressive. They deserve it, of course.

So, our appeal, our voices, our defence was always to stand in that gap, Mr. Speaker. If communities have developed into identified population centres with distinct needs, distinct service pressures, and distinct civic identities, then the law should be capable of recognizing that reality and fix it. And fix it. What is the use that we know? What is the use of people coming in and wringing their hands every day and we are doing nothing? We have the tools at our disposal. That is

what we are doing here today. We are taking Government to the people because they deserve it. We are governing by the people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We are governing from the ground. The ground carried us, and we respect the people. That is who we are. “We doh run and hide from people.” So local government, Mr. Speaker, is closest to everyday lives. The residents want to know two things. Who is responsible, and when will it be fixed?

Mr. Speaker, if our structure makes these questions harder to answer, then this structure deserves to be examined, and in this case, amended. If our structure spreads responsibility so widely that communities feel lost within large administrative regions, I mean, sometimes somebody comes to me and tells me about a road. And I will say, “No, that road is not a central government road. It is a local government road or HDC road, and worse, sometimes it is a PEASL road.” They just look at me, bewildered, you know what you are talking about? I just want my road fixed. They do not want to hear your stories, and that is what we are—

Mr. Manning: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John:—but they “doh” want to hear your stories? You have road to be fixed? “I think you busy making kuchoor and jhanjhat”. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. John: Look, if you are fixing any road, “them” people will not come at you, you know. I will come down there and help you out.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: Yeah, I will come down.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. John: I will come down. You will get your turn now.

So, the Bill, therefore, creates a new municipal map intended to bring administration and accountability closer to identifiable communities. For Chaguanas, it recognizes the significance of that ambitious urban centre. I mean, who would not want to declare Chaguanas a city?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: I do not understand that. You are talking about Chaguanas—it is a disparaging term. People are from Port of Spain, businessmen crying. They are under pressure because the people are migrating to Chaguanas. “Well, I don’t want to advertise for Chaguanas.” But I think sometimes they feel they have better value there, quite frankly.

So, for Barataria, St. Augustine, Sangre Grande and Couva, it creates a borough with its own municipal identities and representative structure. The Bill also reconfigures remaining regional corporations so that the entire system fits together after these changes are made. “Nothing eh hodgepodge.” Everything was thoughtfully put together to ensure nobody is left behind. We see no distinction. I mean, yes, geography, you have the name and what have you. But we bring the same service to every community, every nook and cranny in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So, Mr. Speaker, well, of course, they talked about the role of Elections and Boundaries and so on and so on. I suppose we can leave that alone because maybe somebody else will talk about that. The deadlock provisions. If it is—we had these deadlock provisions before with the THA, we would not have had to go with the old greybeards, council, and so forth. They would have been able to sort that out. So, this is a pre-emptive and common-sense approach to

governance. You understand? So that is what we are doing. This is not a—

Mr. Hosein: They want to draw straws, you know.

Hon. J. John: What is that?

Mr. Hosein: They want to draw straws. That is what they want to do.

Hon. J. John: “Well, that is what dey say. Dey are saying—”

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. John: “Dey say is monkey coco.”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John: So, you know.

So, I said in 2021, you had the whole issue that has been really talked about with the six-six because it really impacted us as a country, the way it was done. In this Parliament, we really fought for the rights of the people. That is when you were fighting for, the rights of the people. You have continuity provisions that someone was talking about earlier, that there is nothing. The Member for St. Augustine would have talked about what happens when there is a collective agreement. What happens to the obligation that already exists?

So, these questions matter because reform must not create chaos. Debts do not disappear. Contracts do not evaporate. Court proceedings do not cease to exist. Workers do not lose their rights simply because the administrative matters change. This Bill, therefore, contains provisions intended to preserve that continuity. So that answers that. So, no amount of misleading the public out there in the press, whatever they are. I do not know if they do look—nobody looks at it.

So, when you put all of these pieces together, Mr. Speaker, the national case becomes clear because the Bill is trying to do four things. First, it updates the municipal map to reflect communities as they exist today. Second, it creates

clearer and more focused municipal units. Third, it strengthens the machinery that allows councils to function. And fourth, it provides legal continuity so that restructuring does not disrupt wide rights, responsibilities, and public administration. Who does not want that?

Mr. Hosein: PNM.

Hon. Member: Imbert.

Hon. J. John: So, Mr. Speaker, I represent the people of Couva North. Proudly so. I meet them. I hear their complaints. I know the frustration that they feel when they have to move from office to office trying to understand who is responsible for a problem. So, as I said before, I know the importance of roads, drainage, and all of that. I know that Couva has developed into a community that deserves a municipal structure centred on Couva itself, not as part of this big, sprawling Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation with the greatest of respect.

Hon. Member: That is three regional corporations in one.

Hon. J. John: Exactly. So, for the first time, Couva will stand as its own borough with its own municipal corporation. It means Couva will have a corporation whose first municipal responsibility is Couva, and it matters not because the word “borough” sounds grand. It matters because focus matters. Responsibility matters. Accountability matters. Planning matters. A corporation whose mandate is concentrated on Couva can look at Couva’s own municipal needs in a more focused way. Its roads, its drains, its public spaces, its recreation grounds, its sanitation needs, the community facilities, its development pressures, the disaster management needs, the neighbourhoods, its people. This is what borough status should mean and would mean. It is not a ceremony, not a signboard, and it is not

something to argue over. We all should be happy when a community is moving forward. So, it will create an opportunity also for greater accountability.

Dr. Moonilal: “Only the PNM will be vex.”

Hon. J. John: “They are vex with everything that makes sense.”

So, Mr. Speaker, there is also a democratic value in giving people a more identifiable municipal authority because accountability becomes clearer. Sometimes in public administration, when responsibility is spread too widely, everybody can explain why somebody else should act because nobody is then responsible. This is bringing accountability closer to the people because people deserve clear answers. If the issue is municipal, the corporation must own its responsibility. That is what we are saying. If it belongs to a utility, the utility must own its responsibility.

You will see, even at this time, the responsiveness of an agency like WASA, T&TEC. I mean, your lights cannot go off fast enough. T&TEC is there to put it on. I mean, these are the things that we have been doing and working on, and we must congratulate the Minister of Public Utilities and his team for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: There is a time—well, the lights “doh” really go, but if it goes, you used to wonder when it is coming back.

Hon. Member: Yeah, whenever.

Hon. J. John: When you call that number, they tell you, if you call about this outage, we have it already, oh gosh. They have it already. I want to tell you again. I want to tell you again. That is the point. They are there on the spot. That is what responsible government does.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: I see the member for Diego Martin North/East in some hole. Listen, he should not go in no five-foot hole, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John: That is the point. He should not. But he is there parading around holes. I do not understand this gentleman. In this Parliament today, you have to stop it. Because I help WASA—because WASA is on the job, or the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is on the job. I do not understand it, but he is looking for something to do. It is when you are in Opposition that this happens to you. You go a little “cuckoo”.

So, Mr. Speaker, the people deserve clear answers, and if this is municipal, the corporation must own its responsibility. I mean, I talk about these agencies, because these are the agencies where every day you have some kind of issues. But it is really—yes, we are living life, and problems will occur. But it is how you respond to the problem. That is what this Government is doing. We are very responsive.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We are proactive by having this Bill today and having this debate today. We are being proactive. But barring that, we are very responsive. You do not have to call us twice or three times. We follow up, and we do our jobs without fear or favour. We do it for everybody.

So, if the issue belongs to a Ministry, the Ministry must own its responsibility. If it belongs to a utility, the utility must own its responsibility. That has been, I think, the experience of the vast majority of Trinidad and Tobago today. Where coordination is required, Government must coordinate. What we cannot continue to do is to send citizens in circles and decide that 14 is enough,

when you really need 17. Maybe we need 21. Have you all thought about that?

A proper consultation. They are asking about where is the consultation and then trying to discredit the people who sat on the—they say it have no consultation—

Mr. Speaker: Member, you have a minute again. You will take your 15?

Hon. J. John: The 15 and everything is finished?

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no.

Hon. Member: Everything gone?

Mr. Speaker: Your regular time.

Hon. J. John: All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: I take it you will take your 15?

Hon. J. John: Yes, Sir. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: I do not understand.

So, Mr. Speaker, we cannot continue to send citizens in circles. That is one reason. Smaller, more focused municipal units must have value. They make it easier to identify the insufficient responsibility for local services. That makes it easier for citizens to demand answers. We are a government of accountability. “We are not afraid, we doh back-back.” I mean—Sparrow dead, but—you know, I mean—

Dr. Moonilal: Take his advice of wisdom.

Hon. J. John: I will take his advice, you understand. “You know, we doh back-back.”

Dr. Moonilal: Take his wisdom.

Hon. J. John: We stand up, and we face our responsibility.

Right. It makes it easier for citizens to demand answers, and it makes it easier for elected representatives to measure performance.

5.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to speak briefly to the wider symbolism of this reform. Chaguanas becoming a city; Barataria becoming a borough; St. Augustine, et cetera. These changes recognize that Trinidad and Tobago is not frozen in time, and my colleague from Tobago just made that point. Our towns and communities evolve, our population changes, needs change, and we must be there in lockstep or even ahead of them, anticipating their needs. And that is what this Bill is doing today.

The people should not be forced to serve the map. That is the larger philosophy behind this reform, and I believe that it a sensible philosophy. We should always be prepared to ask whether institutions will make sense. We should also be prepared to update them when the evidence and lived experience tell us that they can be improved.

So, I mean, everybody is talking about they had this in what year and that. Why did you not implement it?

Dr. Moonilal: Correct. Why?

Hon. J. John: Everything they had.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: They had, they had, they had. Opposition, then government of “woulda, coulda, shoulda”. “You eh implement one thing”, but you are coming here to tell us what we should not implement also.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah, what we should not do. Correct.

Hon. J. John: No, you have a long time in Opposition.

Hon. Member: Forever.

Hon. J. John: Forever. When we let loose this you will know. No, we cannot lose. So, Mr. Speaker, Parliament exists to scrutinize. If drafting errors are identified, let us correct them. So, let us correct them. If a transition provision needs clarification, clarify it. If implementation details need strengthening, strengthen them. That is not a weakness. It is how legislation gets better and it is how we take the service to the people. That is what we are here to do. That is what the taxpayers pay us to do.

So, I want to, Mr. Speaker, I want to make another point about service delivery, the creation of new corporations will only matter if the institutions are properly supported, and, of course, all of that, the systems and so on, that have been worked on. I mean we have a very bright Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, you know, she knows this thing inside out because she came from local government.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: From the bowels of local government. You understand? So, she knows how this—local government. So, I want to acknowledge the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, and the Minister responsible for local government for bringing this reform to Parliament, because it is always easier to leave all structures untouched. It is easier not to rock the boat. “Dais what lazy people does do.” Right? But we are not afraid of that and we are not afraid of the consequences of that. All right? We are not afraid.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We do what we believe is in the interest of the people. Right? It is always easier—this is how things have been done for years, but leadership requires

us to ask whether these structures are still serving the people as effectively as they can. And when the answer is that improvement is possible, leadership requires action.

This Bill is not an attempt to act; this Bill is action, action. All right? The UNC is about action and ensuring that we better the lives of the people.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: That is where accountability comes back in. All right? We are not afraid of that. We are going to stand the consequences, and we know the people know that we are acting on their behalf, because that is why they bought into the concept and the philosophy. When UNC wins, everybody wins. That is a tagline; this is the work. This is how UNC does win, with the work.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: You cannot just sit down there with a hat and a tagline and buzzword, you have to put it into work and sometimes you have to take hard decisions, and that is why we really have to compliment the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. She takes that, the hard decision.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So, Mr. Speaker, I also believe this reform gives us an opportunity to change how we think about local government. Too often local government is treated as a level of the Government that deals with small things, but there is nothing small about the things people experience every day. There is nothing small about a flooded home.

Hon. Member: “Ohhh.”

Hon. J. John: A flooded home. Listen to me, these people during the election—they do not know about that. No empathy, you know. During the election of 2020,

I am driving somewhere on some boulevard in La Horquetta and La Horquetta is the PNM side, eh. You talk about water, I had to turn back. The water was pushing the SUV I was driving.

Dr. Moonilal: People on the roof.

Hon. J. John: People on the roof. “Everything flood out.” Good UNC people, because UNC people are always the first port of call.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: The first port of call. Good UNC people. What do they need? I said, “everything flood out”.

Hon. Member: Cleaning.

Hon. J. John: Not cleaning. If cleaning was easy everything is gone, “meh fridge, meh stove, meh couch”, what have you. UNC people came and said, we are going to do it. You know what? PNM use that as an accusation. You understand? “Wuh you do that for? Wuh you do that for?” And it is their people, you know. That was not Las Lomas and Brazil and so on. That was the PNM side, because they know they would have left them there in the flood. That is how they behave, they just turn their back.

So, there is nothing small about a flooded home. That is pain for the man who is paying month by month to Courts. It is not easy when you get that bill saying it is overdue. So, for us, a flooded home means something. We respond to that. We respond to the people. There is nothing small about a dangerous local road; there is nothing small about poor sanitation; there is nothing small about a neglected public space in a community; there is nothing small about a recreation ground that young people cannot use; there is nothing small about a citizen who cannot get an answer. Local government deals with the texture of daily life. They

are woven into your daily life.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: And that is why we are giving it the attention that is needed.

So this makes it very important, enormously important, and if this Bill helps create municipal institutions that are closer, clearer, and more focused, then that is a reform with real human value and that is a reform the United National Congress will back every day, any time.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Mr. Speaker, how long do I have? So, Mr. Speaker, I support the overall direction of this Bill because it recognizes that basic truth, government structures exist for people. People do not exist for government structures. When the country changes, government must be prepared to change with it. This is a country in an evolution, all right. In 2030, you would not recognize this country that we met in 2025, you know. You understand? Because we are pushing.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. J. John: And the law, reform of the law, amendment of the law, all these are part of the tool. That is what we used to push. You cannot just stand up and talk nonsense and say it is “monkey coco”. You have to get it.

Hon Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John: We used to say it is “bassa-bassa”. So, when communities grow, administration must respond. When institutional weaknesses are exposed, the law must respond. When responsibility is unclear, government must make it clearer. It is your duty. It is why you were voted in. And when people feel distant from the institutions that serve them, we should bring these institutions closer. And that is the national argument for this Bill.

And Couva, I am sorry I have to call the name, but, you know, it is my second home, Couva is one important example of it. For Couva, the legislation creates the opportunity for a dedicated municipal authority with six electoral districts and four aldermen focused on the borough and its community. For the wider country, it creates a more modern municipal map, establishes new city and borough structures, provides a framework for electoral implementation, and addresses institutional deadlock and gridlock, and protects communities during transition.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want the people of Couva North to know that I will continue to make this case strongly and I also recognize that this Parliament legislates for the whole country. We do.

Dr. Moonilal: Correct. Yes.

Hon. J. John: For the whole country, people. The standard we set for Couva must be the standard we want for every community affected by this Bill. Clearer responsibility; stronger representation; focused administration; functioning institutions; orderly transitions; better coordination and service that people can see and feel and touch, and you respond to as a Member of Parliament or as a representative of the people. That is what it is.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: That is what reform is. That is what reform should mean. Mr. Speaker, I will close with this. The success of this legislation will not be measured by how many new names appear in the statute books. It will not be measured by how many signs are replaced. It will not be measured by how impressive the word “city” or “borough” should be, it will be measured in the communities we serve. It will be measured in responsiveness, in accountability, whether institutions function; it will be measured in whether residents know who is responsible. And

ultimately, it will be measured in whether people experience better government closer to home. That is the challenge before us. And the only way we will know, is if we try.

Hon Members: That is right.

Hon. J. John: We have to try. Only if we try, that is how we learn. So the Bill creates the framework. Our responsibility is to make the framework work for Chaguanas, for Barataria, for St. Augustine, for Sande Grande, for the reconfigured regional cooperation, and of course for Couva and for Trinidad and Tobago as a whole. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: “Oh Lord. Leh we vote, leh we vote.”

Mr. Speaker: Whilst I recognize the Member for San Fernando East I think I propose to take the tea break now, but if we start him it would truncate his contribution. It is 10 minutes past 5.00, we will return at 6.00 p.m. Thank you very much.

5.09 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

6.00p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for San Fernando East.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Brian Manning (*San Fernando East*): Good?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, I listened to those on the other side, and it is so much misinformation to dispel in such a short period of time, but I will do my very best. I listened to the Member for Couva North, and it was unfortunate the Member decided to put a half-truth

here on the *Hansard*, but I am going to correct that very quickly. And let me refer here to the Trinidad and Tobago *Express*.

The High Court of Trinidad and Tobago ruled in August 2016 that the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) acted illegally by extending the September 07, 2015 General Election voting hours by one hour, but ultimately

dismissed the United National Congress (UNC) election petitions because the

party failed to prove the extension materially affected the final outcome.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: In other words, whether it was an extension or no extension, it was the same cut-tail, Madam Deputy Speaker. And that is something that they do not want to accept on the other side.

Madam Deputy Speaker, listening to the Member for St. Augustine, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, and the Member started off saying that this Bill is history in the making. I would have to agree with that, Madam Deputy Speaker, because today is a date which will live on in infamy. What they are doing here with this Bill is of no good assistance to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is does nothing to benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is simply politics, it is simply about expediency—

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: It is simply about gerrymandering, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is what this is about. This is not about delivery of goods and services. This is not reform, this is regression that we are getting from those on the other side. The Member for San Juan/Barataria actually had to take a time machine and go back to

1992 to talk about gerrymandering. We do not have to go that far back. We just have to look at what is happening right now. You look across this country, look at local government bodies, municipal bodies, this country is in a state, something that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government should not be proud of.

We have bush across this country as tall as the Member is, but yet she cannot seem to see it. We have bush all over the place. Municipal corporations are being starved of funding. They do not have the materials they need to be effective, yet we are trying to expand this same broken system. To what end? It makes no sense, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, they also said that there was no extensive consultation. Well, at least the Member for St. Augustine said there was not. But the Member for San Juan/Barataria said there was a green paper, white paper, I wonder how they thought those things happened. It happened after extensive consultations—

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—much of it coming from former PNM, Minister of Local Government, one, Hazel Manning, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is what reform is about.

Hon Members: “Yayyy.” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is what reform is about. You consult with the very people that you are trying to assist. Not come here after you had your media people put it in the press on Monday, and here we are on Wednesday debating the very same Bill without any sort of inclusion, whatsoever.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Deputy Speaker, 55(1)(b), please. This is the fourth speaker on the Opposition side speaking on the same issue extensively about

consultation.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes. I agree, but Member if you would like to make a point do so quickly and move on to something that not been said, okay.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you so much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, I listened very closely to my colleague from Laventille West talking about the body, this Committee that this Bill came from. Madam Deputy Speaker, as the old people say, if it starts bad it will end bad. When I listened to the membership of this Committee, I mean it sounded like a rogues' gallery of UNC sycophants.

Hon Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. B. Manning: It sounded like a UNC party group. Madam Deputy Speaker, how is anybody in this country supposed to have any confidence in this Bill and its so-called impartiality when that is the kind of committee that proffered this Bill in the first place.

6.05 p.m.

I mean, we literally have the UNC's campaign manager on the same committee to bring this Bill to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. How are we supposed to trust it? Madam Deputy Speaker, nobody trusts it. And if you read through the Bill, you can see that it has one intent and one purpose, and it has no good intention, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, we listened to them today, and they went out of their way to try to attack the independent EBC. And after looking at some of the statements in the media today, I understood why. Let me read

something quickly in today's *Guardian*:

“EBC: No role in setting new municipal boundaries”

No role from the independent EBC. Those on the other side seem to have a penchant: When they win an election, somehow the EBC is good, but when they lose, the EBC is bad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: How do they explain that? The same EBC, the same one, they are saying it is good when they win, but somehow bad when they lose. But the independent EBC was not even included in a discussion about this Bill, and then they are going to send it to them and give them 90 days where they have to change every electoral boundary in Trinidad and Tobago because that is what they did. But somehow, they do not see that as overburdening the EBC.

Let me quote from the EBC here, Madam Deputy Speaker, and it is from Akash Samaroo, Lead Editor of Politics:

“The Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) says it has no role in determining or altering the boundaries of municipal corporations, as it confirmed it was not formally consulted on the Government’s proposal to establish three new boroughs.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, were not consulted. The people who were supposed to implement what is being done here were not consulted at all.

“The Commission said its responsibility is limited to the delimitation of electoral districts, while the external boundaries of municipal corporations fall outside its remit.

The clarification comes as the Government moves to restructure local government by establishing three additional boroughs and adjusting existing

municipal boundaries.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, extensive work. This is a serious Bill that is going to profoundly change the structure of local government in Trinidad and Tobago. Why are there not independent people on this committee? Why did they do that? They said over and over on the other side that part of the PNM’s motion or ability to reform local government, why was it not implemented? Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, you know very well why it was not implemented.

The major linchpin of the PNM’s local government reform policy came with this funding that was supposed to come from property taxes, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course, those on the other side tied that matter up in court for the past 15 years and then, when they eventually came into office, killed it permanently, but then decided to bring back the same property tax as the landlord tax, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: So, maybe one day we will hear that the landlord tax is actually financing local government in this country. All this talk about this legislation, and not a single mention of how it will be funded. We have a system that is already short of resources and it is being expanded, and no mention of where the funding will come from, Madam Deputy Speaker; absurd.

Madam Speaker, moving on. The Member from Barataria/San Juan spoke, and I do not think it is clear to Members on the other side just yet exactly how electoral boundaries are formed in Trinidad and Tobago. They keep talking about geography, geography, geography. Electoral boundaries are based on population density, not on geographical area. That is why, when the Member from Barataria/San Juan said something similar to our friend from Tobago West about

why there was not an electoral district in an area in Tobago, she had to let him know, “Because nobody lives there.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: They and this Committee seem to still want to put electoral boundaries in areas where there are no people. It is not based on geographical size. It is based on population density. And I am going to get to that more in a minute, Madam Deputy Speaker, because the way our national delegate system is set up is designed for a delegate system that minimizes the opportunity for under- or over-representation. Yet, they are using a law to violate the spirit of the Constitution by bringing in the popular vote.

In the first-past-the-post system that we have in this country, delegate system, there is nothing about popularity vote, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is meaningless, but they want to introduce it at the local government level. Let me explain to the national community how the national delegate system works.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago, we have a House of Representatives, 41 people, and each constituency is approximately the same number of people, the same population; approximately the same. Why is that done? It is done because it would mean that every person in Trinidad and Tobago, their vote is weighted almost equally. It was supposed to level the playing field between urban and rural areas. That is why one man, one vote—and proportional representation in many countries has always descended into civil unrest and war; in many of those countries, Madam Deputy Speaker. Because it meant that the same people over and over were being over-represented, while those who live in the smaller rural areas were under-represented.

In a situation in Trinidad and Tobago, we have 41 constituencies, all

approximately the same number of persons. It means that whether you live in Toco, Mayaro, Port of Spain, San Fernando, you are one of almost 27,000 people in that constituency. You vote for your Member of Parliament, who is your representative to the House of Representatives, and that person is your delegate for your constituency. That delegate then votes on your behalf to choose who becomes the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. That is enshrined in our Constitution. That is how a delegate system works, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Let me point out here for a second: In most constituencies in Trinidad, the average electors is 28,079 voters. That is about 28,000, approximately. In Tobago, it is 26,000. So, the upper limit for Trinidad is 30,887. The lower limit, which is at the 90th percentile, is 25,271. So, every constituency in this country is between those numbers. That is why, when you see the EBC changing boundaries every now and again, it is to get the population densities right; nothing to do with geography. It is to ensure that every constituency is approximately the same. So, when you are looking at what is being changed here by those on the other side, they are bringing an element into municipal corporations and local government which goes counter to our Constitution, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me give the rule here. The rule, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Constitution, Second Schedule, says electorates should be equal as practicable, and each constituency must stay within the 90th percentile to the 110th percentile of its island average. Trinidad and Tobago are averaged separately, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, so, when it comes to local government now, there is also a similar law and the legal requirement there is relative. Each district must be close to its own municipality's average, and no district may differ from another

in the same municipality by more than 25 per cent. That is the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government Act and Tobago House of Assembly) Chap. 25:50. This prevents over- and under-representation. The target of the municipality electorate is divided by its number of districts, so far as practicable, and it is supported by the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04.

Madam Deputy Speaker, no district may exceed or fall below any other in that municipality by more than 25 per cent. The EBC applies this as a band of 25 per cent either side of the municipality's average. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is done to bring equity to the local government voting system. That I believe, Madam Deputy Speaker, is being undermined by those on the other side and part of what they are doing here. This is not true reform, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is simple gerrymandering and political expedience.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is what it is. Nothing here improves the delivery of goods and services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; absolutely nothing.

Let me remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Deputy Speaker, of what real local government reform looks like. During the last local government election, where the PNM did extremely well, we knew that local government was a broken system, and we said so; we said so openly. It is broken, and there was a need for reform, and the reform of that system would be underpinned by property taxes. It meant that the taxes collected within your community would be used within your community. It would be used to protect the very home in which the taxes were being paid on. Those taxes will be used to pave roads, clog potholes, spray for mosquitoes, all of the things that allowed your home to be livable and safe in the first place. Those on the other side destroyed it and they have no idea

where the funding is coming from for future local government activities, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The PNM, on the other hand, this is what we did. What we recommended was more autonomy for corporations. Cabinet approved the draft policy on local government reform in August 2016, after consultations in all 14 corporations. It proposed expanded responsibilities and greater autonomy modelled on the Tobago House of Assembly, Madam Deputy Speaker. So, it was going to give corporations across Trinidad and Tobago the autonomy that is also being given to the THA. Of course, our friend from Tobago failed to mention that.

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Mr. B. Manning: He did not understand or realize that. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am being distracted here. Please assist, I would appreciate it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You are free to continue, Member.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you so much, Madam Deputy Speaker. An executive tier in each corporation, its reformed Bill provided for each corporation to have a municipal council and an executive council, with the executive council subject to an ombudsman. All of that for the better management and control of these corporations, Madam Deputy Speaker. We listened to those on the other side since 10.30 this morning, nothing about that, only about removing people from office who they do not like and frustrating the electoral process of Trinidad and Tobago. That is all we have been getting. They want to implement rules here—and I will get to it soon enough, where—after the population elect someone to office, they can come and decide to remove that very same person that was elected, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is counter the spirit of every aspect of the

Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. It is counter to every part of it. They do not care on the other side. Why? Because it is politically expedient, and that is all they are about.

Moving on with the PNM's reform for local government: Longer terms, local government cycle was to move from three years to four. That was done. Property tax was the funding base, Madam Deputy Speaker; mentioned that. They could not wait to destroy it. Now they have no idea where their money is coming from.

Municipal police: The Act was said to bring the municipal police to life with the powers of regular police. We are bringing municipal police into effect so that they can slow some of the crime and also manage some of these areas. They would join the crime fighters because they would be similar to the police, Madam Deputy Speaker. Any mention of that by those on the other side? None whatsoever.

Control over staff and the contractors: The Bill would let corporations employ their own staff and the said reform meant corporations could choose their own garbage collectors. It gave the corporations more autonomy because they know their communities far better than anyone else. They did not have to go to a Minister of Local Government, they did not have to go to Cabinet, they did not have to come to the Parliament to be approved. The people on the ground were able to make decisions that could quickly serve their populations, Madam Deputy Speaker. Nothing about that. All of that is gone with this legislation.

Transferred functions: The Act amended laws on burial grounds, cremations, advertisements, recreation grounds, highways, roads and planning. Again, more control for the corporations.

New boroughs: A PNM Bill established the boroughs of Diego Martin and Siparia, becoming Act No. 6 of 2023. Phased start: The Minister planned to ask Cabinet to proclaim 54 of the Act's 80 clauses first.

Madam Speaker, let me also remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago—let me remind the population that the People's National Movement proposed to make sure Chaguanas a city since 2009, Madam Deputy Speaker; since 2009.

6.20 p.m.

Since 2009, long before anyone on the other side. Even when it was proposed in 2009, those on the other side came into office in 2010 to 2015, and what did they do?

Hon. Member: Nothing.

Mr. B. Manning: Absolutely nothing, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: They did nothing to make Chaguanas a city then, but now they are coming to say that they are doing it now to benefit the people of Chaguanas when we all know that it came from the UNC party group for political purposes. Nothing else, Madam Deputy Speaker. They are not fooling anyone in this country. We see it all. “Yuh made ah committee, yuh put yuh campaign manager, yuh put former MPs, yuh put executive members of the UNC, no independent parties.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on 55(1)(b). He is repeating himself now, and he is repeating the Member for Lavantille West.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, Member, at the beginning of your contribution, you said the exact thing. Members on your side have also said the exact thing. So please move along.

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Mr. B. Manning: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Greatly appreciated. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me move to the Bill.

Mr. Alexander: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Elder: “What he say?”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. B. Manning: The Bill does two different things. Madam Deputy Speaker, it redraws the local government map, and it rewrites the rules on who controls the council after the votes are counted.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. B. Manning: It changes the process, the governing majority is drawing the map itself by simple majority, Madam Speaker. That also is counter to the Constitution. That is not what our electoral system is about. As I explained, we have a delicate system which deals with under- and over-representation. This does not. The party over voter, Madam Speaker, the cost without capacity, unfinished drafting, all of that here, but let me get to some of the clauses of the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker, clause 8. Where parties have equal councillors and the vote for a presiding officer ties, that officer comes from the party with the highest aggregate vote or the popular vote, Madam Deputy Speaker. In a tie for Mayor or Deputy Mayor, the Presiding Officer shall cast—shall cast—the deciding vote for the candidate backed by members of the party with the majority of votes. Where no party passes 50 per cent, the plurality winner is certified as the majority.

As I said, Madam Speaker, in our first-past-the-post delegate system, there is no room for the popular vote. The popular vote means nothing in our electoral system. Those on the other side are trying to implement it here and to implement a form of proportional representation which goes counter to the Constitution of

Trinidad and Tobago. It is unacceptable, unacceptable.

Clause 9. A councillor or alderman who resigns from or is expelled by their party, loses office. The party serves a notice and sends a certified copy to the CEO, who forwards it to the Mayor. The Mayor must call a special meeting within seven days at which the council shall declare the vacancy. If no meeting is held, the seat is deemed vacant when the seven days expire, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I said, the electors of the community chose this person, and our Constitution does everything possible to not frustrate the will of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Why is the UNC coming here—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—to do something that our Constitution expressly guards against? So what can happen, Madam Deputy Speaker, is after I go and cast my vote for my councillor, they can decide the following day to remove that person and put someone of their choice, that I did not vote for, in to represent me. Someone that I did not vote for. This makes a complete joke of the local government electoral system. It is a joke because now you do not know who you are voting for. I could vote for A and then tomorrow B be implemented by the party. And it is written here in the law. Unacceptable, unacceptable.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: Yeah, nobody lives there, relax, relax.

Clause 13, Madam Deputy Speaker, updates four other laws—

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. B. Manning:—and gives the EBC—

Mr. Imbert: Just this one second, Member.

Mr. B. Manning: Sorry.

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Mr. Imbert: 53 (1)(e).

Hon. Member: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: The Member for Fyzabad is being extremely loud and disruptive.

Madam Deputy Speaker: We have been going through this Standing Order since about 11 a.m. It happens on both sides, as was said before. The Member did not seem to be being interrupted because you actually interrupted him to raise your Standing Order. kay.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, continue.

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, I was being quite bothered. So, I would appreciate your assistance. Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, I gave my ruling.

Mr. B. Manning: Or, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, appreciate it. Clause 13 updates four other laws and gives the EBC 90 days after proclamation to report on electoral districts. Ninety days, Madam Deputy Speaker. Ninety days is a short time after what we saw in this Bill, because of the huge areas that they brought under the purview of different areas or corporations. It is going to be extensive work. It is not just about adding an electoral district here and one there. They are going to have to change most of the boundaries across Trinidad and Tobago. That is what this Bill is going to require.

Just in San Fernando alone, I will use that as a short example. We had an issue in San Fernando, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Alexander: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. B. Manning: Where parts of San Fernando East did not fall under the San

Fernando City Corporation, but fell under the Princes Town Regional Corporation, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I would dare say that the PTRC has been going out of its way to neglect so-called PNM areas in San Fernando East. And I mainly mean areas like Tarodale, areas like Corinth. They always have an excuse. They are never doing any work in those areas. If you go to Tarodale right now, many in Tarodale do not even know that they have a UNC councillor. Many of them have never received any cooperation work ever from the PTRC or any assistance at all.

Same thing in Corinth, even though they are covered by the PTRC, the Princes Town Regional Corporation. They have been actively discriminating against the people of San Fernando East, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: And I would find it a welcome change if those areas were brought under the San Fernando City Corporation, which is led by the People's National Movement, so that we can properly take care of the people of our community.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: But what it also does, Madam Deputy Speaker, is it goes on to extend the constituency to the north, where they include parts of Pointe-à-Pierre, Marabella, Claxton Bay which is a massive area but of course it is a heavily UNC area and that is all they care about. That is all they care about. It is not about delivery of services.

They added a huge area under the San Fernando City Corporation, which is already being starved of resources. We have heard complaints from the San Fernando City Corporation of a lack of vehicles, lack of funding. They cannot even, in some cases, have office material. They do not have a backhoe. They do

not have what they need to serve the people. Yet we are here with this document issued by a UNC party group to expand the boundaries for the San Fernando City Corporation. That is what we are doing. It does not make any good sense. It only makes politically expedient sense, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I move on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the existing corporations keep their property—this is in clause 14. The existing corporations keep their property and liability rights against Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Tunapuna/Piarco, passed to their renamed successors. Madam Deputy Speaker, the resources available, how are these new corporations and municipalities going to be resourced? Will the same rights that workers have in one area be transferred to another? Will their benefits be transferred? All of that people still want to know. Are they still going to be charged a 19 per cent NIS rate by this Government going forward? 19 per cent. That is what they intend to introduce to this country in the next budget, Madam Deputy Speaker. Are workers going to be inflicted with that? No mention of that. But we know that it is coming, and the country knows that it is coming.

They think that they are in the same position today as they were in the election in 2025. Madam Deputy Speaker, I guarantee you they are going to be in for a surprise whenever they call the election bell in the next local government election.

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

Mr. Scotland SC: I am surprised that Couva North [*Inaudible*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you have one more minute. Do you require your additional 15 minutes?

Mr. B. Manning: Yes, please, thank you so much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. B. Manning: I greatly appreciate it. Madam Deputy Speaker, I spoke initially of what was going on in San Fernando in terms of these boundary changes and it is really, really worrisome. For the electoral districts these rise from nine to 11. So, the council grows from 13 members to 15. The aldermen, the number stays at 4.

New district lines, these are not in the Bill. The Elections and Boundaries Commission must report within 90 days, as I said. Madam Speaker, it is going to be a Herculean task. They have added thousands of people to the city of San Fernando with this drafting of a Bill. And it is, in my view, incredibly unsustainable, or ridiculous for them to bring a Bill of this magnitude to this House without a stitch of consultation. From what we have seen so far, all they have done is consult themselves.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you have made this point already. Can you kindly move on?

Mr. Scotland SC: “A a”

Mr. B. Manning: It is an important point, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: We avoid tedious repetition.

Mr. B. Manning: I must put on record that the People’s National Movement has Green Papers, White Papers, we have been consulting since 2009. It has been a decade—

Mr. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker 55(1)(b). We heard about all the colour papers already today.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, Member. I have heard it from you in your contribution. I have now heard it twice from San Fernando East. Please move on.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I understand you have important points but please do not repeat it.

Mr. B. Manning: Do not repeat my important points?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, because once is enough.

Mr. Sturge: Tedious repetition.

Mr. B. Manning: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you. I know the Member from Barataria is extremely excited by this local government reform because he seemed to be friendly with every Member of this UNC party group that came up—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—with these ill-fated, ill-advised ideas in the first place. They know very well that they could not come to the people of this country with this as is. Because there would be a hue and a cry across Trinidad and Tobago, so they come to bring it here in the dead of night. Right?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. B. Manning: They want to send us documents on Tuesday evening to debate on Wednesday morning. Right? That is what they want to do because they do not want the national community to know what they are doing until the deed is done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Because that is the UNC way. That is what they do. They want to come here and talk about integrity, talk about the people, talk about what it is they want to do for this country, but who they really are reeks in everything that they do. Nothing is done straight. Nothing is done honestly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Everything is crooked. That is what they do.

Why could they not bring this here before a JSC? Something as far-reaching and fundamental as this, why could it not come to the JSC? Why could we not speak with local government stakeholders across this country? Why could we not speak with those people who would have been directly affected by this piece of legislation, a profound piece of legislation? Because they know that the pushback for it would have been relentless, Madam Speaker, and the People's National Movement would have been leading that pushback against this draconian document, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is yet again an attempt to infringe on the rights of the people of this country. We have gone from a creeping dictatorship to a galloping dictatorship, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is what they are doing. Everything they do, they want to infringe on the constitutional rights wherever they can. And we are fortunate that they do not have the constitutional majority to actually change serious aspects of our Constitution, because they will do that too, and we know it.

Mr. Scotland SC: Oh yes.

Mr. B. Manning: We know it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me get down to another important part of this Bill. Madam Speaker, there is a connection here between this legislation and the creation of new boroughs and the newly amended procurement legislation. Madam Speaker—Madam Deputy Speaker, clauses 11 and 12: Create new boroughs and reconstruct existing boroughs and municipal corporations and create a new city. A new city, Madam Deputy Speaker. All these municipalities now have contract arrangements up to \$500,000 exempted from procurement regulations. I am sure

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that makes those on the other side very excited, Madam Deputy Speaker. Something else that defies procurement legislation. One that they have already gutted and prepared for their friends, family and financiers.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(1).

Hon. Member: Same thing over and over.

Mr. Hosein: We are dealing with a matter with relation to the amendment to the Municipal Corporation Act, not the Procurement Act. That has gone.

Hon. Member: Save us! Save us!

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, clearly the Member is not listening to what is being said.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

6.35p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, please stick to the clauses of the Bill and things that are relevant to the Bill only.

Mr. B. Manning: Madam, maybe you are not listening either.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Gonzales: May I—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Sure.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East—

Madam Deputy Speaker: What Standing Order, Member?

Mr. Gonzales: I am enforcing 48(1), Madam Deputy Speaker. The Member is making reference to a clause in the Bill relating to the creation of new boroughs and their impact on laws in the country, particularly the procurement laws. So, he is quite relevant—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Okay. I have already given my ruling—

Mr. Gonzales:—and he is quite in keeping with the Standing Orders.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, I have already given my ruling. I have asked the Member for San Fernando East to move on and keep it relevant to the Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you so much for your kind intervention. Clauses 11 and 12 of the Bill—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Clauses 11 and 12 create new boroughs and reconstruct existing boroughs and municipal corporations—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning:—and creates a new city, Madam Deputy Speaker. All those municipalities now have contract arrangements, up to 500,000 exempted from the procurement regulations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: That is what this legislation and clauses 11 and 12 allow, Madam Deputy Speaker, much to the excitement, I am sure, of several Members on the other side, especially the Member for Barataria. But state agencies like RDC and LSA—I think one of those may fall under Barataria—are exempted up to \$2 million, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, we have to be concerned about that also. I realize none of them even mentioned that in their discussion today. We have been speaking about this Bill all day, none spoke about the exemptions under the procurement legislation that would give many of them access to \$2 million or

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\$2.5 million to share out to friends, family, and financiers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(1). What does LSA have to do with this particular Bill? It is not relevant, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am asking everyone to be silent, please. I am on my legs. Member, once more, please keep it relevant. I am currently going through the Bill. I am not seeing anything that you are speaking of. Can you please keep it relevant, once more? Once more, please keep it relevant, and move on. Thank you.

Mr. B. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you so much. As I conclude, it is clear, it is clear to all, from the very beginning, when the PNM was in office, and we spoke about local government reform, it was about delivery of services to the people of this country. We wanted to have a system where persons who were involved in the municipal corporations in this country were able to deliver to their electoral districts without having to go through unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape; you no longer had to go to a Minister of local government; you did not have to go to Cabinet; you did not have to come to the Parliament just to fill a pothole in your community, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. B. Manning: In the last local government election, they had all kinds of misinformation. There was actually a billboard in Tarouba in San Fernando, Madam Deputy Speaker, where they were talking about an inheritance tax that was going to be implemented in the local government by the PNM. That proved to be a bold-faced untruth, until they got into office and their HDC implemented the same

inheritance tax on the people of this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Madam Deputy Speaker, 48(1). The Member needs to get relevant to the Bill. What does this have to do with any provision of this Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have five more minutes, Member. Please use it wisely if you would like to continue your contribution.

Mr. B. Manning: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the Member for Barataria is going to be getting his squats in today.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, please use your time wisely. Please be relevant. This has nothing to do with the Member for Barataria.

Mr. B. Manning: That is so true, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you so much. Moving on. Madam Deputy Speaker, so you saw exactly what the PNM's version of reform to local government looked like, and now we compare it to what the UNC has brought to this Chamber, which does nothing to improve any situation for any person in this country. It only improves their own political situation. That is all they care about, Madam Deputy Speaker. It allows them to frustrate the will of the electorate in this country. It allows them to build out a broken system, further and further into more brokenness, which they cannot even fund at this point in time, but still talking about more, and more, and more. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is a waste. It is a waste. The system is broken. We know it. We said it. And they have not brought anything here today that is going to benefit anyone in this country. Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of People, Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Vandana Mohit): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this most important debate to this country and to where I represent, the people of Chaguanas East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today in support of the Municipal Corporation (Amdt.) Bill, 2026, because this legislation asks Parliament to confront a simple reality. Trinidad in 2026 is not Trinidad in 1990.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, our population has shifted. Our towns have expanded. New residential communities have emerged. Commercial centres have grown beyond their old boundaries. Traffic patterns have changed. Development has moved. Communities that were once rural have become heavily urbanized. Areas once regarded as peripheral now carry major economic, residential, and administrative importance. But while Trinidad changed, Madam Deputy Speaker, too much of the architecture of local government remains frozen in another time. That is the central issue before us, Madam Deputy Speaker.

This Bill is not moving lines on a map. It is not changing Chaguanas from a borough to a city. It is not simply creating new boroughs. It is not an exercise in changing names on letterheads. It is about whether the structure of local government bears a sensible relationship to the people whom local government is supposed to serve.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill is about representation. It is about accountability, proximity, fairness in the distribution of responsibility and, fundamentally, it is about bringing government closer to the people.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, San Fernando East, who just concluded his contribution, after that contribution, , the only thing we can say on this side is that it was the most irrelevant, meaningless contribution that we would have had today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, you heard it for yourself, half through the contribution, the Member said, “Let me get on with the Bill. Let me now move to the Bill.” Madam Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, the Member surrounded his contribution on local government reform. This Bill has nothing to do with local government reform. It has all to do with boundaries realignment. That is what it has, right?

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: This Bill—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: This Bill—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know what their point is in tapping the desk, but I will get to that point of local government reform. This Bill has to do with the realignment of boundaries. It is clear.

Mr. Gonzales: “Ahhhh.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: And Madam Deputy Speaker, it brings me to the point of gerrymandering, which they are raising here today. They are the kings and queens

of gerrymandering, and they are here today to tell us about gerrymandering.

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, point of order, please. The Member is repeating my own contribution.

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

Madam Deputy Speaker: You stood up, you sat down, and still did not raise a Standing Order, Member.

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, 55(1)(b)—

Madam Deputy Speaker: And I am on my legs; I am not inviting you to speak at all. Member for Chaguanas East, please, continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, as I continue, today is an important day for the Borough of Chaguanas—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit:—which will soon become the City of Chaguanas—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit:—and rightly so, Madam Deputy Speaker. Today I say, Chaguanas, you deserve this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure here today to speak on this particular Bill. I have lived the experience of local government. As my colleague from Moruga/Tableland would say, “We come from the heart, and we come from the belly of local government.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, when I look on the Government Bench, I see the Member for St. Augustine; I see the Member for Moruga/Tableland; I see

the Member for Tobago West, all coming from the local government fraternity, moving up the channel thanks to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: I want to take this opportunity today to thank the Member for St. Augustine and the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East refer to my colleague here today, the Member for St. Augustine, stating that she only told one truthful thing in her presentation, which is moving from 14 to 17 corporations. Today, I say, Member for St. Augustine, your contribution spoke to the reality of local government in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: You spoke the truth. You spoke all of what we, as local government representatives, when we sat there, what we experienced; what we felt; and what we lived. Madam Deputy Speaker, I had the pleasure of being a presiding officer to break a deadlock in the Borough of Chaguanas when it was four-four-four. I had the opportunity to sit as a councillor in the Borough of Chaguanas when they had a three-party fight. I had the opportunity to sit as the mayor of the Borough of Chaguanas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Today, Madam Deputy Speaker, this Bill covers all that we had in our expectations for the Borough of Chaguanas, the City of Chaguanas, and the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, when we look at municipal

corporations—and I am not looking at cities at this moment—when we look at municipal corporations, that being regional corporations and borough corporations, we all have to understand that they are just, sometimes, too big. Coming from the local government fraternity and being a mayor, Madam Deputy Speaker—Diego Martin Central, you can speak to this. Laventille West, you once sat in a corporation as an alderman. Diego Martin Central will tell you. When you have councillors banging down your door, they want an equal share of the pie and the allocation, and you are sitting there, and you are confused because you are wondering, “Oh, this place is just too big.”

The equipment we have is not enough.

6.50 p.m.

Your councillors are complaining that they have to share the allocation. We are getting too little. I served when you were in government, PNM. You never ever gave us a large allocation where we could have serviced our community. So do not sit here and act today as though you gave us a lump sum in allocation where we could have serviced the entire borough of Chaguanas or any other corporation or city in this country.

Over the years, we witnessed, you cut allocations. So, when you are a mayor, and you have your councillors calling your phones—mayor or chairman and you have them calling you, you have them asking you what is happening. “Mayor, the backhoe is in this district. I am waiting for it here. People are asking for it here.” You pulled the teams to do something because you have a prayers in this area, and, you know, my burgesses or residents are awaiting the services of the corporation. It is difficult. And we have to understand that some of these regional corporations are just too big. And this Bill is fixing that. It is making the system

fairer.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: And Madam Deputy Speaker, I see nothing wrong here today in making the system fairer. In addition to that, sometimes you would see, as an MP, when I was in Opposition as well, and I called my councillors for a yearly meeting before the budget, sometimes doing pre-budget consultations. Some of them who are in PNM corporations will tell you that they do not get an equal share of the allocations. They will also tell you, “It is too many of them”. And sometimes, Madam Deputy Speaker, you serve an entire term, and you get one box drain per fiscal year. Sometimes you get nothing in a cemetery. You get a little allocation to do a small job in a recreation facility, and you just cannot service your burgesses or your residents. Because we know in regional corporations, we refer to our persons there as residents, and in borough corporations you refer to them as burgesses, and in cities you refer to them as citizens. And you just cannot service your burgesses, residents, or citizens because of the fact that you simply do not have enough allocation. And this Bill, I will say again, is making the system fairer and more equitable to the people we serve.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will share with you here again a little bit about the lived experience. Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2013 we had a deadlock in Chaguanas four-four-four. Four to the UNC, four to the PNM, four to the ILP. I was elected the Presiding Officer. We could not—

Mr. Des Vignes: Those were the days.

Hon. V. Mohit: Yes, and those were the days. Those were the days. We could not elect a mayor on that said day when we elected the Presiding Officer. We

could not do it. We had to return on another day. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I remember clearly, was sitting in the Chaguanas borough chamber during that process on both days. On both days, Madam Deputy Speaker. And you know what was the issue? Whether we vote by secret ballot or whether we vote by show of hands. There were loopholes existing, so we had to come back on another day. And luckily, you know, the UNC retained that corporation in 2013.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: And it was still four-four-four for the entire term we served in office. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we deal with, you know, crossing the Floor and other items, you know, this Bill is really treating with the loopholes that exist within the law. And that is commendable here today because the law is now clear. The law is now clear. So, you know how to treat with situations such as these in terms of deadlock. Madam Deputy Speaker, I will say here today that this Bill is needed for local government. This Bill is needed. We must understand this, those of us sitting in here, and we must share this with the population. This Bill is going to give citizens a better level of service and delivery in the local government system. Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard San Fernando East, I heard Diego Martin North/East, I heard Laventille West. San Fernando East, you just, you know, said clearly that during the period 2010 to 2015, “We as the UNC”—you said this, eh—“did nothing for local government”. Let me share with San Fernando East what the UNC did from 2010 to 2015. I want to ask you.

Mr. Marcelle: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not sit here and tolerate today, Laventille West telling me that the UNC “thief, thief, thief”.

Mr. Marcelle: “But they thief.”

Hon. V. Mohit: Laventille West, I will not accept that. Madam Deputy Speaker, that is not acceptable in this House. I think Laventille West should conduct himself in a better manner in this House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, the UNC brought, from 2010 to 2015, Act No. 13 of 2013, proportional representation in terms of aldermen.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Something, Madam Deputy Speaker, that they now enjoy. Where you have a fair share of aldermen in corporations based on the number of votes, who received the most number, the second highest and in some instances, the third highest. You are benefiting from what we brought to this House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, Barataria/San Juan just reminded me, councillors used to meet people under coconut trees, getting shade. Councillors used to have to visit people when they had the time.

Mr. Hosein: Under their house.

Hon. V. Mohit: They used to have meetings under people’s sheds. Madam Deputy Speaker, who gave councillors offices? The UNC did that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: When councillors got offices, how would they operate? They used to meet people just where I just said they met them during those times. When they meet people, how are they taking information? When they got an office, they just got an office? No. Who gave them ancillary payments in terms of utilities, stationery, in the form of incidentals? The UNC did that.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, fast-forward. In the last year or so, who brought the Public Health (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2026? Food badges, which is a huge service to people in local government. In addition to that, the CMOH removal from the building plan process. Who brought that? The UNC did that. Madam Deputy Speaker, today we are here again with the Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill, and you want to come in this House, San Fernando East, and lecture this Government, and tell us about what we did for local government? We did way more than you did.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East had a whole contribution on local government reform. I want to share with you a little bit on local government reform. In 2016, the then PNM Minister of Local Government, Franklin Khan, publicly declared that local government reform was going to happen and reportedly said it was certain as night follows day. Former Minister Franklin Khan said that. It was certain as night follows day. Legislation, the country was told, will be tabled during the first half of 2017. Corporations were going to receive greater power, greater resources, greater autonomy, greater manpower, less bureaucracy. Trinidad *Guardian* article dated October 31, 2016, Khan said:

“...PNM ready to reform local government.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, night followed day many times between 2016 and 2025. The sun rose approximately 3,000 times—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. V. Mohit:—and still Trinidad and Tobago entered 2025 with the same 14

municipal corporations. So, when the Opposition lectures this Government on the pace or the necessity of reform, the country is entitled to ask, where was the completed reform you are speaking about? We are not speaking about the consultations, the fancy screens, the glossy document, the launch, the press conference or the promise, San Fernando West, we are asking you where the complete reform is, not the pappy show you took throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Some of you said Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West went throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. St. Augustine, Moruga/Tableland and I, we attended all of those consultations. And everybody, you know, who met us were saying, "This is just a pappy show thing". And I do not recall seeing Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West in the borough of Chaguanas. St. Augustine, you as well do not recall seeing him in any of those consultations. So, you are speaking untruths here in the House of Representatives to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Where were you? You were not in those consultations as far as I can recall. I know, I sat in all of them.

Mr. Sturge: But they come here to bully Joel from Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. V. Mohit: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, reform is measured by what changes are there for the citizens. And the changes are included in this Bill here today. Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to move quickly to the Member for Diego Martin North/East who spoke about, you know, the borough of Chaguanas becoming a

city. Today I say in this House, I come from the community of Cunupia located in the borough of Chaguanas. And we deserve respect.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: We deserve respect. And we will not tolerate the disrespect by Diego Martin North/East. We will never tolerate that type of disrespect. I had the opportunity to share with the people of Chaguanas what the Member for Diego Martin North/East said earlier today. “Chaguanas becoming a city is nonsense”. That is what he said. That is what the Member said.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I will invoke Standing Order 44(8). I am being misrepresented by that Member, 44(8).

Madam Deputy Speaker: No, Member. Overruled. Continue, Member.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: I gave my ruling. Continue, Member.

Mr. Sturge: Tell Gollum to sit down.

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, Chaguanas will not tolerate that disrespect. We will not tolerate it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, I listened to Laventille West, Diego Martin North/East, Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, and all three of them had a different message on the city of Chaguanas. All three of them. Diego Martin North/East spoke about wider boundaries. Wider boundaries. And you did say it is nonsense for Chaguanas to become a city.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, 44(8).

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Hon. V. Mohit: Laventille West—

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 44(8). I never said that.

Hon. Members: “Wayyy!”

Mr. Imbert: 44(8)!

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: I never said that.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

7.05 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, once again, I am asking you to resume your seat. Continue, Member.

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, Laventille West and San Fernando East said that since 2009—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: My apologies, Member. I am not disregarding any Standing Orders.

Mr. Imbert: She is misrepresenting me.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please do not impute any improper motive against me, Member. I gave my ruling. I am abiding by the Standing Orders. I am allowing the Member to continue. Continue, Member.

Hon. V. Mohit: You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member just recognized what he said. The people of Chaguanas will never get—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, 44(8). She is misrepresenting me. That is what 44(8) is for. Standing Order 44(8) is for that. She is misrepresenting me.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: According to the Standing Orders, I have to give you permission for clarification. I am not allowing that. I am not inviting a discussion or a conversation. The Member deserves the respect to continue her contribution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, when the Member said what he said, I never disrupted him. I allowed him. I left him. I recorded what he said, and I waited for this moment. And I will say, Madam Deputy Speaker, the people of Chaguanas will not forget how the PNM treated them whilst they were in government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 44(8) speaks to misrepresentation. The Member is misrepresenting me.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let me read the part that I do not think that you are reading:

“Such a Member must first be recognized by the Speaker...”

I do not recognize you, Member. I do not recognize you. I have given my ruling.

Mr. Sturge: Throw him out.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Continue, please, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Sturge: Throw him out. Throw out that leprechaun.

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, they even went on to say that we cut Chaguanas in half—we removed half of Chaguanas from the proposed city. That is what they said. Madam Deputy Speaker, whether what changes are made, you still will not win the city of Chaguanas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: You still will not win it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to move to Chaguanas becoming a city. In 2010, the now Prime Minister, who was the then Prime Minister—*Guardian* article dated August 2010:

“Chaguanas is heading for city status says Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar. She was delivering the feature address at the inauguration ceremony for the new Chaguanas mayor at the auditorium of the new Chaguanas Administrative Complex.”

Members of the PNM, in 2010, that was our Prime Minister.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to take you back to a little history. Laventille West and San Fernando East, you said here today that the PNM, since 2009, promised this to the people of Chaguanas. You said that. Madam Deputy Speaker, I had the privilege of sitting in the Council of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. And while sitting there, the Prime Minister at the time, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, had the then Minister of Planning put in place a committee to treat with Chaguanas moving to city status, and we had a vote in the Council of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me tell you today what happened in that vote.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. V. Mohit: San Fernando East, I did not disturb you.

Mr. Manning: Chaguanas did not become a city.

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, do you know what happened? Let me share with the population and let me enlighten you, San Fernando East.

Mr. Sturge: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. V. Mohit: What happened was the PNM—at that time, we had a 4-4-4—voted against Chaguanas becoming a city. Madam Deputy Speaker, the ILP voted

against Chaguanas becoming a city. So that is 4 and 4, 8. And we were left with 4.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, so when you want to come here in this House and lecture us to tell us that you proposed Chaguanas becoming a city in 2009, in 2010, we promised it, we attempted to deliver on it, but you voted against it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: Voted against it. Tell them.

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you have one more minute. Do you require your additional 15 minutes?

Hon. V. Mohit: Sure, sure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Share licks”.

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, would you like to know what happened after that?

Hon. Member: Please, tell us.

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, the then Chaguanas Chamber of Commerce was headed by one Richie Sookhai, who was, at the time, working with the UNC. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, he held a meeting at Signature Hall in the constituency of Chaguanas East, and they cornered the then Prime Minister; that is what the chamber did. And the Chamber asked the then Prime Minister—they questioned him. The then Chamber President Richie Sookhai questioned the then Prime Minister about the PNM councillors’ vote in the council. And when they

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did that, the then—sorry, not Prime Minister, the then Opposition Leader said—this is what he said—Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, this is what he said, I quote—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. V. Mohit: You want to know if it is from the media? July 02, 2014, Trinidad *Express*.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: You asked for it and you got it.

Hon. V. Mohit: The headline—the political leader of the PNM did not know what the councillors do, I assume, or he was backed against a wall and ashamed of what his party did. Madam Deputy Speaker:

“The PNM leader said he sees no reason why development should stop in Central if a PNM government enters office next year. Rowley said the PNM was working on its plan for progress...”

Madam Deputy Speaker, he said:

“...a People’s National Movement...is committed to seeing Chaguanas lifted to city status.”

This happened, Madam Deputy Speaker:

“Sookhai detailed some of the development that has taken place in Chaguanas in the past six months and questioned Rowley on the PNM’s view of seeing the borough transformed into a city.”

The then Chaguanas’ Chamber President questioning PNM’s political leader as to why the PNM councillors voted against city status.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move on, July 10, 2014, the then Minister of Planning, Tewarie, Trinidad *Express* again:

“Tewarie: No support from PNM, ILP reps”

Tewarie is saying—former Minister:“...Tewarie said he read recently that Opposition Leader Dr. Keith Rowley said he was supporting Chaguanas getting city status.

‘But a Motion was brought not too long ago to the Chaguanas Borough Corporation to grant city status to that particular part of the country. And it was very much needed when you think of the flow of people into that part of the country, when you go to Chaguanas and see the housing—both public and private sector—taking place, when you see the commercial activity, you begin to see that this is a bustling city; and just as we can have a sustainable city of Port of Spain, we can have a sustainable city of Chaguanas,’ Tewarie stated.

He added that there could be a smart city of Port of Spain, and a smart city of Chaguanas.

‘And therefore we wanted to address the issue of city status for Chaguanas. But when the matter came up before the corporation, it did not receive any support from the Opposition, or from the ILP representatives on the corporation. In fact, they objected to city status for Chaguanas.’”

Madam Deputy Speaker, so we say to the PNM here today, we do not want to know about what you promised in 2009.

Mr. Sturge: That never materialized.

Hon. V. Mohit: What matters is you, the PNM, voted against city status for the people of Chaguanas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, it so happened that we went out of office in 2015. You had the opportunity, PNM, from 2015 to 2025, and you did

nothing about it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: You did nothing about it. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we say to Chaguanas, your time has come, in the words of the Chaguanas Mayor. Your time has come. Madam Deputy Speaker, Chaguanas has outgrown the old conception of a borough. It is one of this country's major commercial centres. You heard it from Couva North just now. She said she was not advertising, but a lot of people leave Port of Spain and other parts of Trinidad to come to Chaguanas to shop.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: That is why we have a traffic issue, Madam Deputy Speaker. Chaguanas is an important transport centre. It is a residential centre. It is a place through which citizens from north, south and central Trinidad pass daily. Its commercial reach extends far beyond its municipal boundaries. Madam Deputy Speaker, its development has spread eastward and northward through communities that, today, form part of one interconnected urban and economic space. Its roads carry traffic generated, not only by residents, but by shoppers, workers, students, businesses, transport operators and people traversing the national highway network.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, Chaguanas receiving city status is also needed and long awaited. So, we welcome this initiative.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Today, we say, UNC, thank you. Today, we say, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, you see, those on the Opposition Bench

will not really appreciate these types of things because Diego Martin North/East and Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, when they spoke here today, I saw them struggling because really and truly, they know nothing about the real operations of local government. They know nothing about it. They do not know anything about it.

Mr. Sturge: "Dey too elitist for that".

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, you know why? Your plan was not to give local government representatives a fairer chance. Your plan was not to give citizens better representation. You heard it from San Fernando East himself. He said local government is not about service delivery here today at the beginning of his contribution.

Mr. Sturge: Clueless.

Hon. V. Mohit: That is what he said.

Mr. Manning: Madam Deputy Speaker, 44(8). I believe the Member for Chaguanas East has a hearing problem.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for San Fernando East, I do not recognize you. Please resume your seat.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: We cannot both be standing, and we cannot both be speaking.

Hon. V. Mohit: What will happen with this Bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that councillors will represent their people better. We must admit that sitting in this House. They will represent their burgesses and their residents better. Resource allocation will be done in a better fashion. The residents, the burgesses and the citizens will be able to access resources in a better fashion. Madam Deputy

Speaker, they will not accept this in the Opposition Bench because their objective was to get rid of the Local Government Ministry. That was their plan. Madam Deputy Speaker, in that very meeting in Chaguanas, the then political leader—and I quote again from this article:

“reiterated part of this was the removal of the Local Government Ministry.” That was your plan. So, you really do not care about councillors, aldermen, burgesses, citizens and the type of representation they receive. Because Diego Martin North/East’s aim and objective was to give funds to the Ministry of Finance and operate local government through a THA model. You do not want to hear about the THA today, but today we commend the Member for Tobago West for his contribution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, Tobago, we commend you because you are a voice in this House and you represent a constituency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Mohit: Nobody can tell a Member of this House that anybody “set dem up to speak”. If you are a Member of this House and you represent a seat, whether it be in Trinidad or Tobago, you are here to deal with the national issues of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And we say to you, nobody wrote Tobago’s speech. He wrote his own speech, and he contributed well here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

7.20 p.m.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we on this side we are about representation. We are about delivering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have five minutes, 30 seconds.

Hon. V. Mohit: Sure. Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to just treat a little bit with what Diego Martin North/East would have said here today, and I want to treat with Chaguanas specifically. Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to deal directly with the attempt by the Member for Diego Martin North/East to suggest that because the boundaries of Chaguanas are being rationalized, somehow its elevation to city status is diminished. Madam Deputy Speaker, that argument simply does not withstand scrutiny. City status is not determined by drawing the largest possible line around a map. It is about recognizing urban, commercial, demographic and administrative reality of the municipality being governed. More importantly, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East should revisit his own words in this Parliament. On September 6th, 2013, the very Member told this House, and I quote:

“Chaguanas could go to 200,000 electors, you still only have eight local government councils inside of there”.

He went on to speak about population migration, changing demographics, and urban shifts and questioned why the number of districts should remain fixed while population growth continued. The member is questioning why the number of districts should remain fixed while population growth continued.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the contradiction the country must examine. In 2013, the very Member acknowledged that Chaguanas’ municipal arrangements had to respond to population growth and demographic change and that is exactly what we are treating with here today. Those were his words, Madam Deputy Speaker. In 2026 now, when this Government restructures the very system and elevates Chaguanas to city status, that advancement is dismissed as nonsense.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I said that PNM was the first party to make the—

Madam Deputy Speaker: What Standing Order Member? Member what Standing Order? What Standing Order?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: I said PNM was the first to make the [*Inaudible*] of Chaguanas a city—44(8), she is misrepresenting me. I said PNM was the first to say Chaguanas should be a city.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Deputy Speaker, may I ask you to turn your attention to Standing Order 55(4)(d), please?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Padarath: The Member is persistent in disregarding your ruling and bringing chaos to the House.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East, you blatantly disregarded me and the Chair. I am asking you to withdraw from the Chamber for 10 minutes.

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

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, may I?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, Member, please continue.

Hon. V. Mohit: Madam Deputy Speaker, the issue is not whether every adjoining community must remain within one boundary simply to create a larger shape on the map. The issue is whether Chaguanas, as one of this country's major populations, commercial and transportation centres should have a governance

structure that reflects what it has already become. This Bill, Madam Deputy Speaker, does exactly that. It recognizes Chaguanas as a city while modernizing its municipal boundaries to make local government more focused, manageable and responsive. Madam Deputy Speaker, one cannot argue—the Member cannot argue in 2013 that Chaguanas must evolve with population growth and then in 2026 oppose the evolution when it finally comes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in my last few seconds, on behalf of the people who want government closer to them, on behalf of the communities that have outgrown boundaries designed decades ago, on behalf of the citizens who expect their votes to retain meaning after election day and the next generation who should inherit a system of local government built for their reality rather than our past, I support this Municipal Corporations (Amdt.) Bill, 2026. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Penelope Beckles (Arima): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to make my contribution on this Municipal Corporation (Amdt.) Bill. Madam Deputy Speaker, I know my colleague indicated that certainly on their side they come from the belly of local government. Let me just say, Madam Deputy Speaker, I had the goodfortune in 1992 to be a councillor, elected councillor, of the Arima Borough Corporation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: At that time, very interesting, Madam Deputy Speaker, the salary for a councillor was \$795. Khadijah, you remember that, right? [*Laughter*]

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Yes, \$795. Now, I think they get a couple thousands of dollars if I am not sure. Madam Deputy Speaker, so I want to say that a lot of the concerns that have been raised are very valid and I want to specifically start my contribution by focusing on Arima, right? Because I would like my colleague, in her winding up, to indicate the rationale for the figures as it relates to Arima.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at this point in time the total electors of Arima is 29,784. The incoming is going to be 31,682. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, that means that Arima will now have 64,711 electors. Moving from seven to 10, a change, therefore, of some 34,828.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if you look at the figures as it relates to the 17 either city, boroughs or corporations, Arima has the highest increase, and my issue is that I would like some sort of explanation for that. So, we are now moving, therefore, to on an average of 6,471. Madam Deputy Speaker, what is interesting is that when you look, for example, at Tobago, it is 52,000 and as I said, Arima has expanded to some 60,000 plus.

Listening to the debate from 10.30 a.m., and the several discussions about drains or about whatever the electorate or the burgesses are interested in, I just want to put it in context, because when we look at the boundaries of Arima, it starts at Yarra River. So, we are talking about way in Blanchisseuse on the northern side and on the eastern side, all the way to Aripo and on the southern side, Mausica Road and Carapo, Caroni North Bank Road, and on the western side, Mausica River, which would include—well crossing Mausica River across to the Arima Race Club, and then again to Calvary Branch Road. So that gives you an idea as to how large this area would be.

My question, therefore, having regard to the debate, is the issue of staffing, is the issue of resources. I think it was the hon. Member for Couva North that made reference to the challenges of drains and moving of fences and so. Madam Deputy Speaker, and I know the hon. Prime Minister has been an alderman of the Siparia Regional Corporation. At the end of the day, in my humble view, the real question for the average citizen or burgess from a corporation, is how would the Bill improve delivery?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: I do not think that, or I would like to think, whether it is the Government or whether it is the Opposition, that is really the issue. Therefore, when we increase that number by some 34,000, we understand that this is not just local government, but it is how it is related to a number of other things. I say that because at this point in time, those several communities of Aripo, Blanchisseuse, Paria fall under the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, now they fall under the borough of Arima.

When we talk about delivery of service, it is really a question when someone leaves Blanchisseuse to come to Arima, taking an average depending on where you pass—or Paria—of two hours, only to find out that having arrived at the Arima Borough Corporation—either the town superintendent is not there, the engineer is not there, or that may not be the day and that is really in rural communities—that is what when people talk about service and delivery service. I know that a lot of my colleagues can say the same thing. But I am really fascinated as to this increase of 34,000-plus, because when you look at the increases as compared to others—Port of Spain, 12,000-plus; San Fernando, 10,000; Chaguanas, -26; Arima, 34; Point Fortin, eight; Diego Martin, -12; Siparia, -8,000-plus and I can go through all and

this is really a substantial increase.

I, like everybody else in this Chamber, who spoke about their own various constituencies and areas, what would have influenced this increase? The people of Arima would really like to know what has influenced this increase.

I listened very carefully to the Minister of Local Government, who indicated that this is about, basically, equity. It is about both the Minister for Social Development and most of the speakers talked about the fact that this is about fairness and this is about equity. Clearly, this is not about local government reform, and this is about boundary changes. But I would like to think that even if we speak about boundary changes, the issue is how is it going to impact on the burgesses.

7.35 p.m.

What is also very interesting, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that whilst we speak about the number of councillors in the respective areas, and they would be fixed for the cities and boroughs, that is not the case in the regional corporations. It would be left to, as I understand it, to Elections and Boundaries to determine the amount of councillors based on the geographical locations, the population, and a number of other things, whereas those as it relates to the cities and boroughs are fixed. So Arima is not going to change from moving from seven to 10, but others, like the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, Mayaro, and others, can change.

Now, the former speaker took a lot of time to talk about a situation in Chaguanas where it is not the PNM that spoke about making Chaguanas a city, but it is actually the UNC, and also to speak about the fact that the PNM never indicated that they wanted to make Chaguanas a city. That is not my information.

My information is that the 2009 Bill, it is specific in that Bill, and that Bill was laid in this House by the People's National Movement, specifically making reference to making Chaguanas a city. Therefore, the information that is being put in this House that that was not the case is absolutely true.

As a matter of fact, the Bill, that is the 2009 Bill, that was laid at that time by then Minister of Local Government, Mrs. Hazel Manning, specifically stated—and that is the municipalities, municipal corporations and municipal councils Bill. It says, and if I could make reference to section 5(1):

“For the purposes of local government, the island of Trinidad shall be divided into the following twelve Municipalities:”

—because at that time the proposal was for there to be a decrease from 14 to 12.

In that decrease, the recommendation was:

“the City of Port-of-Spain;
the City of San Fernando;
the City of Arima;
the City of Chaguanas;”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: That was laid in this Parliament “eh”.

Ms. P. Beckles: So I want to recommend to my colleague, the hon. Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services and former mayor of Chaguanas, to please have sight of that piece of legislation.

The hon. Minister also indicated that there was a vote in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, and that vote was the councillors of the PNM and the ILP voted against Chaguanas being made a city. I just want to repeat that a Bill, it is for the Government, it is for the Minister to bring a Bill before the

Parliament, and that Bill was laid here by the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: But, more importantly, what my hon. friend did not say, is that during the period 2010 to 2015, the UNC at the time had 29 seats to the People's National Movement's 12, and, therefore, I do not understand the argument of my honourable friend on the other side, the Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services.

At that time, as is the case now, as a matter of fact, they had more seats then than they had now, and if they wanted to, they could have passed that same piece of legislation, or any piece of legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Whilst they would have you believe that it is all because the PNM did not want to pass the legislation, and now they are the experts on local government. But let me go further to remind this honourable House, that in 2014, when the Government at the time was doing some homework to make Chaguanas a city, a group of residents came out to protest one Thursday night about that idea. This is in Chaguanas. I am reading, with your leave, Madam Deputy Speaker, from the *Express*, July 17, 2014:

“The residents are demanding their immediate problems be addressed before any decision is taken to transform the borough into a city.”

They went on to say that there was a consultation led by the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development. They went on to say that there was a panel, Dr Tewarie, Stephen Cadiz, and very interesting:

“Former Chaguanas mayor Orlando Nagessar, who was seated in the audience, asked for clarity...

“Nagessar said if the borough is to achieve city status, ‘the present temporary vendors’ mall is like a shanty town and you can’t have a city with a shanty town in the middle of it’.”

So the persons who were demonstrating and objecting were their own UNC people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: So I want to say to this honourable House, and to ensure that my colleagues are aware of that, but, more importantly, I want to remind my friend again, the hon. Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services, that during the debate in 2023, at that time there was a proposal for the boroughs of Siparia and Diego Martin to be made boroughs, and this is what the hon. Minister had to say at the time.

“...I did not hear...—the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government...state anything...”

I do not want to use the word “consultation”. I am passing over that, but quote:

“...even...”—speaking to—“...one person from Siparia or one person from Diego Martin...I want borough status within my region. I am ready for this.’ Madam Speaker, a few PNM Ministers or representatives sitting in a room with a council is how we have reached here today...”

The hon. Member also said:

“When you as a Minister can ensure that corporations have proper staffing, they have the right technical officers to do the work to send it to the Ministry to get the money, to get the projects on board; when you can ensure that you can work with the Minister of Finance on a timely basis to make allocations a reality in the form of releases...

...and not allocations in black and white...”

That is when my friend said you could truly speak about city status.

I want to say, having regard to what I mentioned a while ago of the increase in Arima of 30,000-plus persons in continuing to make Arima a borough, I would like my honourable friend, the hon. Minister for St. Augustine, to explain to the people of Arima, what is the proposal to address the same issues that they raised when they were in Government. As a matter of fact, the hon. Member for St Augustine, during the said debate, said and argued, that the legislation was:

“...a superficial attempt to pretend to do something...”—about—“...local government...”

She complained that the Minister gave no clear reason why these two corporations were selected.

“What was your approach, in terms of your methodological framework, that was utilized? What developmental studies and guidelines were utilized to make this decision? What consultations were conducted?”

The hon. Member for St. Augustine then said, “None”. The hon. Member for St. Augustine, during the debate, went on to say:

“Madam Speaker, the Minister failed to indicate to us how the change in status, from taking an eraser and rubbing off the name ‘regional’, replace it with the name ‘borough’...to tell us how that will bring about greater economic, human, infrastructural development in Siparia and Diego Martin.”

But very interesting, Madam Deputy Speaker, was when the hon. Member for St Augustine said:

“...the Government is putting the cart before the horse...”—by not developing the corporations before seeking to give them borough status.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: I ask my hon. friend from St Augustine today whether this Government has developed the corporations before seeking to give them borough status?

The hon. Member, during the said debate, criticized the Government for not increasing resources to the corporation in keeping with more responsibilities under when they become boroughs. The recommendation of the hon. Member for St Augustine at the time said that the Government should either withdraw the Bill entirely or send it to a joint select committee where experts would be called in to assist in the final legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is always very interesting when the shoe is on the other foot, because we all understand that, notwithstanding, they are proudly boasting about being from the belly of local government, it is not just about being from the belly of local government, you know, but it is about ensuring that the people who are now either burgesses, from any one of the corporations, that they understand how this is going to work, on both sides, depending on where you are, and I will say, Arima.

Very often, as the hon. Member for St. Augustine said, and the Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services, when your constituents or your burgesses come to you, they really, very often, are not interested whether they fall in Tunapuna/Piarco, whether they fall in Sangre Grande, whether they fall in Arima. As the Member of Parliament for Arima, at this point in time, some of my constituents belong to San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, some belong to Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, some belong to Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, and some belong to the Borough of Arima, and that is who we have to

deal with. As far as they are concerned, when there is flooding, when there is a disaster, and when they want a drain fixed, and depending on who comes to you, if you go to Blanchisseuse, it is Tunapuna; if you go to La Fillette, it is San Juan; if you go to Valencia, it is Sangre Grande, but they come to you, and they are not really interested in all of that.

7.50 p.m.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I only raised that issue because at the end of the day, it is really about the delivery of service. I know the hon. Member for Couva North spoke a lot about that, about the delivery of service. Because ideally, we would want to get to the stage as a government and as an Opposition where the issue of delivery of service becomes the most important issue for us, for people from both rural as well as urban communities. When they come to you for a drain to be fixed, when they come to you for a streetlight, or as the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure indicated a while ago, when she made reference to streetlights, when she made reference to water, and you were quite on point when you said that when they come to you, they are not concerned about whether, you know, it is local or general.

They just want the light fixed. They expect that you, as the Member of Parliament, must know all the differences, and you must be able to tell all your various burgesses, "This is where you have to go". If you say to them, you are living in Blanchisseuse. You now have to go to the borough. You no longer have to go to the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. If you are living in Aripo, you no longer have to go to the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. Or if some of them go to Sangre Grande, you now have to go to the Arima Borough Corporation.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, may you allow the Member for Couva South

to move the Procedural Motion.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 15(5), I beg to move that the House continues to sit until the completion of the business before it.

Question put and agreed to.

MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMDT.) BILL, 2026

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Arima, you may continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Yes. Madam Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, as it relates to some of the burgesses that fall in the constituency of Lopinot/Arima, they, too, when they go to the hon. Member, have to be told, “You have to go to Arima”. But now we have included in this Bill persons from all the Phases of La Horquetta, which are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and Carapo, who previously fell under the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the real issue therefore is the issue of resources. We no longer have a situation where, for the Arima Borough Corporation, you had seven councillors. As I recall, the allocation this year might have been around \$17 million. For a new borough corporation with 60,000 persons, which is more than double the amount of what you have, the interesting thing is what sort of allocation would be made to a corporation now, like the Arima Borough Corporation. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is very important to note that in the creation, for example, of the new Borough of Barataria. The new Borough of Barataria has five districts and just over 31,000 persons, whereas, for example, in St. Augustine, you have 44,000 with

six districts.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like the hon. Member to indicate, every single district has four aldermen, whether or not, as in the case of San Juan/Laventille, which has been reduced from 136,662 to 105,093, they have the same four aldermen. In the case of Couva, which is new, with District 6 proposed and just over 57,000. In other words, my question is, you now have 17—some cities, some boroughs, some regional corporations—and you have a variation of 31,132, which I think, if I am correct, is the smallest, to Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, which is 112,000, which is the largest. All have four aldermen. The other interesting thing, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that you have some corporations like Port of Spain, which is 12 at 49,000, and, as I said, you have Arima, which is 60,000-plus with 10 councillors.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, do you require your additional 15 minutes?

Ms. P. Beckles: Yes, please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, therefore the question really that one has to ask is show us the proposed electoral districts, show us the population of each new corporation, show us the electorate of each proposed district and show us the boundaries on the map. Because everybody understands very well that at the end of the day, whether it be a councillor, whether you are a Member of Parliament, and I am sure both on this side and on the other side, everybody has a map up in their office. As the Member of Parliament for Arima, there is a map up in my constituency. The constituency of Arima is affected by five other areas. It would be interesting now that you have the new borough of Arima. How exactly is that going to be affected?

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the interesting things for me—and I shared this with some members of my constituency, in my own little way, when I did a consultation yesterday. Very quickly. I, again, want to make reference to something raised by the hon. Member for Couva North. Unfortunately, for a lot of rural constituencies, when they go to certain places, they have a way of being very impatient and not only just impatient, you know, but having persons from rural communities having a run around. I really hope, notwithstanding whatever is being discussed today, that that is something that has to be addressed. Because this boundary change deals with whether you are going to the Ministry of Health, whether you are going to the Ministry of Education, whether you are going to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. While we think that is not the case, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is the case.

A number of us here know that, depending on where you live—because that is the thing about change in boundaries—and you want to go to a particular school, and they ask you, “Where do you live”? As soon as you mention where you live, for some reason, you are not going to get into that school.

Ms. Ameen: “Dat have nothing to do with it.”

Ms. P. Beckles: It has a lot to do with it, Madam Minister. It has a lot to do with it. I am sure, sure, sure you understand what I am saying. I am sure you understand what I am saying. Some people may think I am stretching it. I am not stretching it. That is the reality of it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: It is the reality of it. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister knows what I am talking about. Because growing up in a rural community, sometimes, depending, of course, upon how well you do, they would be a little more—I do not

want to use the word sympathetic because that is not really the word I want to use. But you would have almost a right and a benefit where people would welcome if you go to a school, Siparia convent or, like in my case, I was living in a village, and you pass for a convent. But that is not the case. These things are very important. I do not understand how my friend from St. Augustine does not understand what I am saying. It is very important, particularly, as I said, when I made reference to places like Blanchisseuse and La Fillette, Morne La Croix and those places.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I filed a question in the Parliament a couple months ago, as it relates to the cancellation of certain services in the Blanchisseuse district. The hon. Minister indicated that it was because there are not many people going to use the facility. As a result of that, they cancelled a number of the services that were offered and transferred them to St. Joseph. At the end of the day, that is what local government is about. We understand that there are some people—and when the hon. Minister talked about security of tenure as it relates to staff and as it relates to employees—there are a lot of people, if you tell them to leave Arima and go to work in Paria, “dey not going”. They will object to that. But it is in the same borough. It is in the same borough.

I had the good fortune of having a constituent who died at 110. He said to me that he used to leave Arima and walk to Paria to work. “Some people doh even want to drive to Paria.” So, as we talk about security of tenure, and we talk about employees and their being transferred because they are now in the borough. But the borough could mean that if you go to one of those rural areas, which a lot of them do not want to. I am sure a lot of my colleagues on the other side understand exactly what I am saying. That is part of rationalizing. That is part of educating people that whether you are from a rural community or whether you are from an

urban community, it is equally important.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to, in the last few minutes that I have, indicate that it is very strange to me that you can have an increase of 30,000-plus persons in a constituency and you have absolutely no engagement with the constituency. Absolutely none. It is very interesting that the Government would come and say that the purpose of the Bill in the main is the boundaries and to deal with the crossing of the Floor and persons who just decide, for whatever reason, that they are moving from one political party and going over to the next political party, and to make it very clear that this Bill is not about local government reform.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to make it abundantly clear that because of the Government's failure to provide us with the kind of information that could assist us in making the kind of deliberation that we could share with our constituents, and I want to join with all my colleagues, who made the point, that in a Bill as important as this, we should not get a Bill Monday night to be debated here, Wednesday.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Over the last three or four Sittings, whether it is the gambling Bill, whether it is the procurement Bill, whether the zones of special operation, we have been getting these Bills on a Monday and to debate in less than 48 hours. Madam Deputy Speaker, we will say that that ought not to be the case. The Opposition should be treated with greater respect.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. P. Beckles: Therefore, we have a difficulty in supporting this Bill. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister. Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much, hon. Madam Deputy Speaker, and my colleagues and Members of this honourable Chamber. We have been here since what—

Hon. Members: 10.30

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—10.30a.m. Some of us got here before 10.30. It has been a long, long day. So, I will just pick a few points. I have a very important point I would like to make, you know, with the to and fro, and going back and forth. It is this—these are some very famous words. There is a saying that if you enter a quarrel between the past and the present, you risk losing the future. If you enter a quarrel between the past and the present, you risk losing the future. Let us tonight not risk losing the future.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

8.05 p.m.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And let us make sure that we pass this Bill. Because whilst Members on that side and this side are accusing each other who voted, who had the 2009 Bill, who had a committee, did not have a committee, who did not do what, going back, back, back into the day, today, we are here today to pass this Bill and we have every intention of making these changes in local government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, I thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute because this Bill will make many positive changes, and my colleagues would have dealt with some. But let me take a moment, I want to commend the

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
Bill, 2026
Hon. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government for her presentation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—the hon. Member for Tobago West, I was very proud of him.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: He told us, we remember, and he brought us the history of what has happened in Tobago West and, of course, what reflects in Trinidad, so we want to thank him very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I commend the hon. Member for Couva North for her contribution here today—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and the Member for Chaguanas West, I believe, thank you very much for your sterling contribution. And let me not forget—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sorry?

Hon. Members: Chaguanas East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I said him already, Barataria/San Juan. I am sorry, Chaguanas East, Vandana Mohit.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank all the Members on this side, not just for their contributions here tonight, but we have been working on this Bill for quite a

while, and let us also take a moment to thank to all the technical officers. Some of them might still be around, they were around until late last night.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They helped us with the drafting of the Bill.

So, I want to say that the PNM cannot escape its record by attacking our determination to change it. They cannot change that record. For 10 years, they promoted much-touted local government reform. And let me remind you—when I listened to the speakers, they went back to Bills, 2015, consultation, my colleague spoke about the amount of money spent on all the screens and the pappy-show a circus. They talked about a 2009 Bill. They did not tell us that they came to this Parliament three times to postpone local government elections.

Hon. Members: Yes, correct.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Three times, they postponed local government elections and it is only when formed the Government in 2010, after postponement of three times, we called the local government elections.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And it did not end there, they came back into office from 2015 until 2025, and during that period, they brought a 2022 Bill. They spoke about it again tonight, the 2022 Bill, they were so proud of that Bill. Only one clause was proclaimed, and you know what that clause was? To again postpone local government elections.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, we cannot believe, you know, when we hear the crocodile tears here, or as somebody says, the “cry-baby” going on the other

side all evening.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

We cannot believe that you are serious about local government because every time you came to make a change, it was to postpone. And all these Bills that you say you brought, 2015, 2009, 2022, “doh” forget the one in Tobago—what happened in Tobago, in 2021 that was, with changing it to 15. All of those things, never one thing to benefit people and you come here today—you have the “bold-faceness” and you are brass-faced to ask us to tell you how this brings delivery, how this will help people, when for your 10 years in office, nothing you did in local government was today to help one single person.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Nothing. So, while you talk about all the circuses around the country for consultation, you never carried through. You know, I always had the expression, NATO, no action—

Hon. Members: Talk only.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—talk only. That is what they are, no action, talk only.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So all these Bills—MP for Barataria said it well, white paper, blue paper, green paper, every colour paper and at the end of the day, no action. Come back to PNM, you know, promises never materialize.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Promises never materialize.

And then some people, like they just do not understand the law, and maybe if you do not understand it, seek advice from a lawyer or do not talk about the law.

So, when the Member for Arima comes to tell me, Show us the districts,” the law is very clear, we cannot cut districts; it is only the EBC can cut the districts.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The EBC said as much yesterday. I know you quoted the EBC—one of you did. The EBC is saying their role is something else. The role for cutting the municipalities, whether it is a borough, whether it is a regional corporation or a city, that is the work of the Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And that is what this Bill is doing today. That is law. And the Member for San Fernando East, “I doh know if he gone to look for mummy now”—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “I doh know”—because the Member did not know his A from B. He did not know anything, attempted to talk about law and constitutional breaches. There is not a single constitutional breach in this Bill.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: None! This is no constitutional breach. You know, there is a word—they say it is an “oxymoron”, when you have Members opposite standing up in a public meeting, holding public meetings to say that their rights are

being suppressed, but where are they doing it? In a public meeting. It is an oxymoron, the two things do not match. Well, they say, it is not oxymoron, it is just morons left; just the morons left. So—

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Member, I do not really want to go—he seems to

be having—that hon. Member has a lot of problems going on in his own constituency.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, I do not want to add to it. But when Diego Martin/North East said that only one thing St. Augustine said had any truth in it, well, that Member, nothing he said had any truth in it, nor did it have any legal justification. So, I will leave him alone to deal with his problems and talk to mummy, and deal with San Fernando East's problems as he sees fit.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So coming here tonight, again, 1992—how many speakers told us about 1992? Harping on 1992. You know long ago that was?—34 years ago. They spoke to us about 1992 and all the great things they did and yet today, not one piece of that is in law; not one piece did they translate into legislation to help people. So, the committee—boy, people really brass-faced sometimes, you know; talking about a committee that we set up and how we had local government people, UNC people—when you talk about Mayor Rogers-Dick and the other mayors and whoever were in your committee—

Hon. Member: Sergeant.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—sergeant, they were not politicians, they were not PNM. So, we took people as you would have done, persons who had experience in local government, and I make no apologies for doing that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, you had a committee made up of PNM persons as well, persons with experience, made heavy weather of the committee, calling people's names here. A man like Dr. Allen Sammy has had a long history,

a long record in local government, well poised to offer experience.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Dinesh Sankersingh as well, a long history in local government. So, when you chose the mayors, that was okay for your committee, because that was a PNM committee. But when we chose former chairmen of corporations, that is a problem. I like how Tobago West put it, “When they did, it was fine.”

Hon. Member: “Do so doh like so”.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Do so doh like so”, Tobago West. When they did all those things, all these years, nothing was wrong, everything was fine. And then when we attempt to do work to make things happen, “all break loose”, everything breaks loose.

So the gerrymandering talk now—Diego Martin North/East of all people talk about gerrymandering; of all people in this Parliament. I might have listened to Port of Spain South. I may have listened to Port of Spain South. Sometimes he is a decent human being. But Diego Martin North/East to talk about gerrymandering—and then comes to give me a definition. You all remember the definition? What he said? It was about racking or “ratching”—was it “ratching”?

Hon. Members: Packing and stacking.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Packing and stacking. Packing and stacking districts, but then no understanding of law. We cannot interfere with districts, the law is clear. So, we cannot, what is it?—pack or stack, or whatever it is. The only people who ever did that were the PNM from day one—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—not just for local, general elections; packing and

stacking. So, those were some of the points made on either side.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, again, cutting Chaguanas to half its size, "assault on democracy", same gerrymandering, the EBC's role. Again, it really did not add to the debate in the House, with the greatest of respect; nothing, a repetition of some of the points already made.

And then here we have, again, San Fernando East, talking about property tax. Mr. Speaker, 2025, you were bolted out the door, you were bolted out of government because of that one thing, that property tax. We promised we will repeal it, and promises made, promises kept.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, to come here today to talk about property tax as something that was so great, like you all "doh" learn. "Dey say, stick break in yuh ears", you do not learn. You had become tone deaf to the cries of the people and that was one major, major thing; the property tax placed on people. So, those are some of the points made on the other side.

In 2023 now, they tried a six for a nine. The former, former Prime Minister wanted to name Diego Martin a borough. You all remember that?—2023. Now, somebody here just said, before you make it a city or a borough, you should develop it. Did you develop it? But then, to make it look like he was being fair, thinking that he could bribe the people of Siparia to vote for the PNM, he said, "Okay, we will make Siparia a borough." You all remember that?

Hon. Members: Yeah.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And then what, did he develop it before they did it? So, do not talk to me about, "We must develop these places before we name boroughs and cities," it just makes no sense whatsoever.

So, you had an opportunity. For 10 years, you talked about the much-touted local government reform. The announcements kept coming, the people kept waiting, and now, true to form, you are seeking to obstruct the work needed to address the failures you have left behind. That is your pattern, all these obstacles placed in the way of better representation. And you asked me, “How will this help?” You quoted some of the numbers yourself. You know, tonight, you did not come to speak of it, but over the last few days, the hon. Member for Arima was all over the news and press conferences, and so on, talking about proportionality. Did you hear that word today? No. In the contribution? No. All we heard about was delivery.

Well, let me ask you a question, Madam: When Point Fortin Borough had 17,000 electors, and then you had, in Tunapuna, 182,000 electors, where is the proportionality?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Where is the proportionality? And what that meant for Point Fortin—you ask about how you will get service, this is how you get it. For Point Fortin, 17,814, according to the EBC’s count of electors. That then gave you 2,969 persons to be serviced by a councillor. And if you look at all these numbers, they were so gerrymandered and geared to the PNM areas and all the other areas, including one of their own, Tunapuna, with one of the largest electorates—you suffered them too and want to talk today about Tunapuna. Tunapuna, 182,000 people. One councillor had to service 11,378; whereas, in the PNM area of Arima, for example, 4,315, a councillor had to look after. In Point Fortin—

Ms. Beckles: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam, you had your turn, please. I did not disturb you. You had your turn and I did not disturb you. “Doh” become like a Diego Martin North/East, please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Look at Point Fortin then. The existing average number of electors that our councillors in Point Fortin, up to today, have to service is 2,969. Compare that to, as I said, Tunapuna, 11,378; one councillor looking after 11,378. And the hon. Member said, “you know, when dey come, dey doh want to hear dis and dey doh want to hear dat”.

8.20 p.m.

If you have less electors, less burgesses to service, the service will be greater, better. You will get better representation, and you will have equality of representation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is one of the ills that this Bill is attempting to deal with. So, we can go through all these numbers and see that the PNM-controlled corporations, the number of electorates were less and therefore the councillors had less members to service. You can look at the land areas too. Diego Martin North/East mentioned Mayaro, but look at the land area. So, you look at the electorate, and you look at the land area. And some of these corporations, I have the numbers here, but I will not go into it tonight. If you wish we can share it. The land areas for these existing corporations that you have huge, huge corporations. Again, with one councillor having to service a large land area and others in compact areas like Point Fortin, Arima, Port of Spain and so on. Again, your service will be greater to the people you serve.

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So, this Bill, Mr. Speaker, we are very clear. There are just 15 clauses in the Bill, very simple, very simple Bill. Very simple Bill. Hon. Member on the other side said that “The Bill was not about local government reform but about boundary changes.” But Mr. Speaker, if we do not make boundary changes, the equity, the inequality will continue as it has for almost 34 years, 34 years—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thirty-four years. The last time local government came here was mentioned by my colleague from Barataria/San Juan. The 1990 attempt by the NAR, which was immediately overruled, the PNM won the election and in 1992 just killed all of those things and that is where we have been since then. Since then, from since 1992, today is what, 2026. Over 30 years we have been locked into that mold that was created. How? Members read it from the report. They said they were putting PNM, what?

Hon. Members: Philosophy.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Philosophy. PNM philosophy in place and that was what? To create these huge corporations in the non-PNM controlled areas and to have small electorates to control more corporations. So, you want to come to tell me about gerrymandering. What was more gerrymandering than that? What was more gerrymandering than that? And then when you see—the numbers were stark. They were very, very stark.

In 2003, I had cause to speak on this matter, you know, right here in this Parliament. The records show I questioned why the then PNM Government announced millions for corporations without accounting for the electorate, the numbers and the geographical areas. Those figures then were like this: Port of Spain, 31,928 voters; Point Fortin then, 13,601; Chaguanas—Chaguanas has

featured so prominently today. Today, I think everybody wanted to speak about Chaguanas. I am proud that this Government, this UNC Government will give city status to Chaguanas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, Port of Spain then in 2003, so this has been going way back, way back, 31,928 voters, Point Fortin, 13,601; Chaguanas, 46,532. Hear this one, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, 111,021 electors; Tunapuna/Piarco, 127,348; Port of Spain and Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo each had 12 councillors in spite of the enormous difference in the numbers of the electors. Port of Spain averaged about 2,661 per district and others had over 10,000 per district.

At that time, I raised the issue of funding and I sincerely believe a person in a larger region should not have to compete with thousands more electors for attention from their representative. Equal citizenship must mean a fair opportunity to be heard and that was my argument then and that remains my argument today, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: In December 2019, under the headline “Kamla promises real local government reform”, the *Guardian* reported my commitment to reform based on land area, voter numbers and fair boundaries. And that my undertaking then in 2019 was the—

“...UNC government would make that change...”

The Bill carries that promise right now. Promise made, promise being kept.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, what we are witnessing now is a kind of a

selective outrage. I think one of the other Members mentioned it, selective outrage. You had 10 years to turn your reform, much touted into reliable services. On 10th February, 2023 at pages 28 and 29 of *Hansard*, then local government Minister, Farris Al-Rawi outlined to the Cabinet-appointed committees which examined the municipalities. Diego Martin was chaired by Minister Colm Imbert, Stuart Young, Allyson West, Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal and Corporation Chairman, Sigler Jack. These are all PNM people, are they not?

Hon. Members: All.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: All PNM people. Siparia was chaired by Clarence Rambarat, Stephen Mc Clashie, Paula Gopee-Scoon, Kazim Hosein, Brian Manning, Christopher Encinas, and their resolution, the Corporation had supported.

So, Mr. Al-Rawi then explained that some indicators for moving from town to borough city came from “convention and practice” rather than statutory criteria. The PNM therefore knows that government can examine municipal status and Parliament can legislate. Yet, what it considered legitimate in office, again, as you say it was fine then, Tobago West, now it is sinister. That in my respectful view, Mr. Speaker, is political hypocrisy and scaremongering.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: PNM does not own the right to reform local government, and its unfinished work cannot become a prohibition on our work.

We move on. What the figures show is that under the PNM, the last budget before losing office, the funds allocated in the 2025 development estimates gave several larger UNC-controlled corporations less money in total than smaller PNM-controlled corporations. Point Fortin, PNM-controlled, \$17.65 million for

then, 20,000 people. That was \$872.25 per person. That is Point Fortin PNM-controlled. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, UNC-controlled, \$17.15 million for 178,410 people. You know what that worked out to, Mr. Speaker, \$96.13.

Mr. Tancoo: Geographic discrimination.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: \$96.13.

So, the same amount given to Point Fortin with 20,000, about 20,000, same amount of money given to Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo with 178,000 people. That is inequality. That is inequity that we have to fix and that is what we are trying to do here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, almost nine times the population, but \$500,000 less funding. Arima, heard a lot of Arima today. PNM-controlled, \$18.25 million for 33,606 people. That works to about \$543.06 per elector. Look at Chaguanas. Chaguanas, we are talking a lot about Chaguanas today. UNC-controlled, \$17.25 million for 83,560 people. You know what that works down to, Mr. Speaker, \$206.55 per person. That cannot be equity. That cannot be equality of representation or resourcing. We cannot give everybody every single thing that they want, but at least we can have parity, we can have some kind of equity, some kind of equality in the resources, in the funding, in the representation per councillor. That never happened. In that case, between Arima and Chaguanas, almost two and a half times the population, but \$1 million less. San Fernando, PNM-controlled, \$20 million for 48,838 people. That is about \$4.10 per person.

On the other hand, Penal/Debe, UNC-controlled, \$17.5 million for 89,392 people. You know what that comes down to, Mr. Speaker, \$191 per

person, \$191 per person. Population is twice the size, twice the size in Penal/Debe, but you are giving to the San Fernando-controlled corporation. So do not come to me again, I repeat it, like my colleague from Chaguanas East, MP Vandana Mohit, “I will not tolerate any lecturing from you.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, this unfairness, however, it is bad enough for UNC corporations versus PNM corporations, but that unfairness also reached PNM-controlled corporations. That disrespect for rural communities on the corridor, I come back again, large PNM-controlled corporations, Tunapuna/Piarco, \$18.15 million for 215,119, \$84.37 per person. The lowest figure, Mr. Speaker, in those allocations. Again, go back to Point Fortin. Tunapuna had 194,884 more people but only got 500,000 more.

So, look, I am belabouring the point, it is clear. If you go through every single one of the corporations, it is the same pattern of behaviour. It is the same discrimination as against UNC-controlled corporations. And I do not know what they had against Tunapuna, but they also discriminated against Tunapuna. So, there is no equity, there is no equality in terms of representation per voter and in terms of the sharing of resources. So, these estimates expose a disparity. Larger UNC corporations were allocated less money to serve far more people. These are things that we will work upon.

You are asking about the administrative, about where is the money coming from, not from property tax, I can assure you. And how it is that we are going to allocate resources to these. Those are administrative matters which will be dealt with consequent upon our passing of the legislation. The Minister, in her opening, told us about the administrative arrangements, that the Ministry will

continue with others to work to get these corporations up and running.

So, I heard one member complaining about a proclamation clause. We did not make that up. In your 2021—one of you did it. I have it written down. And the *Hansard* will always show us which one.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, this might be an appropriate time to tell you, you have one minute left, unless you want your 15 minutes?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, sir, I will.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am seeing someone mentioned, and the *Hansard* will reflect it about the proclamation clause. That clause did not come out of the sky. It is the identical clause used by the PNM when they were doing the Tobago House of Assembly (Amdt.) Bill, 2021. Now, that proclamation clause was there to make sure that after the Bill is passed, that it does not sit down in an office somewhere, because we have to get the districts now worked out by the EBC, that is their work. So, what we said in our Bill here, which is identical in words, that within “ninety days” of the proclamation, the EBC will provide us with the report. That report will now have the districts for the municipalities that we have now cut out from the existing locations. So that clause is not new. It was done in 2021. And of course, it is very important we have that clause. Otherwise, as I say, this Bill could languish.

So, the proclamation clause gives us it will be proclaimed, but what it tells us is that within 90 days, it is proclaimed, and if the person who is making—the proclamation is done by the President and so on. Yes, I agree. So, within 90

days of that signature by the President, the EBC has to provide us with a report.

8.35 p.m.

Yes, the report will have to come back to the Parliament. Okay, so what these changes must deliver—these funding disparities I have mentioned explain why I have fought for institutions that better reflect the people and places they serve. As my colleagues have detailed, the Bill moves us from 14 to 17: Three cities, eight boroughs, and six regional municipalities. It is not just about boundaries, Member for Arima. You are totally correct. We were dealing with issues that arose.

I remember the MP for Chaguanas East mentioned a time when there was a deadlock in the Chaguanas Corporation. I remember a time in the Siparia Corporation, way back. As you know, I have been an alderman—39 years ago I was appointed, I think the Member mentioned it, as an alderman in Siparia Corporation, and there was a deadlock. If my memory is correct, they used to pull straws. Anybody as young as me could remember that. In those days Mayaro Corporation would pull straws to determine how to break the tie.

Here in our own Parliament, we saw what happened in Sangre Grande when there was a tie, when the outgoing chairman hops the chair. Hops the chair to be the Presiding Officer. In this Parliament, we had asked, we had asked, I mean, where is the law that says you could hop the chair and then vote for yourself to become the chairman? The then Minister of Local Government, I think he was then newly minted. He had been demoted from AG and became Rural and Local and all these things. He said that is the law.

So, I think it was Dr. Moonilal, if my memory is correct. He got up, and he asked, well, explain. He did not use those words: “How this fella can hop the chair and vote for himself to become the mayor or the chairman of that corporation.” And

up to today, I had the answer here from the *Hansard*. That is what it was.

So, it cannot be that you pull a straw. It cannot be that somebody hops the chair.

There must be clarity in the law. There must be clarity in the law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, where there is a deadlock, you should be able to have—the law must be able to tell us clearly what happens. What happens.

My colleagues, this Bill then also attempts to deal with that problem. The tiebreaker. First, for the Presiding Officer to conduct elections for mayor and deputy mayor, chairman, deputy chairman. And thereafter, if there is another deadlock again, how is that to be broken? In two ways.

First, if there is an outright majority party, that will be the vote that will determine who gets the chair to become chairman, mayor, and so on. Thereafter, if there is no clear outright winner, we have proposed that we use something called the plurality of votes, that is to say, the party, again, may not have got the popular vote, but within the entire municipality, that vote is the highest.

So, there are two methods for calculating how we allocate and how we determine who gets the chair. We did not stop there then. So, that was a problem we faced, many of us who have been in the system. MP for Chaguanas East mentioned it. I think Mayaro would have known about it. I know about Siparia, what happened.

There was a time. I cast no aspersions here tonight on anyone. There was a time when the pulling of the straws, there were allegations that it was gerrymandered. There were allegations that it was gerrymandered. There was some way they had a way of feeling what to pull and therefore, pull the correct straw to get the chair. So, we have dealt with that problem. It is a problem. This Bill brings solutions to

problems we have encountered in local government. The other problem we had was the alderman.

Now, you say people “get vex” with the UNC, disgusted, and they cross the Floor. Well, people “get vex” with the PNM and cross the Floor too, so let us be real. It affects both sides of the House. It affects both parties. And another Member said, “You can’t do that. You can’t take away the people’s seat. You can’t take away the alderman.” But the Member for St. Augustine was very clear when she opened the debate.

Section 49 of our Constitution has an almost identical provision if anybody here crosses the Floor. It happened with a fellow called MP Volney. May he rest in peace. Under section 49, he resigned from the party. And that was the party who put him there. If he was not on that party ticket, it is doubtful that he would have won the seat. You win the seat on a party ticket. So, if you jump the Floor and cross the Floor and whatever, section 49 is in the Constitution. That was a provision placed there, I think, by Mr. Manning. Is it Manning, I believe?

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Mr. Manning, senior. That is section 49. If you cross the Floor, goodbye. If you are expelled from your party, goodbye. If that can happen for elected members of Parliament, then what is wrong if it happens if a councillor jumps the floor or an alderman jumps the floor? That is what the provision in this Bill is giving us the opportunity to correct those things that happen in the politics of the day. How much more time, please, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Nine more minutes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you.

The Bill goes further. I know I spent many sleepless nights talking to the drafters

at all hours. I said we have to protect the workers. We have to make sure that there is a transition. You remember recently we came to this House, when Petrotrin was shut down, all the workers were abandoned, went out the door. We brought a successorship Act to this Parliament. You all remember that? To give those workers back their rights. We have a similar provision now in this, my Bill here, our Bill here, for workers, for succession rights for workers to continue. It does not end there.

I told you guys, I said we have to put in a provision to protect rights, property rights, obligations, but also to protect liabilities. Liabilities are very important. They mean matters pending against a corporation. So, we put that clause in. I think that might be 14 and 15. Those are the clauses down at the end.

Mr. Hosein: The right of appeal.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The right of?

Mr. Hosein: Appeal.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Appeal. So, all those are embedded in this Bill. So, it did not just stop with changing boundaries and renaming corporations as borrowed cities or otherwise. We went a bit further to protect the workers, to protect rights, liabilities, and obligations, property rights as well, and the right of appeal, I think, Members.

Now, when it comes to all the aldermen jumping the floor, they resign, or they are expelled by the party. What happens then? A vacancy notice—let me just see the Bill, please—will be sent to the party. If the person resigns, he resigns from the party. If he is expelled, well, the party then has to do it. So, we come along to those clauses at the end of the Bill. Just remind me, please. Is it 15 or 16?

Mr. Hosein: Clause 4.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Clause 4? Clause 4. They are clause 4.

Okay, so we can revise the alderman's list. Thereafter, when a person resigns or dies, and all these other things happen, we can revise the list. Then a vacancy is sent to the CEO. The mayor or chairman has to convene a meeting, and then the seat is declared vacant. However, we did not leave it there, because sometimes you have a mayor who might have a mind of his own. A chairman with a mind of his own. And you know he gets the notice of expulsion or the notice of resignation or the notice that the person has died. The mayor may not convene that meeting to declare the city vacant.

So, we went—out of an abundance of caution, we say within seven days they do not declare the vacancy. Well, you know what? It is deemed to have been declared vacant.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Not taking any chances with that.

So Mr. Speaker, as I close, in conclusion, I want to thank you for the time to contribute to this debate and again to thank all those who have helped us to bring this Bill this far. And you know it is hypocritical, you know, political hypocrisy. Where others on the side, they are complaining about we bring the Bill today for tomorrow or two days.

Look, it is 10 years I sat here in Opposition, and we were brutalized, totally disrespected.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And why am I doing this? Because we want to get the people's business done. We want to get it fast. You know what happened with you guys? Everything went to JSC, you remember that? And they were sent

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to JSC to?—to die. So, you got very, very little business done, very little business done. The only thing that was probably done is that friends, family, and financiers benefited profusely under your watch.

So, in closing, I say this year marks my 39th year anniversary of my entrance into politics as an alderman.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I began my political career by listening to the ordinary, forgotten citizens speak about the places they call home, about the hardships they carried, the future they wanted for their children, and their voices helped to shape my purpose. Their trust carried me where I am here now today. Now entering my 40th year of public life, my journey returns to its beginning. I stand as Prime Minister advancing the reform I promised the people whose needs first called me to serve. Promises made, promises kept.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: This Bill, Mr. Speaker, is just one of my gifts of service in this milestone year. A stronger voice for our people and greater possibilities for the generations who will follow. The PNM now must choose whether to help that future take shape or stand in its way. If it votes against this Bill, let them explain why the people's progress must wait upon their political convenience.

I repeat the words I started with. If we pick a quarrel between the past and the present, we will lose the future. So today, let us not lose the future of our children, of our country. To this nation, I have faithfully given the years of my life, almost 40 years. To the people, today I renew my pledge. With this Bill, I honour the voices that first called me into public life and carry their hopes forward

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so that our children inherit a nation which listens to them, serves them and gives them room to flourish.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: St. Augustine stood before you. St. Augustine stood before you.

Ms. Ameen: I stood up before.

Mr. Speaker: She stood before you. St. Augustine

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for recognizing me.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no, no.

Ms. Ameen: I did stand before the Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: St. Augustine—I recognize St. Augustine.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Arouca/Lopinot, have a seat. St. Augustine.

Mr. Gonzales: I did indicate that. I did indicate to you—[*Inaudible*].

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: St. Augustine stood first.

Mr. Gonzales: Why are we being deprived of speaking?

Mr. Speaker: No one is depriving you. St. Augustine stood first. Look at the video. St. Augustine stood first.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk, laughter and desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Khadijah Ameen): Mr. Speaker, you know, let me tell you, eh. I am a firm believer in democracy. I am a patriot of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr Speaker, an Opposition is an important part of parliamentary democracy. Today, Mr Speaker, let me tell you, it is very clear from seeing the Opposition in action today that the PNM is weak. They are fractured. They are rudderless. They have zero contributions to make up any meaning.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Today, Mr Speaker, local government is something that I believe almost anyone can connect to, and the Members opposite, one after the other, failed miserably.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: They failed. They brought zero meaningful suggestions. They stood up and made all kinds of spurious accusations. They stood up and spoke about things that I made very clear in the opening and then go saying something else.

Mr Speaker, they misled the House, and we were not jumping up every minute like other people over there. Mr Speaker, I let them talk, they talk because at the end of the day, we are a Government of action and we walk the walk.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr Speaker, you know, while we on this side here, busy

thinking about the people and how we are going to organize these corporations so that you can maintain the three-tiered system in this country for boroughs and cities and corporations, they over there asking questions like they never read a book.

Mr Speaker, while we are thinking about people, they are thinking about dollar signs.

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

Hon. K. Ameen: You know what they want to know? “ Who we renting the building from?” They come here to ask about rentals. I want to refer them to the former Minister of Local Government if they want to know about rentals.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr Speaker, in my opening, I warned you. I warned this House that they come to wild up things. I said that. I said that they and when I spoke about the workers and how the Prime Minister was very careful to include a clause to protect the agreements and the union arrangements—and I made it very clear.

8.50 p.m.

I repeated myself several times in my opening remarks that workers will not lose their jobs. I repeated that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: I even used the 1990 example when we transitioned from county councils into regional corporations, when I went to Tunapuna/Piarco as a chairman. I met workers from that period and they explained, and I used that as an example. And then the Member for Laventille West comes up almost immediately after, two speakers down, to come to say the complete opposite. And I am making it very clear, let me tell “allyuh” something, “allyuh” like to play with people,

games. “Allyuh” like to play with people, mind games. You see people where their job security is concerned, they like to go up there and “wild up” people. And currently there are some union members who are trying to drum up a march right now and they are looking for some people. So I do not know if the Opposition is trying to help them.

But I want to make it very clear, this Government will ensure that the transition will not cause a single worker to lose their job. No one will lose their job.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: And I want to tell the Opposition stop spreading untruths about us to people. Mr. Speaker, “ah tell yuh already”, they think about the dollar signs. When the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about the white paper, the green paper and the meeting, Mr. Speaker, first of all, that Member told some serious untruths—

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. K. Ameen:—about my presentation. When he got up he said several things. He said that my whole presentation was untrue. Mr. Speaker, that in itself is untrue.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned—because I had such a short time I could not go into details. I mentioned that the PNM had white paper, green paper and meetings with all these big LED screens. Mr. Speaker, I want to give you some more information. When he went through the history and all the white paper and green paper and the consultations, why did he not tell us how much money they spent? Why did he not tell us that they gave, one Andrew Gabriel the contract

to host these local government consultations throughout the country, the length and breadth of the country. Why does he not tell us the million dollars it cost to this country for infrastructure, media and hospitality.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Why do they not tell us that, friends, family and financiers in everything, everything. Up to their last term in government, they had people who were working to do reform and change agents and consultants, just paying “ah set” of PNM activists money to some of the bloggers. They are on TikTok bawling, “follow the money, follow the money”, but they never “follow the money” in San Fernando West.

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

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Alexander: Follow the money.

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I was a councillor in 2003, I had just become a councillor when Rennie Dumas was the Minister and then it went on to Hazel Manning, then Minister of Local Government, Sen. Hazel Manning. That lady did a lot of consultation up and down the country, you know. I wish, I wish that some people on the other side, I am not calling any name, could sit down and have a cup of coffee with their mummy.

Mr. Alexander: Follow “mammie”.

Hon. K. Ameen: And get a little information, “ah” little bit would go a long way. I found the Member for San Fernando East was a disappointment compared to his predecessors in the Manning name. He was really a disappointment. But more than that, Mr. Speaker, those consultations and meetings and all these things, I was a councillor in 2003; 2006 we were supposed to have an election, they put it off;

2007, they put it off; 2008, they put it off; 2009, they put it off; 2010 the people get fed up, snap election and Kamla Persad-Bissessar became government and Prime Minister and that is how Trinidad and Tobago got a local government election.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: That is what they did. Mr. Speaker, when they had—they had nothing of substance to criticize, when they could not attack the substance of the Bill, the substance of the report, they attacked the people. They started to call out names—of course it had UNC people, it also had PNM people. I am going to call the whole list now, because they, Mr. Speaker, pick and choose. Why did you not call the whole list of names, why not?

Mr. Scotland SC: Name one.

Hon. K. Ameen: I want to tell you that the chairman of that committee, one, Ms. Stara Ramlogan was the Director of Planning, a public servant. Mr. Speaker, that person was selected because of her technical expertise.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I also want to tell you that in 2016, Ms. Stara Ramlogan, I have the letter here, was appointed to chair an oversight committee to monitor the implementation of activities of the Ministry of Rural Development and its operationalization, and it is signed by one, Franklin A. Khan. PNM-appointed. And they come here to bring down the woman's character, a public servant of the highest order, served with distinction. Shame on them.

Hon. Members: Shame.

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, shame on them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Also on that committee, you have Lennox Sankersingh. I

wonder if anyone of them know who Lennox Sankersingh is?

Hon. Member: “Yuh cyah even spell it.”

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Lennox Sankersingh is local government walking.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. K. Ameen: He was in the NAR, he was in the PNM, he was in the NAR’s committee to do this transition from county council to regional corporation. When the PNM in their—you know it is plenty, “all kind ah” local government things they had to do.

Mr. Scotland SC: From baby Jesus.

Hon. K. Ameen: No, he did not join the political party, he was part of the committees, the committees who were reviewing, so they were doing oversight and all kinds of things that you mentioned. But my point is that Lennox Sankersingh was appointed by the PNM to do local government reform, to review the legislation and to do several things in local government. Appointed by the PNM. They never called his name, why? Also, on that committee Mr. Cornelius Price, another walking encyclopedia in local government. We appointed people because of their capacity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: And Cornelius Price was one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Cornelius Price was the person who worked alongside Mrs. Hazel Manning when she was Minister of Local Government in that decentralization unit. They formed an inter-ministerial committee, that man did a lot of work, and because of the PNM’s incompetence, nothing came out of it. He

is a walking encyclopedia for local government. You had Dr. Assad Ali. He is a planning luminary in this country from the University of the West Indies.

Mr. Speaker, so they could not attack the substance, they attack the people. I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee for their service to this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, I also want to mention, you know, this morning we had several persons in the public gallery. We still have, I see the Chairman of Couva/Tabaquite, Mr. Ryan Rampersad there, I see Mr. Kenwyn Phillip, Chairman of the Sangre Grande Corporation. I want to mention that, you know, today, in the public gallery, yes, we had a school visiting us as well, but we had Chairmen and Mayors and Councillors of Mayaro, Princes Town; the Mayor of Siparia; Chaguanas; Sangre Grande; Penal/Debe; Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo. And this Bill has not only generated interest from local government persons, it has generated interest from throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, all day—in fact, since the Prime Minister announced the coming of Chaguanas as a city, people have been flooding us saying that this is a positive move, this is a long overdue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: This is a well-thought-out way to go, this is the way forward. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind Trinidad and Tobago that this is an opportunity for us to breathe. For a long time people in this country were made to feel—it is a form of bullying, you know. They were made to feel that anything that is not PNM is not good. They try to make you feel that if you have a different opinion that you are not patriotic. They try to make you feel that if you “eh wear red” that means

you are not patriotic, but when you wear red that means you are a PNM. I am yellow and I am UNC and proud, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: Mr. Speaker, this Bill is well thought out. Many of the Members on the opposite side without even knowing it, were making points in support of the Bill. I heard the Member for Arima lamenting that people from Blanchisseuse have to come all the way to Arima. Mr. Speaker, right now they have to come to Arima and take a taxi or a maxi to go to Tunapuna. So we are stopping that where they just have to go to Arima, and end of story. Mr. Speaker, they made no good points to respond to. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spent about 20 minutes of his contribution on Tobago East.

Mr. Young SC: West.

Hon. K. Ameen: Tobago West. Mr. Speaker, somebody messaged me. They say, "what Nutsy do Stuart so"?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Ameen: I am just using the parlance, right. And I am saying that I was disappointed that an experienced parliamentarian would try to intimidate a first-time parliamentarian, would come here and try to chastise and belittle a person and feel because he is from Tobago and this Bill does not change boundaries in Tobago, that he should not talk about Tobago. Mr. Speaker, the voice of Tobago is an important part of this Government and Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Speaker, a point of order. Point of order, Mr. Speaker, 48(6). The Member is saying that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is intimidating and has intimidated the Member for—

Mr. Speaker: Right. First of all, I think we have to look at it in the context in which she said it. She then corrected it to say, “chastise”.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no. The context in which the Member said it, the Member then corrected it to say “chastise”, probably recognizing that intimidation was loose language. All right. A bit of linguistic licentiousness, but she corrected it. Right.

Hon. K. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is very different from telling somebody “doh geh in meh firing range”. Very, very different, right. So, Member, I am sure you do not intend to suggest that the Member was intimidating in some sort of—

Hon. K. Ameen: Certainly. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for understanding where I am coming from. And where I am coming from, Mr. Speaker, is that I was once a first-time MP here and I feel that Tobago is an important part of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and every Bill that you have a Tobago perspective on it, it is very, very, valuable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Ameen: And the Member for Tobago West, I think made such a valuable contribution and it put things into context. It helped you recognize, seeing through the eyes of the PNM and how they treat the electorate, how they treat, you know. But, Mr. Speaker, you get my point.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that this Bill, while it has received widespread support from the public, I want to say that—Mr. Speaker, with these few words I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. K. Ameen (cont'd)

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Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in Committee.

9.05 p.m.

Clauses 1 to 12 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13.

Question proposed: That clause 13 stand part of the Bill.

13(2) In the Schedule, insert after item 4 the following item:

“5. The Special Operations Act, 2026

The Schedule is amended by deleting items 1 to 4 and substituting the following items:

(Act. No. 21
 of
 2026)

“1. District 1 shall comprise the City of Port of Spain, the Borough of Diego Martin, the Borough of Barataria and the Regional Municipality of San Juan-Laventille.

2. District 2 shall comprise the Borough of Arima, the Borough of St. Augustine and the Regional Municipality of Tunapuna.

3. District 3 shall comprise the Borough of Sangre Grande and the Regional Municipality of

Mayaro-Rio Claro.

4. District 4 shall
comprise the City of
Chaguanas, the Borough of
Couva and the Regional
Municipality of Tabaquite-
Talparo.”.”.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General, I understand there is a proposed amendment.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chair, there is an amendment, yes. It has been circulated. It is necessary because the Bill changes the boundaries of some municipal corporations, renaming three municipal corporations, creating four boroughs. So, the description of the districts under the Special Operations Act, which came into force yesterday, last night, as it currently stands, should be changed to align with the proposals in the Bill.

So, the four districts in the Special Operations Act are being deleted and substituted to accurately reflect and be in sync with the provisions of the Bill. That is it.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. So, Mr. Chair, is it that we are to understand, after the full course of debate has closed, having received this Bill less than 48 hours before the start of the debate, now at the committee stage, without any indication whatsoever by any speaker on the Government side for almost 12 hours of debate, the first time, not only we, but the country, are hearing that the Government now intends to insert into this Bill, which are the amendments to the municipal corporations and boundaries, et cetera, they are now inserting a Schedule to deal with the Special Operations Act, making it four districts and putting into baskets of each district certain corporations? Is it that we are now being told?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Yes, we are amending the Schedule to insert provisions which are required now by the passage of the Act—the enactment of the legislation last night. So, yes. The answer to the question is, yes.

Question put.

Mr. Imbert: Division.

Mr. Chairman: I am not so sure you can put—well, let us check it.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: At committee stage?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: For amendment at Committee stage, you can? Let me just take

advice from the Procedural Clerk.

[Mr. Chairman confers with Clerk]

All right. I do not think it is absolutely clear, but I am advised by the Clerk that that is the practice that has occurred in the past. I do not think the Standing Orders are clear enough for that. However, on this occasion, reserving my right for further review, because when you look at Chapter VIII:

“...Decisions of...

...Collection of Voices...

And:

“...Division...”

—it is not entirely clear that you can take a division at this stage, but I am prepared to allow it at this stage. So, Clerk, take the division on this singular occasion, on further consideration.

The Committed divided: Ayes 27 Noes 12

AYES

Padarath, B.

Persad Bissessar SC, Mrs. K.

Tancoo, D.

John, J.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Lee, D.

Hosein, S.

Ameen, Ms. K.

Alexander, R.

Maharaj, D.

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
Bill, 2026
Hon. K. Ameen (cont'd)

Mohit, Ms. V.

Sturge, W.

Bodoe, Dr. L.

Dowlath, Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. Aiyana

Morris, W.

Benjamin, Ms. M.

Sobers, S.

Watts, Phillip

Seecheran, Dr. R.

Kesar, E.

Elder, C.

Sam, Mrs. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. N.

Dr. Gosine: Absolutely yes.

Sampson, J.

NOES

Mr. Gonzales: No to ZOSO.

Ms. Beckles: No to ZOSO.

Mr. Imbert: No to ZOSO.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No to ZOSO.

Mr. Young SC: No to ZOSO.

Mr. Scotland SC: No to ZOSO.

Mr. de Nobriga: No to ZOSO.

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Mr. Chairman: No. I am not entirely sure—hold on. Hang on. This has been—this has happened here—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: The question put is either yes or no. So, it is a simple yes or no.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, “absolutely” is one word, meaning the same thing as yes.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Chairman: No, that is a phrase.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: There is a difference.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, right. So, vote no—yes or no, simple. The Standing Orders, in any event, provide that you vote either yes or no. So, it is either a yes or a no.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Division continued.

NOES (*cont'd*)

Mr. Manning: No, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Marcelle: No to ZOSO.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Okay. Let me make something clear. I have just given a ruling on that. It is either yes or no.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay? Laventille West, you just heard my ruling. The Standing Orders do not contemplate on editorializing of your vote. It simply says yes or no.

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Okay?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: So, it is either yes or no. Laventille West, yes or no?

Mr. Marcelle: Mr. Speaker, the Clerk must ask the question.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: I am not so sure the Clerk has the exclusive jurisdiction to ask the question, but I will ask the Clerk to ask you the question.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Division continued

Mr. Des Vignes: No ZOSO.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Diego Martin West, you heard the ruling. In defiance of the ruling, take a walk for the rest of the session.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: He voted already.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Well, that is the risk you run. For defiance of a clear ruling, that is the risk you run. That is the risk you ran. That is the moral hazard you run.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: You know, I have had enough of this childish churlishness all day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: It is a simple yes or no.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: It is childish, it is juvenile, it is querulous and it is churlish.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
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2026.10.07

Mr. Chairman: I can.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Do you know the meaning of the word “churlish”? It means rudeness. It means insolence.

Mr. Imbert: What is childish?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Take the vote.

Division continued.

NOES (*cont'd*)

Mr. Birchwood: Absolutely no.

Romain, D.

Question agreed to.

Clause 13, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 14 and 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

9.20p.m.

New clause 4(5)

Insert after clause 3, the following new clause:

“Section 5 amended	4. Section 5(1) of the Act is amended by -
	(a) deleting paragraph (<i>da</i>); and
	(b) inserting after paragraph (<i>b</i>), the following new paragraph:
	“(ba) the City of Chaguanas;”.’.

New clause 4(5) read the first time.

Question proposed: That the new clause 4 be read a second time.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I have a question to ask the Attorney General.

Mr. Chairman: I think that the question comes after this time.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, this is simply for it to be read a second time, this is not the vote.

Question proposed: That the new clause 4 be read a second time.

Clerk: New clause 4(5)

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Question proposed: That the new clause be added to the Bill. **Mr. Chairman:** Those in favour say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I have a question.

Mr. Chairman: Those against say no.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Imbert: I have a question, Mr. Speaker. You are taking the vote—

Mr. Chairman: I am going to entertain it.

Mr. Imbert: You are going twice to take the vote, “wais dat”?

Mr. Chairman: No, this is the procedure as laid out.

Mr. Hosein: Correct.

Mr. Chairman: You will get your time. If you have a little patience, you will get your time, right. Go ahead, ask your question to the hon. Attorney General.

Mr. Imbert: “I would like to know after all the histrionics in this debate today by

the UNC, why they left the city of Chaguanas out of the Bill? Why did dey leave out the city of Chaguanas?”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: And secondly, what about the other boroughs? What about the other boroughs? “The ones yuh now creating”. Why does this amendment now correct an error in your Bill where you left out the city of Chaguanas with all the noise you make about it? And what about the other boroughs?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General.

Sen. Jeremie SC: Chairman, the amendment is necessary. It is a consequential amendment in light of the proposal in the Bill to redesignate the Borough of Chaguanas as the city of Chaguanas. So, the reference in section 5(1) of the Act is being amended.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, that answer—

Sen. Jeremie SC: That is my answer, Chair.

Mr. Imbert: Fine, no problem. I have a supplementary question. That answer makes no sense. Because the section being amended says:

Subject to subsection (2) and section 6, this Act shall apply to the city of Port of Spain and the city of San Fernando and so on.

So, they left out the application of the Act to the new city of Chaguanas, why? It is not a consequential amendment.

Mr. Chairman: Attorney General, do you have any further answer?

Sen. Jeremie SC: Absolutely not.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Question put and agreed to.

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Question proposed: That the new clause be added to the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 4 added to the Bill.

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

House resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Khadijah Ameen): Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Municipal Cooperation (Amdt.) Bill, 2026, was considered in the Committee of the whole and approved with amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with the Committee's report.

Question put.

Hon. Member: Division.

Mr. Speaker: In this instance, I am sure you can get a division. I am uncertain as to the previous one.

The House divided: Ayes 27 Noes 11

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Hon. K.

Tancoo, Hon. D.

John, Hon. J.

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R. Lee, Hon. D.

Hosein, Hon. S.

Ameen, Hon. K.

Alexander, Hon. R.

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
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Hon. K. Ameen (cont'd)

Maharaj, Hon. D.

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, Hon. W.

Benjamin, Hon. M.

Sobers, Hon. S.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

Kesar, Hon. E.

Elder, Hon. C.

Sam, Mrs. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. R.

Gosein, Dr. N.

Sampson, J.

NOES

Gonzales, M.

Beckles, Ms. P.

Imbert, C.

Gadsby-Dolly. Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
 Bill, 2026
 Hon. K. Ameen (cont'd)

de Nobriga S.

Manning, B.

Marcelle, K.

Birchwood, C.

Romain, D.

Question agreed to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Khadijah Ameen): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 to establish the City of Chaguanas, and the Boroughs of Barataria, Couva, St. Augustine, and Sangre Grande; 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, and the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations, Chap. 48:50; and for other related matters, be now read a third time and passed.

Question put.

Hon. Member: Division.

The House divided: Ayes 27 Noes 11

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Hon. K.

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
Bill, 2026
Hon. K. Ameen (cont'd)

Tancoo, Hon. D.

John, Hon. J.

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

Lee, Hon. D.

Hosein, Hon. S.

Ameen, Hon. K.

Alexander, Hon. R.

Maharaj, Hon. D.

Mohit, Hon. V.

Sturge, Hon. W.

Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L.

Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.

Ali, Dr. A.

Morris, Hon. W.

Benjamin, Hon. M.

Sobers, Hon. S.

Watts, Hon. P.

Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.

Kesar, Hon. E.

Elder, Hon. C.

Sam, Mrs. S.

Narinesingh, H.

Roopnarine, Dr. R.

Gosein, Dr. N.

Sampson, J.

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
Bill, 2026
Hon. K. Ameen (cont'd)

NOES

Clerk: Mr. Gonzales.

Mr. Gonzales: No to ZoSo!

Clerk: Ms. Beckles

Ms. Beckles: No.

Clerk: Mr. Imbert.

Mr. Imbert: No and no to ZoSo again.

Clerk: Dr. Gadsby-Dolly.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No to dictatorship.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: St. Ann's East, I made it clear. The votes are either yes or no or some of a one-word variation. The clerk is going to ask you back the question.

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, Arouca/Lopinot had the same infraction, so did Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: "Oh gosh, siddong nah, yuh not in charge".

Mr. Speaker: Let us get to St. Ann's East. Clerk, ask back St. Ann's East the question.

Division continued

NOES (*cont'd*)

Gadsby-Dolly, Dr. N.

Young SC, S.

Scotland SC, K.

de Nobriga S.

Manning, B.

Municipal Corporations (Amdt.)
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Marcelle, K.

Birchwood, C.

Romain, D.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed. **Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you most kindly, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this house do now adjourn to Monday, October 12, at 1.30 p.m., when the Minister of Finance, the Member for Fyzabad will present the 2026/2027 fiscal presentation on Budget Day.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the question, we did receive an application for leave to be absent from today's sitting. But through inadvertence, it was not announced. I wish to correct the public record, the Member for Tobago East sought leave to be excused from today's Sitting, and that leave has been granted.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: I now propose to put the question.

Question put.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Padarath: Division!

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I think that was a facetious call for a division. This House now

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stands adjourned to Monday 12th October at 1.30 p m. Good night, everyone.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.36 p.m.