

# Official Report

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2011) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN*

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159<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 21<sup>ST</sup> July, 2011

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*The Assembly convened at 3.06 p.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mdm. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

### **Condolence to Minister Jennifer Westford on the death of her father**

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, I was informed that the Father of the Hon. Minister of Public Service, Dr. Jennifer R. A. Westford, MP, died yesterday afternoon at the St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital after a brief illness. On behalf of the Members of the Assembly, and on myself, I would like to extend our deepest sympathy to Dr. Westford, her mother, and the other children of the late Mr. Reginald Westford. The funeral will be held at the Merriman's Funeral Home tomorrow, Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> July; viewing will be from 12 noon followed by a funeral service at 1.00 p.m.

### **57<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

Hon. Members, I also wish to inform you that the Speaker of the National Assembly, yours truly the Deputy Speaker, Ms. Bibi Shadick, the Rev. Dr. Kwame Gilbert and Mr. Sherlock Isaacs will

be attending the 57<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference which is being held in London, UK, from 21<sup>st</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2011. The Speaker has left this morning and the rest of the delegation will be leaving on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 2011. I will therefore, as you see, be presiding at today's sitting. I am expecting your usual cooperation.

## **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

### **Oral Reply**

#### **DREDGING OF THE DEMERARA, ESSEQUIBO AND BERBICE RIVERS**

**Mrs. Holder:** Are there any plans to dredge the Demerara, Essequibo and or the Berbice Rivers? If so, will the Hon. Minister say which Rivers will be dredged, when, and the likely cost?

**Minister of Transport and Hydraulics [Mr. Benn]:** Mdm. Speaker, as Minister of Transport and Hydraulics in the Ministry of Public Works and Communication, I will make a reply.

Before I do so, however, I would like to also express my condolences to the Hon. Dr. Westford, on the death of her father.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, in reply, the issues on the plans to dredge the Demerara, Essequibo, and Berbice Rivers are receiving attention even now as we prepare the Budget for 2012. The figures we have are certainly only indicative of the proper engineering numbers. The statistics and examination between the agencies, that is the Ministry itself and the Planning Units of the Ministry of Finance, will eventually determine this number in the Budget.

However, I would say that the Berbice River is being continuously dredged, particularly in connection with the activities relating to bauxite shipping. Those figures relate to some 20 million cubic metres a year, and a range of perhaps \$40 to \$50 million per month to achieve a depth of 88.3 metres draft.

The Demerara River has been under dredging for this year up to the end of April, after which we had difficulties with Steve N which was overdue for general docking. It is awaiting docking at

the moment. The intention is to dock it shortly and to have the parts come in to be placed on the vessel.

Eight hundred thousand cubic metres are the indicative numbers which are needed for capital dredging. The cost are to the order, perhaps, of \$500 million for the balance of this year and next year. With the reservations I expressed previously, the intention is for the Steve N to do maintenance dredging in the last quarter, and for all of next year.

The Essequibo River has had a deficit of dredging over the years. There is a plan in the last quarter, towards the end, to do some work on the Bar at Chalmers Point, and the indications are 300,000 metres cube at \$60 million. Those are the plans in place at this time.

**Mrs. Holder:** Thank you. Supplementary question. With respect to the Demerara River, I think you referred to the docking of the dredge. Could you say whether or not you have any intentions of advertising, putting out a tender?

**Mr. Benn:** The docking of the Steve N was advertised, and the vessel is intended to be docked at the GUYNEC (Guyana National Engineering Corporation) Wharf.

**Mrs. Holder:** Through the Chair, is there going to be independent dredging done in the interim and by whom?

**Mr. Benn:** We are examining this issue at the moment and we do not have a final position as yet, but we are working on that issue.

**Mrs. Holder:** Would that be put out to tender?

**Mr. Benn:** For that level of expenditure that is what we always attempt to do; we always put it out to tender.

### **Written Replies**

## **POLICY WITH RESPECT TO THE ISSUING OF SHOT GUN LICENCES TO AMERINDIANS**

**Mrs. Holder:** What is the policy with regards to the issuing of individual shot gun licenses to Amerindian residents who rely on game hunting as a source of protein, an essential nutrient in their diet?

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]:** The Hon Minister of Home Affairs wishes to inform the National Assembly that the policy in relation to Amerindians is to give them priority processing and assist where necessary. Sometimes farms are nearby and they can assist each other.

**Mrs. Holder:** Several residents in the village of Paramakatoi have applied for shot gun licences from as far back as 1996. They have received letters of acknowledgement and reference numbers of their applications from the Commissioner of Police, but no further indication about the status of their applications. Will the Hon. Minister state what has caused the delay?

**Mr. Rohee:** The Hon. Minister of Home Affairs wishes to inform the National Assembly that it would be difficult to process in 2011 a 1996 application. Current applications are being attended to. Nevertheless, if copies of the letters of acknowledgement with reference numbers are available these should be sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs in order to facilitate any further action in this matter.

#### **PROMISE MADE BY THE PRESIDENT**

**Mrs. Holder:** Some years ago President Jagdeo had promised applicants for shot gun licences from the village of Paramakatoi in Region 8 that he would have intervened to expedite the processing of their applications. Would the Prime Minister say if this will still be done?

**Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications [Mr. Hinds]:** The Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications wishes to inform the National Assembly that: First of all, the issue of firearm licences for a number of interior areas, including Paramakatoi, were pending some years ago, and the President, in response to requests from Amerindian communities, offered to ensure that the processing of those applications be expedited.

Hon. Members are well aware that there is a process that must be gone through in accordance with the Firearms Act, Chapter 16:05, in order for persons to be granted firearm licences. Member Mrs. Holder may also remember that the Firearms (Licencing) Regulations 2010, (Regulation No. 1 of 2010) were laid in this House, which made provision for the establishment of a Firearms Licensing Approval Board, whose purpose is to review all applications for firearm licences received from the Commissioner of Police, and submit their own recommendations to the Minister of Home Affairs as to whether the firearm licence should be granted or refused.

I am advised that a number of applications for firearm licences from persons at Paramakatoi have been issued, having gone through the procedures, and some are still pending.

## **MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTING OF THE ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER**

### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 54**

Be It Resolved:

That Standing Order No. 54 be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed at its sitting on Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2011, with the second reading and remaining stages of the National Registration (Amendment) Bill 2011 – Bill No. 14/2011.  
*[Prime Minister and Minister of Public works and Communications]*

**Mr. Hinds:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I rise to move the motion standing in my name, that Standing Order No. 54 be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed at its sitting on Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2011, that is today, with the second reading and remaining stages of the National Registration (Amendment) Bill 2011 – Bill No. 14/2011.

*Question put, and agree to.*

*Standing Order suspended.*

## **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING**

### **1. BROADCAST BILL 2011 – Bill No. 13/2011**

A Bill Intituled:

“AN ACT to make provision for the establishment of Guyana National Broadcasting Authority responsible for the regulation, supervision and development of the National Broadcasting System, to provide for its functions, and to provide for the licensing of broadcasting agencies, and the encouragement of production and broadcasting of television and radio programmes, having relevance generally to life and culture of the people, and for consequential and related matters”.

*[Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications]*

## **2. NATIONAL REGISTRATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2011 – Bill No. 14/2011**

A Bill Intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the National Registration Act”.

*[Minister of Home Affairs]*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members before we proceed with the second reading of the National Registration (Amendment) Bill, we will substitute the Adoption of the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Draft Standing Orders. This is as a result of the delay we had in reaching a consensus, between the Opposition and the Government, on some amendments to the National Registration (Amendment) Bill. What we will do is skip that and after the break come back to the Bill.

We move to the adoption of the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Draft Standing Orders.

### **COMMITTEES BUSINESS**

#### **MOTION**

#### **ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE REPORT OF THE DRAFT STANDING ORDERS**

Be It Resolved:

That this National Assembly adopts the Report of the Special Select Committee on the report of the Draft Standing Orders.  
*[Minister of Health – Chairman of the Committee on the Draft Standing Orders]*

**Minister of Health [Dr. Ramsammy]:** Mdm. Speaker, last week we asked that this motion be placed on the Order Paper.

This motion asks that the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Standing Orders be approved by the National Assembly. The Special Select Committee was established in 2007 to make a thorough review of the Standing Orders that govern the procedures in the National Assembly. The Special Select Committee met thirty-one times. This Committee was reviewing the Standing Orders that were reviewed previously in 2005 and 2006. Following a needs assessment which was done during the Seventh Parliament. The National Assembly, in considering the Report of the Needs Assessment, asked a Special Select Committee, which I was privileged to chair, to review the Standing Orders. That special select committee reviewed the Standing Orders and it was approved in 2006. The Eight Parliament operated under procedures that were amended by the Seventh Parliament.

Subsequently, in 2007, a motion was introduced for another revision of the Standing Orders. As I said, in 2007 the National Assembly appointed a special select committee, and I was privileged to be appointed the Chair of that Committee.

Before I talk about the Standing Orders itself, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I do think I should make some reference to the fact that during the time from 2007 to now when we met, it was an extended period of time because the original motion had only given us three months to complete that review. That proved to be an inadequate period of time because the Members who participated in this revision did a very thorough review of every single Standing Order; we went through them one by one.

I do want to make a plea to Members. We are all very busy people and it is a small number of us who are now engaged in a large number of Special Select Committees. Virtually all of our Bills go through them. Many of us are engaged in other Standing Committees, and there are many Members in this House that are now members of Sector Committees. So ours is a very busy

Parliament. It is an extremely busy Parliament. But we often find ourselves in these Special Select Committees and Sector Committees with poor attendance. This is one Special Select Committee which rarely, if every, had the attendance of all members. Indeed, when we look at the attendance record there was only a 54% attendance. There were thirty-one meetings, and we have ten members. We should have had 310 members as present during the period, but only 54% of members were present. This puts an unreasonable amount of pressure on those of us who were there. Still, we were able to complete this work and we presented our report to this National Assembly.

In this report thirty-three of the standing orders have been ammended or recommendations have been made for amendments to thirty-three of the Standing Orders. Most of these amendments are minor ones. Some amendments try to ensure that we remain consistent; some were language with no substantive change in the procedure. But there are some with substantive changes in the way we operate. There are in fact three new Standing Orders that are proposed.

One of them is Standing Order 73 which we had all agreed on. This has to do with Procedures during the Budget Debates. When we meet in the committee, various sectors make their presentations, and questions come mainly from the Oppostion. We made recommendations that inspite of the fact that each sector is allocated a time period, if during one sector the time has been used up they can continue, but that would mean at the end the total amount of time used up could not be extended. At that point, if there are remaining things to do, the questions will be put altogether. That is one we have been talking about and had agreed even before this Special Select Committee was appointed. This Special Select Committee ensured that an agreement we had on all sides will be put into effect.

Another, Standing Order 23(1), about Public Business, has a change. But this is not a major change. It was modified to take into consideration Statements by Ministers, including Policy Statements. On the Order Paper there is a special sequence in which things are done. One of them is Statements by Ministers, but there is nothing in the Standing Orders to define this and establish the procedure by which that statement is made. We have corrected this in this revised Standing Orders.

A third new Standing Order that has been inserted is Standing Order 87. This gives effect to an agreement we made by resolution in the National Assembly, for the creation of a Parliamentary Oversight Committee on the Security Sector. This was a resolution passed by the National Assembly to establish a Parliamentary Oversight Committee on the Security Sector. We have now inserted a new Standing Order to give effect to that resolution of the Parliament.

We have made other changes in the Standing Orders. The procedures we use in this House are governed by our Constitution, by the Standing Orders, and by customs, practices and rulings of the Speaker. In the new Standing Orders we are proposing, we have recommended that rulings of the Speaker be added as an appendix to the Standing Orders. So the Standing Orders we are recommending for adoption by this National Assembly include an appendix with the rulings of the Speaker made through the Eight and Ninth Parliaments. These are all included now. One of those rulings was done by yourself, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. It is included here. We have tried to capture as many customs and practices as we could in revising the amended Standing Orders.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, this was an extensive piece of work. But in looking at the Standing Orders we also realised that throughout the Seventh, Eight and Ninth Parliaments and even before that, Members sometimes had differences about some of the terms used. We know, and I know that, Minister Rodrigues-Birkett chaired a Special Select Committee on Creating a Manual for the National Assembly. That Manual is part of what guided us in our operations.

We also thought that there is need for a glossary to go along with the Standing Orders. We have drafted a glossary and it is also part of what we present to the National Assembly. We would recommend, and are recommending, within this motion, that the glossary be part of the Standing Orders. When new members come – this glossary is coming at an opportune time - as the Ninth Parliament moves into the Tenth Parliament, we will have Standing Orders given to Members that not only include an appendix of rulings by the Speaker, but also a glossary. Members could then become quite familiar with new terms. Whilst I am fully expecting there would be many veterans in the Tenth Parliament, I also know that on both sides of this House there would be some new people who have never served in the National Assembly.

This is a good time too for members of the public, because these things I am sure will be on the website of the Parliament, so they can read through, know the rules that govern this House; and students could also acquaint themselves with the glossary.

The Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice has been an important part of our work. We used it whenever our Standing Orders did not include special instructions. We have always referred to May's which remains part of the work we do.

It is with a great deal of pleasure and pride, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, that for the second time I stand in this National Assembly, first in the Seventh Parliament and now in the Ninth Parliament, asking that the National Assembly adopt the recommendations to revise the Standing Orders. At this point I would ask that the National Assembly approve the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Standing Orders, and approve that the changes made to the Standing Orders now stand as the Standing Orders of our Country. [Applause]

**Mr. Carberry:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, this exercise, I think, as the Chairman of the Committee has recognised, had a very long gestation. Although I do not believe that any of us would disagree that our Standing Orders should be revisited from time to time, I hope for the future we would utilise the fact that we have a sessional committee called the Standing Orders Committee, and that as an ongoing exercise we would, in fact, deal with issues at that level.

This Committee started life in 2007, and it is now 2011. What was originally intended to be a three-month exercise has been extended to more than three years. There is no doubt that a lot of very valuable work has been done, and the Standing Orders have been improved as a consequence of that very valuable work. When I observed the the time we met and the extended period, it reminded me - that as a child there was a sweet called "*nevah done*". I got the impression at one point this was a "*nevah done*" exercise. I hope that now we have brought it to conclusion, we would not behave as though we are sucking that "*nevah done*" sweet.

3.36 p.m.

But I want to make a point that, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the attendance of the People's National Congress Reform – One Guyana's Members of this Committee, you would have observed, reflected the fact that after the revelation in the Simmel's case, in the United States of America,

the party took a position where, as a matter of principle, it felt that the chairmanship of this Committee should be re-examined. That has not been done and it has, in fact, influenced our attitude towards the attendance of the sessions of this Committee. I believe that, as a National Assembly, we have to recognise that there are certain developments which really cast a very deep shadow on Members here and these matters should never be treated lightly. If we notice what is happening in the United Kingdom, for example, at the moment, with what is called now the phone hacking phenomenon, the people know when they should resign and they have the honesty, purpose and the dedication to service and they know when they should resign.

I am happy that, in fact, this *never-done* exercise has come to an end. I commend these Standing Orders to the National Assembly and I hope that for the future we will utilise the Committees which we established so that, in fact, the ongoing review of the Standing Orders should be something that is normal and regular. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Minister of Labour [Mr. Nadir]:** The work of this particular Committee has been long and tedious, and in spite of the honourable last speaker referring to the fact that a three-month exercise should not have taken this long, the presenter of the motion did mention the fact that we are constrained by the participation of Members of all of the Committees because we do not have a full-time Parliament. We do not have a Parliament where out-of-town Members of Parliament have a home they can come to and spend two weeks here and meet at the Committee meetings. Democracy is an expensive business and we are going to have to make provisions for all of these. But you, yourself, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, having sat through this particular Committee, know the amount of effort everyone made to ensure that we can have these revised Standing Orders before this Ninth Parliament ends. It has been a great sacrifice. The work itself... and we have, still, a very far way to go in our National Assembly. A lot of this work – the work in the Committee that dealt with the Manual for Procedures in Committees – had to be done right there in Committee. The backup research capacities, the abilities, are just not there. Even if we went out to source it, what came back was in such a - I do not want to say - too poor quality, but it was not acceptable to almost if we go through them at a rapid pace. So we had to take many of those things and go back to them over and over again. From the experiences which many persons have had in this National Assembly...I know some, like myself, might sit here for twenty years and learn nothing, but there are other persons, who acquired great knowledge in parliamentary

procedures, have seen the anomalies which propped up that even maze cannot answer, and we have had to grapple with those. Those we could not deal with at the particular point in time we had to go back and come again. So in many Committees the procedure has been adopted that we should get through the non contentious ones; put aside the ones that need some more research, development and thought and come back. And because we also represent political parties, many times when we come back with a suggestion it was not so much that the suggestion did not have any rationalism behind it, but the fact that someone else is proposing it, because of the lack of trust, people had to go back and check. So why is the Government going to accept the amendment to ensure that we have not seven days between the laying of a Bill and the reading? Why are we going to accept six days instead of seven? Somebody went back and said, “Let us examine this thing.” And that was a significant one that took some time because we have seen the work of the Ninth Parliament having been, in several cases, stopped when we came to a second reading and we did not have seven clear days. I think this is one of the ones that had to be changed. So we had to bring it to the National Assembly, at great expense to the taxpayer, and then we had to go back – abandoned the session. This is one of the changes.

I am pleased to hear the last speaker mentioned that the PNCR-1G had some reservations about the chairmanship. I noticed that towards the end there was a lot of participation by the PNCR-1G. So Dr. Ramsammy, I saw that as a vote of confidence in your chairmanship.

While we may see people resigning overseas because of certain scandals, some people may resign because they do not want to be dragged over the coals. I do not know why they resigned and none of us here can speculate. We are saying what reports are appearing about... [An Hon. Member: Where do you cut your hair?] I cut my hair at Chevy in James Street, Albouystown. On Sunday morning you can come.

Dr. Ramsammy, the Chairman of the Committee, mentioned a link between the Standing Orders which were produced out of the process in the Eight Parliament and, like this particular Report here, we came at the very last hour to pass that. So a simple thing like “**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS...**” got left out at the very last. I see the work that we have done here, though long in coming back to the National Assembly, has produced significant and important changes to these Standing Orders that can last a long time. This is like a *never-done* sweetie. I agree because

this particular Standing Order we have here is going to change. It is a *never-done* work. For example, in this Parliament alone, we brought in two new Standing Committees. Is that right, Ms. Teixeira? So we had to now accommodate that. [Ms. Teixeira: There is one new Committee.] There is an additional Committee, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Oversight of the Security Sector. So we have to now add that in too. If that comes in the next Parliament we would have to accommodate that.

The last point: This National Assembly took a decision that this will go - not the Select Committee, but the National Assembly, not the Government alone - to go to a very Special Select Committee to deal with these Standing Orders and not to the Statutory Committee established to deal with Standing Order issues. So to come now and say well we should utilise the mechanism... People should use that at the very beginning and say let us send it to that Committee and not a very special committee and deal with it there. I find it a bit unprincipled to come and say that we did not utilise the established mechanism when we sat here and agreed it will go to this particular Committee.

So I really want to commend the work of Dr. Ramsammy in this because he, himself, had to do an extreme amount of technical work, even offering guidance to the support staff of Parliament Office to ensure that we can get all the changes, advice on the matrices and, you, yourself, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, did yeoman work while I was there, at those sessions that I attended, and the work of the late Hon. Member Mr. Winston Murray in this particular Committee. I, too, stand in support of the recommendations and the adoption of the Report from this Standing Committee. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Ms. Teixeira:** For me, personally, it is with great pride that this has been brought. The fact that it took a number of years...I am not particularly disturbed about that because I do know the work of a number of us who diligently came to meetings, the research which had to be done, the clarifications, the toing and froing, and the advices, both legal and otherwise, on a number of issues which had to be gone on. As Dr. Ramsammy said, this busy little unicameral Parliament of ours, made up of 65 elected Members, runs about twenty-odd committees at any one time and, therefore, it could be imagined that many Members duplicate on a number of assignments in Committees. Unfortunately, in some Committees, some people are diligent about turning up and

others, it can be told from the time they are appointed on the Special Select Committee, that their faces will barely be seen. I think the parties – all of the parties, including my side of the House – should, at some time, review the attendance of certain persons in Committees. Mr. Corbin is looking worried. Mr. Corbin, in fact, your party may not be the guilty one. It is the one behind you.

The resolution that brought this Committee into being was, in fact, a resolution of this House which states...after the tremendous work which was done in the Eighth Parliament on the Standing Orders and new Standing Orders came into being. We immediately started to see a number of issues that, having been out into operation, had to be clarified. There were grey areas that needed to be resolved. So the motion which came to this House was to ask for it to go to a Special Select Committee for those issues to be ironed out.

A lot of work went on and, as the speakers before me have pointed out, a number of the areas were either omitted because of the intensity of completing the work in the Eighth Parliament by, I think, May, 2006 – if I am wrong Dr. Ramsammy would correct me - or were not very clear. When it came to the implementation in the House, we thought that it would be easier if those were developed, new Standing Orders were put in, or the issues clarified. For an example of that was that in the Eighth Parliament, the new Standing Orders talked about a Bill going to a Select Committee or a Sectoral Committee at the first reading and it could also have gone at the second reading, but there was no great clarity in the Standing Orders on how it should be moved, once it got to that Committee, and how it got back to the House, and how it would be dealt with in the House. We went through a lot of discussion in the Committee about how that would work. Whilst it may not look terribly exciting – they are not exciting issues – we feel, most of us who have - forgive me for not saying the Committee - really worked in the Committee... I think I feel proud of being part of that team of both sides of the House that was able to reach agreement on those issues. So the number of areas...There were some speakers before me who pointed out those Standing Orders and there are others who would have made it very clear... For example, in the budget debates, when we began in 2007, in the Ninth Parliament in 2008, it was the Opposition Mrs. Riehl and others who started talking about how we do the allotment of time, and, so having reached agreement in practical ways in the 2009 budget debate and the 2010 budget debate, administratively, we have been trying that in the Standing Orders as a good

practice. So whilst people sometimes think that we fight on everything at all the different levels, at many times in Committee there are a lot of attempts to reach agreement or some level of consensus. And language is something that has to be worked on, and the words which were used, so that everybody had some comfort zone in it.

The resolution also talks about issues which the former Attorney General had raised with the Speaker after the new Standing Orders were produced in 2006. We, as a Committee, went through those issues and reached agreement.

One of the areas we also discussed, in some great detail, was to do with the issue of Committees, recognising that we were a unicameral body and that we only had sixty-five members who were voting. We agreed, in Committee – Mr. Murray was alive and in the debates at that time – that we will allow all Members of the House, whether they are eligible to vote or not, in Committee, that they are eligible to be Members of Committees and eligible to vote when required or if required in the Committee. This, in no way, damages the fact that in the House no non voting Member can vote, obviously. This was to try to reduce some of the stress in terms of persons in Committees. We had a very good discussion on that.

The issues to do with the omissions, as Mr. Manzoor Nadir pointed out, in the cleaning up, editing and correcting some of the mistakes, were part of the work of the Committee. Also, new Standing Orders were included, as earlier speakers have pointed out.

The new Standing Committee on Oversight of the Security Sector, this was certainly a function we played in making sure it reflected the Constitution and the terms of reference agreed by the House. But more importantly is that as Members of this House, I think we should be proud of the fact that there is such a Standing Committee, in the Guyana Parliament, which does not exist in any other Parliament in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Therefore, we should be proud of these initiatives of the Ninth Parliament.

As we are coming down the line in the Ninth Parliament, I want to say that - to really support what Minister Manzoor pointed out - unlike in a number of Parliaments which have experts, and so on, and certainly where we can find experts they were allowed too in Committees, we have found that in the parliamentary practices and procedures, other than the Clerk of the National

Assembly, Mr. Isaacs, here with us, that there are few people we can call to, except ourselves and, of course, the Speaker. So we have developed a certain capacity to deal with some of these issues. Therefore, probably over time, as the Members of Parliament retire, or are no longer Parliamentarians, they will be the type of experts we will bring into the Committee in the latter period, or later Parliaments, which will come. But I think that, in this Parliament, the work on the manual which was done, as Mr. Nadir pointed out, we actually rewrote the entire manual, is now the property of this House.

The glossary...by the way, and it was not mentioned by any other speaker, and it is not to blow my own trumpet. I got an idea as a Member of the House, not necessarily in the Committee, that a number of terms of Parliament were sometimes undefined and not in anywhere could you find them unless you went through *Erskine May's Treaties on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* and other Parliaments. Therefore, I volunteered, as a Member of that Committee, to prepare a draft glossary which will be for use of this House. It went through some amendments, thanks to the Members of the Committee, the Clerk and the Speaker, and it is before this House. Please note that I was not paid as a Committee Member or consultant to do this. It was my voluntary initiative and my volunteerism for this Parliament.

I hope that the documents which come out of this Parliament - the manual, the glossary, the new Standing Orders, as amended - will really enhance the quality of the Parliament, in the Tenth Parliament, and they will be useful documents for all Members of Parliament (MPs), new and those who will be coming back. I have also suggested to the Clerk that once, whatever, cleaning up has been done with these documents that we put them all on CD- ROMS so that in the new Parliament, the new MPs will get an entire package of all the documents so that they will brief them and keep them well informed as well as, of course, per norm, doing hard copies.

It has been a pleasure working on this Committee, and I must say that the interesting dialogues, disagreements, agreements and struggles to find the words that we can reach consensus on has been one, for me, a delightful Committee to be on with those who really have this interest. I look forward for other such initiatives coming out of this Parliament.

We support the Chairman in that the Report to be adopted, in totality, which includes the rulings of the Speaker. We have also proposed that the rulings of the Speakers of this House, from

whenever we can find them, be created in a separate booklet so that the rulings of the various Speakers can become our own, with the Standing Orders, the glossary and the manual, version of the Erskine May's of the Guyana Parliament and we should be proud of the work we have done. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Dr. Ramsammy (replying):** Let me just say thank you to all the Members of this Committee. I particularly want to thank the Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, Minister Nadir, you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, and also the late Mr. Winston Murray. I do want to say that these Standing Orders being proposed were all agreed to by consensus. I cannot recall at any point during the deliberations of this Special Select Committee that we had to vote. We talked through these. Some were long deliberations, but in the end we all agreed to a formulation for those Standing Orders which we have amended.

It would be remiss of me if I do not, on behalf of all the Members of this Committee, thank the Members and staff of the Parliament Office. They were at our beck and call and, at all times, were of service to this Committee. So I would like to extend my gratitude and our gratitude to the Committee staff and to the staff of the Parliament Office. This has been great work and, I think, this is something that we all can be proud of.

So thank you very much and I move that this be adopted.

*Question put and carried.*

*Report adopted.*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, I will like to thank all the Members of the Special Select Committee on the Draft Standing Orders for the hard work they have done in ensuring that the work of the Committee was completed before the end of the life of this Parliament. It is the duty of the Parliament Office to incorporate these amendments made in the Standing Orders, and I was just told by the Clerk that arrangements have already been made for these new Standing Orders to be printed in Trinidad. So, as early as possible, the new Standing Orders will be available.

Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to take the suspension. The sitting is suspended for one hour.

*Sitting suspended at 4.00 p.m.*

*5.12 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 5.12 p.m.*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, in giving the “**ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER**”, one announcement was omitted which I will like to give you now.

### **Resignation of Mr. Lall**

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Speaker has received from Mr. Kellawan Lall a letter dated 15<sup>th</sup> of July, 2011 resigning his seat as a Member of Parliament with effect from the 20<sup>th</sup> of July, 2011. With Mr. Lall’s resignation, a seat in the National Assembly has become vacant. The vacancy is, in accordance with section 99 (a) of the Representation of the People Act, chapter 1:03, to be filled by a person whose name is to be extracted from the list of candidates from which Mr. Lall’s name was extracted. As Mr. Lall’s name was extracted from the People’s Progressive Civic list of candidates, I have, in accordance with section 99 of the said Act, called upon the representative of the said list to further extract from that list the name of a person who is willing to become a Member of the National Assembly to fill the vacancy in this Assembly.

### **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

### **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

### **BILL – SECOND READING**

### **NATIONAL REGISTRATION (AMENDMENT) BILL – Bill No. 14/2011**

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the National Registration Act.”

*[Minister of Home Affairs]*

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]:** I wish to move that this National Registration (Amendment) Bill – Bill No. 14/2011 be read a second time.

The Bill which we have before us, which is an amendment Bill, I understand, has been subjected to very lengthy negotiations just prior to the convening to the House, earlier this afternoon. I understand that a general consensus was reached by the Leader of the Opposition, and his team, and the Attorney General of Guyana and the Minister of Justice. I believe that with the amendments which were subsequently made to the Bill put in proper perspective what both sides of the House would wish to have in respect of the matter which arose out of the necessity by the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) to persons whose names were not included in the list of electors due to the fact that they did not at the time when the registration was taking place, and, secondly, at the time when the period of the claims and objections was on its way and was brought to an end, as a result of which a significant number of persons, running into couple thousands, were not registered as voters. I think that we all will agree that it is the interest of all the political parties, particularly the major political party, the major player...

I have noticed that there have been some transformational changes in the electoral formation within recent times. But also in respect of the smaller political parties, represented in the House, it is in their interest to have as many persons as possible registered as voters, something which the Guyanese people, as a whole, fought for in the past decades, that is to say, to have their rights to elect a Government of their choice and to exercise their franchise. Therefore, I think the intention of the Bill as understood by the parties and, principally, by GECOM...

Some people used the term “reopening of the claims and objections period”, but whatever way it would be described... Some for political purposes, misleading in a way, speak about extending the life of the Government when it has nothing to do with that. Some speak about numbers. I think if we are talking about numbers we are talking about numbers of persons who have been left off the list and the wish, or the desire, by the political parties which will be contesting elections to have as many of the persons included on their list. Thus, the attempt by GECOM or the decision of GECOM, I think, coincides, generally speaking, with the interest of the political parties to have their constituents registered, to have their constituents have the source documents.

We recognised that there are difficulties not having the source document, birth certificates, in time to register.

Be that as it may, I do not think that this is the time to be casting blame in any direction. I think we need to get away from that. We need to get away from the blame game because I know that is what is going to come and it can be seen from their reaction that persons are seeking, in this Hon. House, to cast blame in some direction; to claim some institution of the State was not fully geared and prepared to ensure that persons did have their source documents. But, as I said, that is neither here nor there. Let us get to the heart of the matter and the heart of the matter is there are about six to seven thousand people out there who do not have source document. They need to get the source document in their hands and that is what we are working at with the General Registrar's Office to ensure that it is happening. So what we want is a win-win situation. Everybody wins at the end of the day - the political parties win, GECOM wins and the people win.

So let us, so to speak, bury the hatchet and smoke the peace pipe of this matter. Let us move forward as one trying, over the next thirteen days, to encourage those who we know to get registered, so that when the bell tolls, we do not know who the bell will toll for as yet, we will all be ready to contest. We will have a process which is so transparent, we will have a process in which we are all satisfied fully, that no casting of aspersion on the legitimacy of the process will ever take place.

Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [Applause]

**Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Corbin]:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, it is unfortunate that the PPP administration is leaving office setting the same example it set when it began its term of office of lack of consultation and total arrogance in the way it has managed the affairs of this country. It is unfortunate – very unfortunate. There is good reason to be concerned about this because last evening around 7.00 p.m. this legislation was delivered to my home, and, of course, the Supplementary Order Paper, that the Government intended to proceed with this Bill, throughout all its stages, this afternoon. I must admit that it was not a complete surprise since I am a Guyanese, I am involved in the politics of this country and I will be untruthful if I said it was not anticipated having regard to all that has happened in the proceedings of the Guyana Elections

Commission and what was reported in the media over the last few days. So I do not comment on the procedures, on the fact that the Bill was necessary, but on the manner in which this administration, faced with this reality, approached the matter, as I said in the same way it began.

We are a very pragmatic party, and recognising that this Bill does not require a two-thirds majority to be passed we, in the PNCR – 1G, sought, in the limited hours available, to suggest some amendments which we believe would be palatable and to, in our opinion, provide certain safeguards. I am pleased that the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, my learned friend and colleague in this House, was objective enough to spend, some time before the commencement of this House, understanding the mischief which the PNCR – 1G was concerned about and was willing to look at those matters and address them in a very objective manner. I appreciate that.

I understand that there has been some concerns by other parties about who I was representing, but I make no apologies that I was looking after the interest of the PNCR - 1G because of the fact that throughout the process of the electoral exercise and registration I, as the Leader of the Opposition, have kept all political parties abreast with developments, sending them copies of letters, alerting them to developments and dangers, and even arranging for them to be briefed by members of the Guyana Elections Commission. Despite those efforts some parties choose to do their representation to the Guyana Elections Commission outside of a board framework. So I make no apologies of representing the PNCR-1G's interest in the matters which are before the House today.

As I said, we have made certain suggestions for changes and it appears that those changes will provide certain safeguards, but notwithstanding the entreaties of my good friend, on the other side, the Minister of Home Affairs, who must, I know, be very clairvoyant to know our concerns, being the one who was most guilty of this travesty that we are faced with today. Those discussions and amendments which the Attorney General was willing to accommodate do not negate the fact that this piece of legislation, which we have had to agree with, is discriminatory and it is likely to still cause persons constitutional rights to be infringed. I will speak about that in a few minutes.

The background must be carefully understood because there have been a lot of propaganda in the last few weeks on the national television and radio - rather than educational material, a lot of propaganda - about what was happening with the registration process and it needs to be corrected for the record in this House. This process which we are about to enable did not happen overnight. I recall, just prior to the 2006 General and Regional Elections, there was an attempt to have a voters list in this country that was beyond controversy. I do not think that it can be denied that for decades a major source of concern in this country has been the voters list, whichever party was in office. So, prior to 2006, there was a serious attempt to ensure that we prepared a voter's list which was beyond question and we have sought, then, to exercise from the old voters list those names that could not be verified. We have sought, prior to 2006 elections, to have that process done.

We came to the National Assembly with a rushed piece of legislation just like this and that is why we have to put in safeguards now. We came to the National Assembly with a rushed piece of legislation which speaks about verifying the voters list and we urge certain safeguards be put in it. We were told that the Guyana Elections Commission will, in its administering of arrangements, look at that verification. At that time there was a document before the Guyana Elections Commission which stated that there was going to be a certain process employed for that verification process but as soon as the legislation was passed that administrative procedure was abandoned and it went into the 2006 elections without the house-to-house verification being done. We still did not remedy the mischief. There was still controversy over the 2006 voters list. I am going back to explain this so that it could be understood why there was a grave concern.

The Government, in hindsight, recognised that it was necessary for us to move in a positive direction and so on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, 2007 an agreement was signed between the Government of Guyana, the parliamentary political parties and the Guyana Elections Commission, in the presence of certain members of the diplomatic corps, for a preparation of a new national register of registrants by house-to-house registration prior to the holding of Local Government and future elections in Guyana. This was the genesis of this exercise which we are about to tidy up here today. So I mentioned this to emphasise that this is not a process that started with the claims and objections period a few weeks ago. It started since 2007 when this agreement was signed.

This agreement provided for certain expectations, one of which was... and I will quote from this document that I have just read, and it is signed for the want of identification by one Mdm. Gail Teixeira, on the part of the Government of Guyana, as governmental adviser, one, Hon. Member D. Ramotar, now presidential candidate, not setting a good example on consultation though, for representing the People's Progressive Party, your humble servant as representing the PNCR-1 Guyana, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, Alliance For Change, Mr. E. Franklin, Guyana Action Party. I am not sure of the name of the person whose signature appears here, but I know that it is a member who, I believe, is now the new leader of The United Force signing on behalf of The United Force. The name is not written out, but I am sure I remember her being present at the signing. What is her name?

**Hon. Members:** Ms. Lowe.

**Mr. Corbin:** Yes, I think it was Ms. Lowe, but it is just an initial here, who signed on behalf of the TUF - The United Force.

Now, what were the objectives? First of all, at paragraph one, two, three, four, it ends up saying after, its revision, "a final voters list will be created for the next General and Regional Elections scheduled for 2011." It speaks about Local Government Election, but I am just reading those which are parts relevant. "All of the above mentioned parties pledge that they will fully recognise and accept the new NRR compile from the new house-to-house registration and will equally support its use for the extraction of the PLE for the Local Government Election scheduled for 2008..." 2008! "...and as of dated by continuous registration for the extraction of the PLE for General and Regional Elections scheduled for 2011."

I say this to point out how dated the process was and there were certain obligations in this document. One of which, I just pointed out, is the obligation of the political parties to give every support to GECOM to ensure that the process was expedited and at the same time, the obligation which we took on, to accept the final list which will be out of this exercise as a list that will be used for all future elections. We want to remove all controversies. It is precisely because of that objective that there was an agreement to ensure the authentication of every person who was registered, so there was the introduction of source document, as marriage certificate, birth certificate, and the decision was not lightly taken. It was taken within the context that a certified

and verified national registration base is needed so that after now it is certain that the people on that list are properly verified and certified, scrutineers of various parties observe it and so everybody is happy with it. That is the reason why source document came in to the picture.

I saw some strange statements from the Government, and heard it on the radio as if the Guyana Elections Commission imposed some impossible obligations on the citizens. But if it is put in the context of what was the objective, the idea of having authenticated source documents to set up a permanent base in this country had to be understood. We had no problems supporting those criteria for people to be put on that list, because there were provisions for scrutineers to verify the process, go to the people's home, see that the document is in order and object so that they could not quarrel about it. What did the Government obligate to do, Mdm. Deputy Speaker? In this agreement, and I quote from this agreement again, states:

“The Government of Guyana undertakes to ensure that there are no financial, administrative, legal or institutional impediments for implementation of the above arrangements...”

This is what is here.

“...undertook to ensure...”

I do not know if the Attorney General did not vet that agreement. It was before his time.

“...no financial, administrative, legal or institutional arrangement to make this exercise possible.”

After the first phase of house-to-house registration was completed, it was clear that the present cultural patterns in our country... where people sometime, in some area, did not register their births; that in some cases people who had come here and be living long, citizens of CARICOM, and who have become naturalised Guyanese did not go through the process of naturalisation. There are all kinds of problems which arose for those persons to acquire the relevant source document in order to make them eligible for registering, not last week, since the house-to-house registration commence years ago. Years ago, recognising this problem, GECOM was written to and asked that it look at these problems which people were experiencing to see what could be

done to expedite this matter, since 2008. We were told that GECOM would make representation, not in 2011, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, three years ago. I need to give this background to understand why we are as irritated as we are that we have come to this, because after writing to GECOM, after 2008, explaining that if this was to be done effectively to remove those bottlenecks there was need for the Government to honour its obligations to under this agreement by making certain institutional and administrative arrangement to remove the bottlenecks - three years ago.

GECOM was spoken to. GECOM, we are aware, requested a meeting with the very presenter of the Bill, this afternoon, the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs and his team, explained this very problem to the Hon. Minister suggesting that a special project unit be set up at the General Registrar's Office so that all the people of Guyana, not just a few people who are being hustled to get on now for special political reasons, will have an opportunity to use that project unit to put themselves in order to enjoy the constitutional rights to be registered. Lo and behold, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, even though GECOM promised to get foreign financing to make that project unit operational, the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs told it that it did not have to worry; everything was under control with GECOM and refused the General Registrar's Office. In fact he actually said that it was none GECOM's business; it should mind its own business, and let the Ministry of Home Affairs mind its business. That was the level of the arrogance we had: that was not GECOM's business. It seems suddenly that it is GECOM's business today because it has to now make a request that it made several years ago and a scapegoat is found, and the Attorney General is forced now to hustle up with the law. If he had known all that was happening he might have urged, all along, to avoid him having to rush special legislation.

*5.42 p.m.*

Three years ago, when this problem could have been addressed and a project unit established so that all Guyanese could benefit, the Government adamantly refused to set up a system, even though funding would have been provided. There is no doubt. I am on public record, at numerous press conferences, calling on the Government to do something about this. At a press conference, earlier this year, when I spoke about it the Guyana Registrar's Office had the temerity to reply to me in the media - I thought that would have been left for the politicians - to

say that I was misleading the people and that she was producing twenty-five thousand birth certificates and there was no bottleneck there. It is in the public records. I do not want to go back to the newspapers to quote. Rather than addressing the real problem, it was as if the Leader of the Opposition and the political parties were making political mileage, or as they say “grandstanding”. They like to use that cliché.

Therefore, on February 9<sup>th</sup> of this year - I want to place it on record, having had such serious bottlenecks – I wrote to GECOM, I copied this letter to all the political parties as I said before, including the Leaders of the Alliance For Change, National Front Alliance, Working People Alliance (WPA), all the parties. I do not want to read the whole letter. I want to bring to the attention of the Government why this strange behaviour, at this ninth hour, must arouse suspicion, because on February 9<sup>th</sup> 2011, this is what I wrote to the Chairman and Commissioners of GECOM:

“The PNCR wishes to express its appreciation for the cordially meeting held with its representatives and Chairman and Members of GECOM on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011 to discuss matters of concern following the conclusion of the continuous registration process. At that meeting several matters of mutual interest were discussed, among them, the difficulties faced by some eligible persons in being registered because of their inability to obtain, in a timely manner, the relevant source documents, such as, birth and marriage certificates from the General Registrar’s Office.”

And it goes on to elaborate on some issues which could have been dealt with, even earlier this year, at the end of the continuous registration process. I came to the National Assembly, even before that and, I think it was during the 2010 budget debate, mentioned that I just come from the North West District, an area that the Hon. Member Mr. Ramotar is suddenly very concerned about when he looked at the number of persons registered there. He just woke up. Now he is saying that there is one thousand and eighty-six persons. Was that the number he gave? Let me see. The Hon. Member said there is some one thousand and eighty-six persons that he had just discovered without birth certificates. Yes, it is one thousand and eighty-six persons. No, that is in

Region 9. In Region 1, he said he has found seven hundred and twenty- five persons. He suddenly woke up last week and found these figures.

When I came to the National Assembly, here, not for political grandstanding, I pointed out that I had just come from the Aruka River, and I mentioned the villages, that there were Amerindian Welfare Officers who had collected documents of birth certificates and were not returning them, and that we needed to do something. We were prepared to help to get the birth certificates to those persons in the indigenous communities. I was laughed at with scorn, as if I was making a joke. I have the *Hansard* here, Madam. It is 2010. [Ms. Teixeira: Did it say laugh?] It did not say laugh. The behaviour mimics that.

This was what the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs in her response, and I am quoting from the *Hansard* of her presentation in the budget speech 2010, not this year, or last week, said:

“We have also been supporting the delivery of birth certificates prepared by the Ministry of Home Affairs. This will help to alleviate many people’s concerns as it relates to those issues, since the Government does not bury its head in the sand and say everything is fine and glorious.”

That was her response to the issue - I am quoting from the *Hansard* - when I raised this as a burning issue in the 2010 budget debates, not in 2011, when persons needed a joint arrangement, as how the Attorney General and I have worked out what we would accept in the difficult circumstances as a Bill. That is what should have been happening then. What do we need to put in place to give every Guyanese an equal opportunity to make them eligible to get on the voters list? But, again, there was the total ignoring of it.

We did not rest on our laurels there. This matter was constantly raised with GECOM. The joint political parties, and all the opposition parties, wrote GECOM, saying, “Please go back and speak with Mr. Rohee and see if he has converted yet to the reality”. Because, by now, the People’s Progressive Party, if it was on the ground, must also know that these are real problems and not political gimmickry. I fail to appreciate that a political party on the ground would not similarly experience the problems which we were experiencing, the complaints that citizens were

making all along. But there was this deafness, this refusal for some strange reason, not to address the core of the problem.

We did not give up. On May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the General Secretary now wrote to GECOM, again, to *Dr. Surujbally*. I do not want to read the whole letter. I want to read the relevant portions to see why the behaviour of GECOM... Now, in the face of one letter signed by the potential presidential candidate, one Mr. Donald Ramotar, on behalf of the PPP, suddenly somersaulted... [Dr. Ramsammy: It is the presidential candidate. It is not potential.] He is not presidential candidate until his name is on the list, as you know, when his name is submitted on nomination day. On the 30<sup>th</sup> May, the General Secretary wrote GECOM this time, and this is what he stated to GECOM:

“Dear Dr. Surujbally,

The PNCR is on record as supporting the GECOM’s decision on the types of source document needed to enable any applicant to be able to become registered in the National Register of Registrants (NRR). You will recall that very early efforts were made by the PNCR through GECOM to have the Government establish a task force to speed up the processing of relevant source documents...”

And it goes on to say what we were willing to do and how we were willing to cooperate. I want to read this section very carefully about what we were telling GECOM. This was addressed from the General Secretary on the 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2011, and this is what he said in the second to last paragraph of this letter:

“In the course of last month alone, this party has submitted to GRO hundreds of applications, a large portion of which are still outstanding, and with each passing day more are being received by us. As I write this note to you, another batch is being processed for dispatch to the GRO. Although the turnaround time has been significantly reduced over the last month, current arrangements will still leave many potential voters unable to be registered by the expiry date. In view of this, the party will be pleased to know what options are available to the Commission to deal with this issue.”

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Your time is up Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr. Carberry:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I move that the Leader of the Opposition be given fifteen minutes more to continue his presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mr. Corbin:** So on the 30<sup>th</sup> May, we made another appeal. We gave statistics from statistics. We said, “Look, these are statistics that could have easily been verified.” We had the list of names of persons who we were assisting to get source documents. Had there been a special project unit we would have sent it there and those persons would have been helped. But we had to go through the long drab of a line. You only have to go to the first floor of the General Registrar’s Office, any day, you will see the line of persons waiting there, and inconvenience it has. I am not blaming the General Registrar and her staff. We knew that they were incapable of doing their work, because it is not only the General Registrar’s role. For some of the problems would require lawyers. If there is a process with late registration applications, a magistrate has to be found. So if a general project unit was set up it might have been able to coordinate all these various activities which would have facilitated the expeditious dealing with such issues faced by potential electors. But there was a blind eye and a total ignoring of the plight of Guyanese, who are eligible for registration, who the propagandist of this administration, over the last few weeks, has suddenly been claiming to be so concerned about, and that the PNC and other parties do not want them registered. This is the kind of propaganda out there - we want to deprive the persons, for whom we are opening the register to and get in, from being registered... [Mr. Ramotar: *[inaudible]* You have to explain that.] I will explain.

As late as June, when we wrote and approached GECOM, the Chairman of the Elections Commission, faced with the reality of his Commission, sent me a letter dated July 1<sup>st</sup>, and he has in it, “Some considerations pertaining to the suggestion that GECOM, could/should open an avenue for unregistered persons to become registered.” I do not want to bore the National Assembly. There are some thirteen considerations – three pages – all pointing to the fact- and this was on June 29<sup>th</sup> - why really it cannot be done. Just before that, we got another document with twenty-one considerations. In other words, this thing was so impossible to do - a logistical

nightmare. We ended up with the claims and objections period coming to an end without this fundamental problem being addressed.

The reason we wrote very early was because GECOM, on its own, has the power, and had the power, without having to come to this National Assembly, under existing laws, to extend the period of claims and objections, rather than rushing to close it. But like us, we knew that even if it extended it for six months it could not address the problem, just as this Bill here, today, will not address the problem faced by many Guyanese. It will not correct the mischief. GECOM probably came to the conclusion that since the Government was unwilling, for two years, to change the system or to put in place a system which can really deal with the core problem, that even if it continues extending the claims and objection period, it will still not really help a lot of persons who are facing problems. That is why, perhaps, it decided it was not going to extend the claims and objections period, even though last minute appeals were made by us to it.

So I got this letter from GECOM basically saying that it was going ahead and close the claims and objections period anyway. Whoever was registered was registered. That is what basically it said. "Do not bother us anymore; we are going ahead. There are so many considerations and it cannot be done." But then all of a sudden, on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011, GECOM was in receipt of a letter, but I believe one was sent a few days before – I am not privy to all – signed by the General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party, Mr. Donald Ramotar. On June 8<sup>th</sup>, he followed up with another letter to GECOM, captioned, "Summary of eligible Guyanese who were unable to register as electors during the just concluded claims and objections period."

So, the General Secretary now woke up, after everything was finished, like Rip Van Winkle, after years of sleeping, on the 8<sup>th</sup> June. With just such concern he sent an attachment, he wanted it to be reopened. I know that the Attorney General did not deal with the political... That is why I did not engage him on the political..., because I know that is not his area. This is the Hon. Member Mr. Ramotar's area. His concerns were not for the whole of Guyana, but for about seven hundred and twenty-five persons who he managed to get source documents for in Region 1. I do not want to name the villages. These are the same villages which we were concerned about with the padding of the list in the past. In Region 1 - seven hundred and twenty five, Region 2 - seven hundred and twenty-one, from some specific areas, Region 3 - two hundred and

eighty, East Coast Demerara - a big area as the East Coast Demerara - one hundred and fifty-nine, the East Bank Demerara, the whole of the East Bank - one hundred and forty-three. In Region 5, he is concerned about seventy. Region 6, he has eight hundred and fourteen there to get on this list. Region 9 - one thousand and eighty six – do you understand me? He got source documents for them now. Region 10, there is three hundred and two.

So all of a sudden, the General Secretary of the PPP, having now, probably, obtained the source documents for those and others, woke up, like Rip Van Winkle, and wrote to GECOM saying he wants those persons on the list; GECOM must go so and so. The Commissioners who had refused, voted against reopening this process, suddenly somersaulted to the wishes of the General Secretary of the PPP, and the Government, saying, “Yes, we agree that there is now a case made out and we will reopen the process just to accommodate those persons not registered”. How can we speak of justice and equality of opportunity and behave in this manner? It is in this context, as I said when I began my presentation, that this legislation is discriminatory, because it has failed to address the core problem. It is not only those persons, who Mr. Ramotar and the PPP would like to get on the list, are faced with those problems, but those persons who were unable to get their problems solved and who would not be able to make full use of the thirteen-day period this list is opening for.

It is discriminatory from that point of view, and that is why when we heard GECOM speaking about extending the period we were concerned because we knew that that was not the mischief. The mischief is not the extension. The mischief really is a system to make sure eligible persons get documents. It cannot be done in thirteen days, and the only persons who will benefit are those who managed to have got their source documents. We are hustling to get all those we want. We are encouraging them to get it too. It is not that we would not have supporters and members who would not benefit, but the majority of persons who will benefit are those who have been facilitated by those who are in control of that machinery that they have refused to adopt to help everyone else - discrimination to the highest.

The Bill before the House, as I said, will indeed be helpful for those persons who have managed to get the source documents. It is for that reason, from a pragmatic standpoint, that we have tried to discuss, in a very pragmatic way, with the Government arrangements that can ensure that a

number of things happen. One, this legislation must be applied across the board. In other words, anyone who is eligible now, for whatever reason, and the process is reopened for thirteen days, must be able to register. There must be no discretion that only the names supplied by the PPP, PNC or by the AFC ... [Mr. Ramotar: Mr. Corbin, they really have you bad there, now.] No. I called the PNC and the AFC. In other words, it should be across the board. There would be persons who would not be associated with anyone, they might be supporting A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) in the future, and we want them to have an equal opportunity to be registered. That is why we made certain recommendations and the Attorney General agreed that it was not the intention of the legislation to deprive anybody. So everybody will have an opportunity, once that person satisfies the basic criteria to be registered.

The second one is that this legislation should be a one-off amendment because if it is left in permanently it could be creating a bit of mischief in the future. So it is a one-off arrangement.

Thirdly, of course, we want to make sure that the procedures which are employed in the process of registration comply with the existing statutory provisions for registration. That is, they must have the documents; they must be scrutinised and the scrutineers must go out. We did not want to leave any gaps for misinterpretation. As I said, we were caught in that vice in 2006 when we did not specify that the procedures for verification be put in the legislation [Mr. Ramson: But you did not file any case.] It would have been like the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), and like the Integrity Commission which has never seen the light of day, even though it was right for hearing since 2005, Attorney General. Maybe if you were in the High Court or the Court of Appeal you would have ensured that the case be heard. But in 2005, that case was right for hearing and it has not been heard yet by the High Court; that is why we have not gone yet to the Courts. It is a waste of time. I wonder when the ERC case will be heard, because I heard a lot of contempt taking place. You better advise your officer that he cannot go in the office and pretend to be the Commissioner [Mr. Ramson: Is he working at the Attorney General's Chambers now?] No. But you are the Government's office to advise that he has no authority in the ERC, until the Courts decides. It is contempt. [Mr. Ramson: I did not know that he was working in the Attorney General's Chambers.] Find out. You must give them legal advice.

The point we want to make is that we are putting these safeguards not because we believe that this legislation could really address the magnitude of the issue that is at hand, but it is the best that one can do in these circumstances. Had the Government done what it was supposed to do, according to this original agreement which was signed since 2007 June, the institutional arrangements would have been put in place so that all Guyanese would have been able to benefit. Four years later we should not have had any issue about Guyanese having problems with source documents, everyone should have been in order by this time, four years later.

It is arrogance; it is refusal to consult; it is contempt for other views which has led us into this position. As the PPP leaves office, I want to urge it to reflect on its evil ways, and urge to the Minister, in the few more days that he has as a Minister – yes, elections will be held before December; you can count it in days – that it is not too late, because this is an exercise that will have to be continuously addressed. This is supposed to be something that will be the impotunity. So there is going to be Local Government Election soon. Are we going to have the same problem again? Are we going to come to the National Assembly a week before the Local Government Election and say we are going to pass a special legislation to get a few persons in, rather than addressing the core problem of putting in institutional arrangements that these problems can never occur?

I therefore hope that the Government will not misuse this opportunity. Even in these thirteen days which are available, the Minister should put some special arrangements in place at the General Registrar Office to facilitate those persons that Mr. Ramotar may not be able to help. He will make the arrangements so that persons can be helped during this period.

We, in the People's National Congress Reform, in keeping with our commitment, have already encouraged those Guyanese who have been deprived of an opportunity to register, to seize these last thirteen days to get on the voters list. We apologise to those others who have suffered tremendously by the behaviour - the atrocious behaviour – of our dear Minister of Home Affairs who refused to put a system in place to help them.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Dr. Anthony]:** I rise in support of the amendments proposed to the National Registration Act which allows for the insertion of section 14 (a). We have heard the Leader of the Opposition making various arguments on this section which we are debating here today. But I think, for all of us, the most important thing is why is it we need to amend this law? The basic thing is that we need to amend the law because there are thousands of Guyanese who have met the age requirement but are not on the list of eligible electors for the 2011 General and Regional Elections. How is this possible? This happened because of the provision which we now require, and it goes back to 2005 when GECOM took that decision which required everyone to register with their Guyanese birth certificate or passport.

*6.12 p.m.*

As you could imagine, some people had their birth certificate while others have lost or misplaced theirs and there are some persons who have never bothered to register their births. These two later categories had to make an application to the General Registrar Office (GRO) for their certificate and upon receiving it they then present themselves to GECOM's registration centre to get registered.

GECOM itself recognised that eligible electors were having difficulties and during a meeting with the Private Sector Commission not so long ago on the 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2011 Dr. Steve Surujbally acknowledged that during the 2008 House to House Registration, approximately 38,000 persons could not have applied for registration because they were not in possession of their source documents. Since 2008 to now, many persons have made genuine attempts to get themselves in order. In fact, it is reported that the just concluded claims and objection period from the 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2011 to 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, more than 16,900 persons were registered in just one month. 16,900 persons were properly registered under the full glare of all concerned stakeholders – PPP/C scrutineers and opposition scrutineers.

I think the work that they would have done and we need to commend them – GECOM and the GRO – for facilitating this. But despite these valiant efforts by the possible electors, GECOM and other stakeholders, it was still felt that thousands of persons can possibly be disenfranchised. This is not just a government problem; it is not just an opposition concern, but a collective concern by both government and opposition parties. Early in the year, as Mr. Corbin said, the

People's National Congress (PNC) flagged this concern with GECOM and they probably did that earlier than this year. But during this year, as he said, on the 7<sup>th</sup> February, on the 30<sup>th</sup> May, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June and the 29<sup>th</sup> June, they flagged this concern. The joint opposition political parties which comprise the PNC, Guyana Action Party/Rise Organise and Rebuild Guyana (GAP/ROAR), the National Front Alliance and Working People's Alliance (WPA) also expressed similar concerns on the 10<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, just as the aims and objection period was nearing an end. The Alliance For Change (AFC) stated similar concerns on the 24<sup>th</sup> May, 2011 during the claims period and the Private Sector Commission expressed similar concerns on the 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, almost at the end of the claims period. All of these stakeholders were echoing the same thing that we have a potential problem and can GECOM do something about it. From my understanding, GECOM reviewed the matter. Their initial discussion on the matter revealed that they felt that the number of persons who were left off the list was relatively small. In fact, they were talking about 400 persons. And based on this information that there were only 400 persons, the Commission took a decision that they would not extend the claims and objection period. The People's Progress Party/Civic (PPP/C), during the Claims and objection period, because we had hundreds of volunteers across Guyana verifying the preliminary list of electors, through our field work, were able to document the several thousands of persons who were unregistered. The magnitude of the problem was much greater than anticipated and the PPP/C brought that information to the attention of GECOM. The GECOM Commissioners then reopened a discussion on the matter and decided that the prudent thing to do was to reopen the process for these thousands of persons who have been unable to register to get an opportunity to do so. I have to make this point too: when GECOM was having those discussions and was deliberating the projected date of elections, they were saying it would be sometime around the 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2011. This was two months before the constitutional deadline so in their discussions they felt that reopening would not compromise having the elections within the constitutional deadline. I would like to commend GECOM for its decision.

This, Hon. Opposition Leader, is not a decision for one village or one region, but for the whole of Guyana. This decision is not for one political party but for all political parties interested in contesting the general elections. More importantly, their decision is about the ordinary man and woman who have been left off the list because they did not have their birth certificates so we

need to put them on the list of electorates. I find it strange that some opposition parties which have been diligently calling on GECOM to find a mechanism, now when it has found the mechanism, are having difficulty in supporting the mechanism. I am happy that today pragmatic and better sense prevailed. I am happy about that.

I heard Mr. Corbin just now and I just want to say that there was also another letter which the Hon. Member would have written and that letter was written to Dr. Surujbally on the 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2011. And what did it say then?

“The need to reopen another round of claims and objections is pregnant with the possibility of irreparable danger to the integrity of the final voters list.”

So, if we want the mechanism and we are being provided with the mechanism, why is it that we have these doubts? The PPP/C, I want it to be known, is interested in a list that has the highest standard of integrity. We want GECOM to ensure that all the checks and balances that they had during the process are maintained; that they keep all the safeguards because we want to have a list that meets all the standards of integrity. And that is why we want the PPP/C and Opposition scrutineers to oversee the process. The ten finger prints that each person had to give when they register must be cross-matched so as to avoid any double registration. The residency status must be verified by visits to the person’s place of abode. What are we talking about with integrity? Within the timeframe – the 13 days – we want this to happen. We are not taking any shortcuts. We are not asking for any shortcuts. Do your process and maintain the integrity of the process. Is this too much to ask? No, I do not think so!

When we address these issues of integrity, and I see there are some new concerns that are being raised and in today’s *Kaieteur News*, I have seen an article – they have headline and bottom line – at the bottom line which says “*Any delay will see Jagdeo’s presidency go well into 2012 or beyond – AFC.*” To me it is obvious that the AFC is not listening to GECOM because if they were, they would have heard the Chairman of GECOM, Dr. Steve Surujbally, saying at his press conference on Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2011, and reported on Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2011, in the *Stabroek News: GECOM clears more registration*, in the fourth paragraph:

“Elections could be held in November, well before the constitutional deadline of the 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2011.”

So what are we talking about? Why are we peddling this kind of mischief? Why? Why? Why are we paddling the notion that by enfranchising thousands of persons by reopening the claims and objections period that GECOM will compromise the date? This is just plain wrong. We, as a nation, must be proud that we can take steps that are humanly possible to enfranchise people. After all, this right to vote was one that was fought for over the decades go back into the history. I saw the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Corbin, talking about history. We could go back further in history. There was a time in this country when to vote, one had to have property. And if you go back further in 1812, it used to be that you must own 25 slaves. The property right was abolished. The age was reduced from 25 years to 21 years in 1952 after Universal adult Suffrage was introduced and the first election where Universal Adult Suffrage was used was on the 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1953. Why do I say that? It is because we, in the PPP/C, have always stood on the side of the people, fighting for enfranchisement. Look at our history and you would know why we are passionate about our people’s enfranchisement. It is the core tenant of the People’s Progressive Party and we make no apologies for that.

I heard the Hon. Leader of the Opposition inferring about padding in Region 1. But if you want to reopen the books of history and turn the pages of history, we can go back there because we can talk about the 16<sup>th</sup> December, 1968 and talk about the fairy tale elections when the slogan then was an overall majority; when the independent Elections Commission was removed and placed under the Ministry of Home Affairs; when overseas voting was introduced and then proxy voting was introduced. And do you know, in that year, what happened? They registered close to 68,000 overseas voters of which, in that election, 36,000 voted for the PNC and they gave the PPP and The United Force (TUF) a thousand each. All of that is documented in a film called *The Trail of the Vanishing Voters*. Do you want to hear more?

On the 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1973, do you remember what happened then on the Corentyne when two valiant, young men who were defending their right of their ballots to be counted at the place of the pole was shot and killed because they dared to defend their rights? *[Interruption]*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members...

**Mr. Corbin:** On a Point of Order, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I think the Hon. Member is obligated to speak the truth in this House and it is untrue to state, in this house, that the PNC shot anybody in the 1973 election, when, in fact, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, there is a Report of a Commission of Inquiry headed by Justice *Dhan Jhappan*, which will be circulated for the benefit of the Hon. Member who is probably too young or was not born to know the details.

**Dr. Anthony:** I think if the Hon. Leader of the Opposition was listening, I said, “They were shot.” *[Interruption]*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, we have too much noise in the House. Would you please keep it down a bit so that the speaker can get on with it?

**Dr. Anthony:** Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I have been speaking the truth and the truth is that they were shot. We cannot remove that. It is in our history. Jagan Ramessar and Parmanand Bholanauth were killed on the 16<sup>th</sup> July, 1973 and they are now referred to as the Ballot Box Martyrs. And they live in the bosom of every freedom lover Guyanese because they defended their rights.

We can also remember that on the 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1980... *[Interruption]*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, please! The house is getting too disorderly. Could you please...?

**Dr. Anthony:** We could also remember the elections of the 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1980 and what Lord Avebury’s observer team said. And we could also talk about the 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1985 and when Anthony Jenkins was maltreated at Haslington. We can talk about that when Dr. Jagan went to his rescue. **[Member:** How do you know that?] I was near there. Ask Mr. Elliot. Oh yes! We can talk about many things. So when you want to talk about padding and history, let us go back to your history and we will see what is there. So we can talk about the period 1968 to 1991 when there were the four rigged elections and one rigged referendum.

The PPP/C stands on the side of giving people their rights to vote and reopening this process would give thousands of Guyanese that right to vote. So I trust, in the spirit of democracy, in the

spirit of enfranchisement, that we allow this to happen and let us open the claims and objection period on the 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2011. Thank you very much. [Applause]

*[Mr. C. Ramson withdrew from Chamber]*

**Mr. Ramjattan:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I will await the departure of the Hon. Attorney General. Before I get into the matter at hand, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, let me, on behalf of the Alliance For Change, also offer condolences to Dr. Westford on the death of her father.

What we have before us is a most troubling, disturbing piece of legislation and it comes at an eleventh hour when election is just four or five months constitutionally due. It would appear that because of the new found love for enfranchising those who absolutely did not take care after a three-year period of getting registered or probably, for some other reason or consideration, simply did not want to get registered. For them to now come and utilise in a very sensitive moment in our election period, for wanting now to ensure, at this stage, that they become registered, you can capture me. It does not matter because we are indicating: why could this not have been done earlier? Since 2008, the agreement started the process of being effectuated – the agreement that we are going to have a brand new register. And, indeed, if we knew that there are going to be those who are not going to get registered for one reason or the other, and you are doing all the scrutineer work that you have been doing, right up to this year, you must have known that five or six thousand people are out there who are not registered. You did not call for that then in March this year or in February this year when you would have done all your work as was just mentioned. You waited until the eleventh hour, July, now pleading for what is called a further 13 days. By the way, 13 days: that figure has some evil behind it.

They must not come here and give the impression that they have a love for enfranchisement. We have been holding back Local Government Elections year after year after year. They do not want to have that kind of elections. We have been having what is called a continual delay and delay and delay. This proves to us or any discerning person that there has some motive behind it and that is why we find it troubling and so disturbing. And we must not be, in any way, condemned for making that rationalisation. We know that there was all manner of propaganda to get a third term for His Excellency. We had all manner of...

**Ms. Manickchand:** On a Point of Order please Mdm. Speaker, Mr. Corbin just pointed out in this House that we are obliged to tell the truth and the Hon. Member, Presidential Candidate, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, has just said something that has continuously been denied by His Excellency President Jagdeo.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** That does not mean a thing. He had told us that he was legally married and cannot find the marriage certificate. And they are telling us that we must believe that. He went around the marrow seven times and it was not registered. And you come here telling me I am lying on him. Please, you must understand what I am saying here: that you can come with all your fancy farce and comedy and tape it up nicely as if you do not want a delay.

This Bill here, its entire motive and considerations behind, must be regarded as but the first step towards an extension and beyond the 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2011 deadline. This scheme is, obviously, to delay. It must be. I want to tell you... [Mr. Neendkumar: Nobody is coming to your meetings. You called off your meetings.] We called off none. You must go to those places and let us hear. They are going to chase you away and that is why. I want to let it be known that indeed 13 days that will be utilised for a first extension period, for now, does not necessarily mean that 13 days will be the extension period for elections. It is 13 days in which they will get all of these other registrants, necessarily involve another whole host of other items being done. This is necessarily going to mean that this date of the 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2011 is not going to be met. I want to indicate to you and that was the major concern of the GECOM officials themselves. They were the ones indicating that there are too many things to do and that is why we cannot allow an extension of the claims and objections period. But because the powerful PPP/C would ask with all the political clout, money and institutional arrangements, obviously, they buckled. And they buckled under the assumption which I am absolutely certain will be proven wrong - and you can mark my words – that yes we are going to give you moneys and put in the institutional arrangements and all of that is going to be done within that thirteen-day period for the purposes of getting that election done before December, 2011.

You have to start up mobile units. You have to arrange scrutineers. You have to reopen all the centres. You have to have so much money, forty million of which have not been paid. And then they will have to come and bring supplementaries for additional expenses and all of that.

Moreover, it will not be totally out of place for me to say that although GECOM is saying that the cross matching will take not that lengthy time, that same GECOM was saying that we do not wait – that is the California Company – on Guyana. They have other work in California to do other than cross matching. So not because you give them by the end of 28<sup>th</sup> July or sometime in August, the people are going to simply leave what they are doing and jump on the Guyana cross matching exercise.

*6.42 p.m.*

Not because Guyana gives them by 28<sup>th</sup> of July, 2011 or sometime in August, the people are going to simply leave what they are doing and jump on the Guyana cross matching exercise. No! I have gotten some information from the GECOM that indicated that it could very well take months! And let me say this: the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) is well aware of all of that. They are well aware of all of that and they must understand that that is why our concerns are so reasonable, relevant, and, in every respect, accurate.

Our concerns are not the concerns of any irrational person, especially when it comes down to this eleventh hour. It has taken three years to get these 470 registrants. Well, it is a lot more than that but it is about 470 will be in what will be regarded as the preliminary voter's list. During that time, the government must have known that there were people who were going to be left out, for whatever reason. And I want to give an analogy: when we make deadlines in Guyana, we must keep those deadlines! It's like a person on a flight going to New York. A person has to pay his/her passage; get his/her visa and do whatever is necessary to get on that flight. If 190 passengers are ready to fly and about ten of them - less than one percent – are not ready, would the plane be held back to ensure that get onboard? You ensure that the flight leaves on time and those who are left behind will catch another flight. The Government must understand that we know what is happening here. **[Ms. Manickchand:** Are you comparing persons' right to register to a flight?] That analogy is descriptive of the situation. Government wants, however, to let another flight come sometime, probably, in July 2012. Watch and see what is going to happen.

I am, somewhat, also disappointed in the Hon. Leader of the Opposition for choosing to take the pragmatist position, and stating that, indeed, this is what we are now forced to do. I am

indicating to this House that yes, you can vote for it and that is alright. It did not come as any surprise this afternoon that you voted for it. But in relation to it being discriminatory, it was a very solid argument Leader of the Opposition. In relation to it being not the correction for the mischief, in relation to it being a ninth hour development, and you say, “We are going to support it with these amendments”, which are but hollow, hollow amendments!

This is what we are indicating here. This is what necessarily negotiating with the PPP/C always provides. It is indicative of what has transpired in the history of this country. At convenient moments we will get the two major parties negotiating and it indicates that their minds have met. “Let us allow the Bill to pass with whatever little amendments”. That is not good enough. It is unprincipled on the grounds of discrimination. It is unprincipled because it is in the eleventh hour. It is unprincipled, also, because it does not meet the remedy that is required for the massive mischief that we all understand it to be. And so, then, we are indicating that because deadlines are there, you must ensure that the deadlines are kept. **[Dr. Anthony: Are you going to disenfranchise the people?]**

It is not disenfranchising people. I want you to understand that the government is going to play that up with the electorate. But let me say that this is absolutely the first (*inaudible*). Let me say this: our law provides that when people do not register, they should be penalised! Look at this article here. As a matter of fact that was one of the institutional arrangements in the 2007 agreement. It stated that a people would be made examples. If they do not get registered, they might very well suffer certain penalties. This is what it is all about. People have to, more or less, get registered and that is what our law provides for. If we could not have done that, you might have done a couple with certain people and they would have probably realised that it is compulsory, that there is the need for them to go get registered, and you would have done that three years ago! Three years ago! But no, you come at the eleventh hour, when the three years is almost coming to an end and what do you do? They are, more or less, rewarded for not being active in their civic responsibility! We reward them for not being active in their civic responsibility. But more than that, all of that have to do with the ineptness of the Ministry of Home Affairs and the GRO. It is very much inept! It was very clearly made to me that communication to and from on GECOM in relation to this issue was that, “We have certain obligations under the law why we just cannot register people and why we just cannot give them

source documents. Sorry.” They have to do certain things. They have to go because we do not know if they came from Brazil or wherever. GECOM does not know where they come from and so the Ministry of Home Affairs was indicated to GECOM that it should only going register people who have these source documents. This was a part of the agreement such a long time ago. Why now? It is not changing it. Why is it that you did not ensure that those people, previously, got their source documents? Why all of a sudden, at this last moment, is the government bringing it up?

I want also, on behalf of the Alliance For Change, to indicate that it is so strange and as a matter of fact, it is so outrageous that on the 14<sup>th</sup> July, we had a certain Commissioner of GECOM –Mr. Robert Williams – argue the case that, indeed, there should be no reopening of the Claims and Objections period. And this Commissioner, opposition appointed, four days later on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, when there was a grand opportunity the absence of Mr. Moen Mc Doom, he had one big somersault and vault fast. What happened there? What really caused that? Was it a total reconfiguration of the arguments in his mind and a brand new determination? I really want to know. It is quite clear that there are certain circumstances, obviously, because it might very well be that it was the PPP’s clout that caused it to happen. As to what that clout may have been, I do not want to mention here.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mdm. Speaker, I think it is normal parliamentary practice that we do not call the names of persons who are not here in the House and who have no right of reply. It is ill-fitting and the Hon. Member should be asked to desist from doing it.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Yes. I agree Hon. Member. I think it is the rule, Mr. Ramjattan, that we do not criticise people by name when they are not here, in the House, and cannot give account.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** I thought it might have been allowed because it is a very valid criticism but in view of your ruling, I would just pass it. However, anybody could use their imagination as it relates to the two dates - 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. [Ms. Manickhand: Inaudible] Well, my dear, you are going to ensure that you, probably, give us an explanation now that appears that you know.

The AFC also wants to indicate that in the Bill there is what is called..., the actual Bill absolutely open ended to the extent that we, really, cannot support such a Bill.

It says, “Notwithstanding anything in this act or any regulations”, and then it goes on to say, “The Commission shall consider the information laid before it, where it is reasonable.” Now, I understand that there might have been an amendment to that by the People’s National Congress Reform 1 Guyana.

“... laid before it during the observing the procedures for registration of those eligible electors”.

Now, again, if the words “where it is reasonable”, are taken out and the words in the amendment drafted by Hon. Members Mr. Robert Corbin and Basil Williams are put in, it still makes it all the more that these numbers of registrants that will be there for the thirteen-day period have to go through all the procedures for the registration of those names. That must be the case and we understand that. I am saying that in the context, all of those procedures now have to be passed and all of those procedures will have to be adhered to. It, necessarily, even means even more time. [Ms. Manickchand: It does not necessarily mean that.] Well, you can plead and state with me that it does not, but I am mentioning to you that it is a concern of ours; it is a concern of ours and indeed [Ms. Manickchand: It is your imagination] It is not imagination. You do not understand the imagination of the people on the Government side. They have brilliant minds and they will tell you that this is but it and they are not going to, in any way, do it, I know of that. They are the kind of people who will tell you one thing and do another and you, in the PNCR – 1G knows that so I do not know why you are quarrelling with me. You know that. As a matter of fact you, yourself, have indicated how hypocritical they are.

I want to let it be known that if the Government is so certain that it is going to have the elections held before the 28<sup>th</sup> December, why does it not announce or indicate the date? I am absolutely certain that if they are certain that it is going to happen before the 28<sup>th</sup>, they can announce the date. But they are not going to announce the date. They are going to indicate now that they have problems with the California Company, they are not getting the finances and for a variety of reasons, especially, as mentioned, where they have all those voters coming from the interior regions. They want some moneys from the Norwegian Funds to start flowing and they, probably, were told that, indeed, the moneys are going to come by December. [Ms. Manickchand: It is your imagination] We will imagine it all. Is it not true that all of a sudden you want all those

voters to be on the list when you never wanted them before because you feel now that you are going to have these moneys for that late (inaudible) and that late spin?

It is obvious that the People's Progressive Party feels something is wrong and so it has to go put these five thousand voters on the list. That is what they feel! The numbers are not looking good! So they want now to put a five thousand more and they claim enfranchisement. Oh my God! Only three months ago they were indicating that they will win with sixty five percent. Two of the three months are now gone and they are saying that they want another five thousand persons to be on the list.

The Alliance For Change has indicated quite clearly, in a press release, that this matter is full of suspicions, pregnant with the possibility of an adjourned election and all that it entails. We are saying to this Hon. House that we suspect that that is going to be the case. We are indicating, quite clearly now, that it should not be and not one bit of it should be allowed in here. We are not going to support this Bill. It cannot be supported. And we are indicating that ... **[Interjection]** Watch and see. Just watch and see. A nation will have its eyes and what is happening here. In that score then, I wish to inform this House that the Alliance For Change will hold the principled position that deadlines must be kept whenever they are made. If 9<sup>th</sup> June was the deadline for claims and objections period, let that be the deadline. Not because of certain political clout of the PPP/C to find five thousand names and bring it, the deadline should not be kept. It causes the GECOM to lack independence; it becomes partial. How will we know that when the period is finished, another five thousand names will be found and then there will be the situation because of this amendment, persons will say that they would like to have those five thousand names further? It is unprecedented! It creates a bad precedent. Those are our concerns. You must understand them. I feel in that being the score, this Bill is wrought with danger to the extent that it cannot be supported, at all, by the Alliance For Change. We hold a principled position. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Mr. Ramotar:** Thank you, very much, Mdm. Speaker. I would like, first of all, to say that the PPP/Civic has no intention of wanting to extend the period of mandate beyond the time that was allotted. We have always fought for free and fair elections and we have a proud record to stand on to say that we have always been fighting for people's human rights and the right for our

ordinary people to exercise their franchise. The Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, mentioned the long history and struggle that people had to put up to get the right to vote. We think that is one of the most fundamental human rights to give a people of a country an opportunity to decide which government they would want to govern them for a certain period of time. That is one of the things that baffle me. The same people who have been asking for extension on the very eve of the close of the claims and objections period, when they are now granted that extension, are objecting to it and have begun to see jumbie under the bed.

Mdm. Speaker, members of the AFC, themselves, went to the GECOM and asked for that not, so long ago. In May of this year they asked to have extension of time. What is amazing with the amount of noise and heat that have been generated by the other side is that they have been making the exact request. They have been asking for it all of the time because they have been recognising the problem. It is very wrong, Mdm. Speaker, and total misrepresentation on the part of the Opposition for them to state that the PPP did not support that. At every single press conference that the PNCR -1G made that claim and even when the AFC went to GECOM and raised that problem, when the PPP was asked to comment, we said that we were finding the same things they were finding, but we believe that the GECOM might have the capacity to solve these problems. We have said that. We have never condemned them. Never at one time did we say they were making mischief. We said, constantly, and they can go back to the record in the press and see that our position was that we are finding the same issues. But it shows the mentality that exists in the body of politics sometimes. Just because the PPP has joined them, I do not know what lack of consultation Mr. Corbin is talking about. Why do we need consultation if we are saying that we agree with you and that we all are in agreement that the Claims and Objections period should be re-opened for a limited period of time? Do you need consultation even for us to say that we agree with you? You made your remarks unilaterally. You did not consult us when you were finding these things. But we, ourselves, said that we agree with you on this matter. Now, all of a sudden, we are hearing all kinds of sinister motives being prescribed when the very essence of the matter is giving people that right to be registered in our country.

I know, as I have said, there is a lot of misrepresentation talking place here today. They have been talking all kinds of things about the final voters' list. There is not even a preliminary voters' list as yet and I heard people talk about the final voters' list. The only volte-face that we had here

today was the volte-face of the Opposition - The Opposition which claims that it has been making calls for the reopening of the process has now volte-faced. Of course, Mr. Corbin, as astute a politician as he is, I must say that he seems to be much smarter than the other people on the other side, probably recognised the dangerous road that he is threading on. He, probably, recognised the mistake some of the Commissioners, that he recommended to be appointed, made by voting against a process to enfranchise people and he is, probably, now trying to save the day because now he is not putting himself against those people who have been left off of the list and who wants to be placed on the list. He is trying to save the day. Unfortunately, your colleagues in the Opposition benches are not as clever as you. You have outsmarted them at this time.

Mr. Corbin was right when he went to the origin of how these problems started. We all wanted to have a list that would be beyond controversy and that was why when GECOM proposed using source document, all of the political parties agreed to that. There was no objection to having source documents. Before that, for elections in 2006, 2001, 1996, 1992 and 1997, people were allowed to use other forms of source documents. They were allowed to use baptism certificates; the Toshaos were allowed to swear for them and there were other methods they were allowed to use. Although all of those things proved to be good and valid, persons have to remember that all of our elections from 1997 to now were audited and there were no problems. But I think we wanted to have something that was perfect. We wanted to cross every "t" and dot every "i".

[Mr. Corbin: Inaudible]            It was for that same 1997 elections that the report of the CARICOM Auditors said that they found not a single fraudulent ballot. That is what the report said. Not a single fraudulent ballot. You are very selective sometimes. But the point is that we wanted to have a perfect list. In s doing, I do not think, at that time, that any of us anticipated the great problem that we are having now. This is not only a problem for the interior. This is a problem that is happening all over the country where there are many people who have either lost their documents or were never registered. And, therefore, it seems to me to be an extremely reasonable position that the GECOM took when every single one of the stakeholders has taken the position that the problem is big enough to re-open the period for a short time. I agree that it is not possible to have everyone who is entitled to be on the list to be there. I agree that it would have some people who, as the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan said, might not want o register. But those are not the people who we are fighting for. The ones who are making claims about are the

ones who have made attempts and several efforts to get their source documents and did not get them in time. **[Mr. Ramjattan: Inaudible]** Whatever is the problem is not the issue. The issue is: do you agree to enfranchise people, who through no fault of their own have not been registered? That is the issue that we are facing today. The Hon. Member wants to penalise people. But these people have proof that they have made attempts over and over to get their documents and they have not succeeded in doing so.

Another issue that they seem to want to cloud when they make claims about discrimination is that this process, as the Hon. Member Dr. Frank Anthony said, is going to be going through the same rigorous method. It will be scrutinised from beginning to end by both ruling party and opposition party scrutinisers. We have absolutely no problem with putting into the amendment that this list should go to all the parties to be examined. In fact, at the last press conference that the PPP/C held that was a suggestion that I made for these things to satisfy any suspicion on the part of the Opposition about any type of suspicion that we propose that this be done. We have no problem with accepting such an amendment to the Bill before us today. I want to say ... **[Mr. Corbin: That I will take my seat]** I will do that just now. I want to respond to one thing that Mr. Ramjattan said because he seems to want to throw as much mud as possible. He seems to be a specialist in that area.

*7.12 p.m.*

He spoke about the local Government Elections as if this was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Government, the People Progressive Party (PPP) and the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to postpone the elections. When Mr. Ramjattan was in the PPP he spoke on these benches many times, condemning some of the violence that had us without the Elections Commission after 1997 elections. That was the main reason why we did not have Local Government elections. The same thing happened in 2001. After the 1997 election we did not have an Elections Commission, and after the Election Commission was set up to run to, only, the 2001 election, they resigned. Afterwards, we had long negotiations to try to come to a general consensus of the new system of local government. This distortion that the Opposition is so specialised in, continues to do today.

Let me make the point too... I do not want to comment on any internal problem that any political party has, but they must check their own record. The Bill, which Mr. Corbin said he got only last night, was sent to the PNCR-1G at 11.30 am on Wednesday morning. I do not know if there was a mix-up between A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and the PNCR-1G and the information was not sent to the right people; I do not know if it had to go to Mr. Robert Corbin or Mr. David Granger. [Mr. Corbin: Did it come from Freedom House?] It came from the Office of the President. I am speaking from... [Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Carberry sent someone to pick it up on Wednesday morning] Mr. Carberry sent someone to pick up it at 11:30 on Wednesday. Therefore, to say that these matters are being rushed through with no consultation and you did not have time read it and so forth is not true. If you have a mix up in your area, do not stand up here and grandstand and try criticise the Government for not doing that!

I would like to mention that the Guyana Election's Commission (GECOM) decided to re-open this process on Monday. On Tuesday the Bill was drafted and made ready, and on Wednesday it was delivered, as I said, at 11.30 to the PNCR-1G.

My own view is that we need not to have this big controversy because, obviously, we all agree that the amount of people who have been excluded is substantial enough for all of us to make representation. That is point. Every single one of us made representation to the Election Commission and, obviously, if the Election Commission sees that all the political parties are making representation to them, they will obviously have to listen and try to come to a conclusion. It is not one party, it is not two parties but all of us, in here, have made this representation and, therefore, to now come and try to put all kinds of interpretation to a simple matter is extremely unfortunate. I would love to have the Alliance For Change (AFC) vote against the Bill, so that they can let people see them for what they are and for wanting to disenfranchise people. Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [Applause]

**Mr. B. Williams:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, after listening to the Hon. Member, Donald Ramotar, my uneasiness increases. I received my copy of the Bill last night. I recall that, at a meeting, last night, at the Congress Place, the Leader of the Opposition had indicated that he only received his an hour before me. So I do not know what the Hon. Member is talking about.

The Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), under the Constitution, has supervisory control over the national registration of electors, and this Party have long harped on the fact that GECOM, which is supposed to be independent, was in fact controlled by Dr. Roger Luncheon who controls the money at the Office of the President and so this Administration could extort leverage on GECOM whenever they wish to. Why am I saying this? We know that it is an uncontroversial fact that the Opposition, including the PNC, has been seeking to have measures put in place to have electors get their source documents and the like. We remember that the Hon. Member, Mr Rohee, was abusive to GECOM, saying that they must not get into the Ministry's business. [Mr. Rohee: Which Minister of Home Affairs?] I recall distinctly...

[Mr. Rohee: Were you there?] I saw your release. You said that they must not get involved in your Ministry's business. And so, really, it is not appropriate for Mr. Donald Ramotar to say that all the parties made representations. If you had joined us three years ago, I would have said, "yes it is a genuine effort on the part of your party." Now that you have joined us at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, we have to be wide eyed because we know that it was only a matter of days before, GECOM was expressing firm views that it would have be impossible to reopen this claims and objections period for the purpose.

I am not speaking off the top my head; I could speak from a document dated the 1<sup>st</sup> July from the Guyana Election Commission. I would take snippets and read from the paragraph saying that "irrespective of how often GECOM reopens registrations facility there will always be those lagggers and recalcitrants..." soft language eh?

"...who will arrive after the closure date requesting to be on the revised voters list/finders list?"

If we decide to be accommodational and establish a new registration date, why should we not make another one later and another one even later to accommodate those constantly coming late? If you create a precedence, the court will argue that you are beholden to repetition and continuance of precedence set. That was a lamentation, only a matter of time matters of days, of GECOM. And it continues, very strong,

"it must be remembered that the final voters list has a definite unalterably"- oh I love that word- '...shelf life. When the CEO would have certified the final voters list, according to the current action plan, the final voter's list validity will expire three months later..."

He is adverted to that:

"...If elections are not held within those three months the entire exercise will have to recommence. The election will not take place this year. The repercussive effects are too dire to contemplate."

This is GECOM saying that. This was only the 1<sup>st</sup> July and then you had on the 7<sup>th</sup> July more lamentations. I cannot go through all of this but I have never seen a list like this before. This list is giving me heart burn. Let me start with one in the centre of the document.

"Statutorily no less than 21 days will have to be set aside for the CEO to review the list of the revised list of electors..."

Twenty-one days alone, for internal work.

"...then the finger prints of newly late captured registrants will have to be sent to cojent to be crossmatched."

I do not know where cojent is.

"...I.D cards will have to be printed and distributed..."

Remember 40,000 was not uplifted recently.

"...distributed in respect of the persons who will be registered during the proposed claims and objection exercise..."

and he continues:

"Divisional scrutineers will have to be appointed. The Opposition political parties could refuse to appoint scrutiners based on their collected position that they will not support the conduct of another claims and objection exercise. This would definitely lead to creditability of the list and by extension the results of the elections being affected..."

and it ends:

"there is great likelihood of GECOM being accused of colluding with the PPP Government..."

so true,

"to delay the election thus serving to erode the Commission's credibility."

You cannot want a better prediction; that is prophetic. That is how we feel right now; that there is a collusion that caused this sudden change, this over night swing. That is the effect of a "*douchera*"- not even a chinaman, that is a "*douchera*". That after that we could receive this letter at 20<sup>th</sup> July the same month. "Please be advised that the Elections Commission at a special meeting on Monday the 18<sup>th</sup> July has approved the reopening of the claims and objection process..." (laughter) ...perhaps the Donald could tell us (laughter) what has exacerbated this serious situation, what has cause this change, this turn around Hon. Member. This is what we are talking about, the credibility of GECOM and this reinforces our belief that GECOM must be independent Mdm. Deputy Speaker, GECOM must be independent and if GECOM has maintained over a period of time that they cannot change the situation but then they change it and this is what they are saying - they are saying this process for 2011 for a period of 13 days with effect from the 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2011 to and including Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2011. This is the mere fact that there has been a massive turn around and therefore it begs the question; one must ask: what is the reason for this? Why did you not want to give them a reason to vote three years go? Why only now? Why do you want to enfranchise them only now? Why PNC have to show you the way every time? But you have decided that now, so we have to examine now the potential repercussions of this decision of the PPP/C-GECOM to reopen at this late moment. Why?

Hear what... the Commission itself has recognised that if one goes past the qualifying date for more than 30 days before the next election date one will have to do the entire list over again. They have recognised that, that means there is a real possibility that you could go in the next... the Commission said that not me, but in addition to that Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the life of parliament is 5 years under the constitution so your life expires in and around the 28<sup>th</sup> December. It means that you are beholding to coordinate your activities to ensure that there is a new

government and a new Parliament before the 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2011, that is your responsibility, you have to ensure that happens and what is happening, if there is slippage there will be slippage there in that regard. If you announce elections now and the dissolution of Parliament, you have three months within which to hold elections. [A Member: ...you have the wrong speech.] No! All these things are wrapped up in this... possibly could happen and that is why your own protégé who knows you, he knows you more than all of us. [Interjection]

If he could laugh, we have a right to laugh also. I know they say, when “*quasi hint to bashiba, we got big notice.*” I see you look disturb Donald, but the position is as someone said it earlier and I believe that. I believe, that at the close of the last claims and objections period the Hon. Member Donald Ramotar in Rob Street took a look at the numbers and he obviously did not like what he saw, and so he awoke with the acuity of a Rip Van Wrinkle and I suspect he summoned a meeting. “We have to get more votes,” that is exactly what happens Donald. So like water - we know all these things you know - we waiting for him to make his move, we waiting on you - St.Cuthberts Mission, we waiting on you; the 13 days you give yourself, first you give yourself 7 then you said 13 days, see how your days increasing, last two days were 7 days - we got the document - to show you the last day was 7 in all now you gone to 13 days. This letter said 13, it says 13 days with effect from 25<sup>th</sup> July. Oh you deceiving your own selves and therefore we come to the present, what are you going to do... you come with this Bill thankful the Hon. Attorney General recognise what we are trying to say, basically what you want us to do. The Bill is here you have the power to vote by one vote to pass this Bill but we still have a duty to our large constituency and we believe that the efforts we made to put this Bill in order, so that there will be a level playing field at least to all electors who have not been able to vote before to vote now and register now and not to be discriminated against by some *nebulous* inability to register due to circumstances beyond their control.

We want a wide... any Guyanese who is eligible and put their self forward and apply they must be registered, there must be a level playing field, so this is not simply open so you could get in your so call 5000 votes Hon. Member Donald Ramotar. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we have no difficulty of proposing those amendments that have been circulated and which in effect create a level playing field for all the Guyanese electors who have been unable to register previously. As I said we are very wary and very concerned about the activities of GECOM, this is not the first

time GECOM has done this to us. GECOM promised us at the last occasion for verification right down to the end and then another visit by the Hon. Member and is the same thing happen an about-turn again. We are taking a dim view of the manner in which GECOM is conducting itself, it is not engendering the type of confidence that stakeholders repose in it. I think it is gross disrespect to the Opposition Parties too, to keep telling them they cannot do it and providing a million reasons yet when the PPP ask - the government who holds the money in the purse they suddenly yield, like the maiden who could not do any thing else but yield to the might. Cannot happen, we take a dim view as I said, but once we have the amendments we have proposed, once the amendments are carried, we would have little difficulty in ensuring that a level playing field is created for all Guyanese voters who have not yet had that opportunity to vote and that they vote in this period, we will be holding you to a strict 13 days period, we hold you to that. Thank you Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [Applause]

**Mr. Rohee (replying):** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, save for the presentation of the Hon. Member Khemraj Ramjattan who made his party position very clear that they are going to vote against the Bill, listening to the Hon. Members Mr. Corbin and Basil Williams, I formed the distinct impression that the Hon. Members were seeking to make out from the very beginning and then this Hon. House, that the process at which we are about to embark will have a lot of flaws. I am trying to figure out whether there is some strategic thinking behind this. Whether at some point in time the PNC/R and others will seek to make out the electoral process is flawed. But the Hon. Members notwithstanding that posture eventually came around to supporting the amendments having regarding to the fact that the PNC/R and PPP/C sat and worked out a formula with one consensus between the parties and that I think is commendable and shows what this Parliament can produce. The Hon. Member Mr. Corbin sought to cloud or give a spin to the position with respect to the PNC/R clouding it in pragmatism, as if pragmatism is known only to the PNC/R and not PPP/C nor to the persons who serve on GECOM nor to the persons who work at GECOM. Pragmatism is a universal phenomenon as you know Mr. Corbin and not only the PNC/R can claim to know or adopt a pragmatic stand on a matter on this side. This is why I believe the people of allied for progress – politicians - are very poor politicians in this respect. Do not let the “victory” you had in the last elections swing your heads because the game is going to be different this time. I was wondering if there is any connection with pragmatism and the

CYA , which members on the opposite benches sought to commit in this House. I would not like to spell out what a CYA is all about but I think all those who are aware of what a CYA is would know what I am talking about. Some other harsh words were used towards the government and PPP/C and myself. We heard about arrogance and contempt, we heard about atrocious behaviour, we heard about ineptness, all the adjectives one can find to point fingers in the direction of the government. What I want to say Mdm. Deputy Speaker is this, a claim has been made to the effect that GECOM came to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the General Register Office at a meeting to argue a case for a special arrangement to be put in place to assist the process, that is the real truth. I have no reason to deny that. What I wish to emphasise however, is that we recognised from the outset that the Elections Commission is an independent body and as an independent body there is no way that a government agency/department could become either a department or unit or an extension of GECOM. That is precisely what GECOM wanted to make the Ministry of Home Affairs and the GRO an extension of GECOM and there is no way government could have entertained such a discussion. At the time when GECOM came to speak to us there was absolutely no problem with birth certificates because Mr. Surujbally eventually left the meeting feeling pleased with a sense of satisfaction that all is going well thus far in respect of birth certificates from the GRO. The mischief was that we have a situation in which a decision was made by the parties but none of the parties knew, objectively speaking, what the reality was out there in respect of numbers of birth certificates that were required. There was no figure, no number, precisely, now the numbers are coming in. It was as if the GRO was given a basket to fetch water, the help I emphasise and I insist that was offered was to make the GRO an extension of the Elections Commission and that could never be entertained.

*7.42 p.m.*

I suspected that what happened was that GECOM wanted to have some type of analysis to determine whether they were on the right track at the time, having taken the decision that every individual must have a source document before they get on the list. When they themselves did not know how many source documents were required out there they came to us to find out how many birth certificates we were issuing on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. They wanted to have an estimate as to whether the decision taken was going to impact on them negatively. I believe the magnitude of the problem was underestimated. Member Ramotar mentioned some of

the challenges. I could mention many of the challenges; two for example were that there are many citizens of Guyana who have birth certificates that were printed on foolscap paper; GECOM never accepted those, what we call the old Birth Certificates. GECOM did not accept the old red lined Birth Certificates. When those types of Birth Certificates were presented to the registrants they said they do not accept that. They wanted to accept only the short Birth Certificates printed in green and white. Many people who did not have that type of Birth Certificate were left off the list.

In addition to that, the Hon. Member Corbin spoke about the culture, how the cultural manifestations express themselves in these matters. There are many who have a single name on a Birth Certificate, but GECOM would not accept that. GECOM wanted to make laws about what should be registered in respect of a Birth Registration/Certificate. The question was asked: why the turnaround by GECOM? The answer to that is quite simple and straightforward. There is no mystery about this. The answer is that you put a rule that people must have source documents/Birth Certificates, you close the doors with the end of the claims and objections period and then you find that there are a number of person who are standing outside the door without a source document. The question is, what do you do. Do you keep the doors closed or do you open the door to allow these people to get registered by having a source document. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we know the song that goes “*open de door and leh de man come in, all ah we a one family*”. Open the door and let the man come in; the man representing the individual male or female is the person without the source document.

This is a challenge in any government situation, and you should know that. Every time you raise the bar in respect of greater accountability and greater transparency the challenges increase. This is precisely what happened in this case. One of the challenges was to ensure that every potential registrant had a source document in their hands. The question of what GECOM came and promised to do, and I emphasise the word “promised”, which is to get foreign funds to set up this project which they spoke about. It was a promise and nothing more than that. It was a mere promise, nothing more or nothing less. When we hear that what we have before us is a most troubling piece of legislation; troubling for who? is the question. I do not believe this legislation is troubling for those persons out there who would like to have a source document to have their names on the list. It may be troubling for those of you Hon. Members who have a different

agenda from the individuals who are desirous of having a source document and having their names on the list of registrants.

The question was asked about why wait until the eleventh hour; I do not understand their thinking. We have to allow GECOM to do its work; we have to allow the system to work. Why are we going thirty or even ten days before claims and objections period is closed, suddenly with a crystal ball in our hands and anticipate that there is going to be a problem? How are we going to do that? Maybe Mr. Ramjattan is a *see-far* man, because he is talking about evil on the thirteenth. We could not anticipate before we arrived where we are today that we would have so many people without source documents. We have to give GECOM a chance to do its work. At every stage of the process we were supporting GECOM while we were at the same time pointing out to GECOM our dissatisfactions. There is no question about an eleventh hour turnaround.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Ramjattan the Hon. Member says that their concerns are reasonable and they are not irrational. We have taken note of that, it is the most we can do with it, take note of them and let it be reflected in the Hansard, but the process has to continue. Our responsibility is to ensure that the Birth Certificates are issued even within this narrow window that we have, ten days for claims and thirty three days for objections. By the way, these contributions to me seem to be riddled with a whole host of contradictory positions, and they all came out with the speeches we heard from the Opposition benches. I would like to ask a few questions to those who oppose this Bill, to those who have trepidations of the Bill and to those who have doubts of the Bill. Are you against a person having a source document? That is the bottom line. Are you against these persons being put on the list of registrants? Are you in favour of persons being disenfranchised? These are the three fundamental questions which we must ask ourselves in respect to the letter and spirit of this Bill before this Hon. House tonight.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the question as to who will get will be verifiable on the basis of the arrangements that are put in place to ensure that there are scrutineers. Mr. Corbin knows the process, so the question is a moot question. We are happy that notwithstanding the reservations, the hype, language and the criticisms – we are not afraid of criticisms over here – notwithstanding all of that, we are happy that the People's National Congress Reform has finally come around to support this Bill even at this eleventh hour. I believe that this Bill is going to be

welcomed by the overwhelming majority of Guyanese out there, especially those who do not have a source document and who have not been registered. I believe that they will be welcomed. They will welcome this Bill, because they will see the reasonableness on the part of those who supported it in this Hon. House to give them a third or a second chance. Anyone who is given a first, second, third or fourth chance will appreciate a Bill like this, and therefore I wish to commend this Bill to this Hon. House and ask that it be read a second time.

*Question put*

**Mr. Carberry:** Division.

*Assembly divided*

**Ayes**

*Mr. Pereira*

*Rev. Dr. Gilbert*

*Dr. Mahadeo*

*Mr. Whittaker*

*Mr. Seeraj*

*Mrs. Sahoye-Shury*

*Mr. Persaud*

*Mr. Neendkumar*

*Mr. Lumumba*

*Mr. Nagamootoo*

*Mr. Khan*

*Mrs. Edwards*

*Mr. Chand*

*Mr. Atkinson*

*Mr. Nokta*

*Mrs. Chandarpal*

*Ms. Teixeira*

*Mr. Ramotar*

*Mr. Ali*

*Mr. Prashad*

*Ms. Webster*

*Dr. Ramsaran*

*Ms. Manickchand*

*Mr. Nadir*

*Mr. Benn*

*Dr. Anthony*

*Dr. Westford*

*Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett*

*Dr. Ramsammy*

*Mr. Rohee*

*Mr. Hinds*

*Noes*

*Mr. Patterson*

*Mrs. Punalall*

*Mrs. Holder*

*Mr. Ramjattan*

*Mr. Trotman*

***Decline***

*Ms. Hastings*

*Mr. Fernandes*

*Ms. Kissoon*

*Ms. Baveghems*

*Ms. Wade*

*Dr. Austin*

*Ms. Selman*

*Mrs. David-Blair*

*Mr. Elliot*

*Mr. Danny*

*Ms. Sampson*

*Ms. Ally*

*Mr. Scott*

*Dr. Norton*

*Mr. Basil Williams*

*Mr. Carberry*

*Mr. Corbin*

*Question put and carried.*

*Bill read a second time.*

*The Assembly will now resolve itself into Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause.*

*Assembly in Committee*

**Clause 1**

*Question put*

*Division Called*

**Ayes**

*Mr. Pereira*

*Rev. Dr. Gilbert*

*Dr. Mahadeo*

*Mr. Whittaker*

*Mr. Seeraj*

*Mrs. Sahoye-Shury*

*Mr. Persaud*

*Mr. Neendkumar*

*Mr. Lumumba*

*Mr. Khan*

*Mrs. Edwards*

*Mr. Chand*

*Mr. Atkinson*

*Mr. Nokta*

*Mrs. Chandarpal*

*Ms. Teixeira*

*Mr. Ramotar*

*Mr. Ali*

*Mr. Prashad*

*Ms. Webster*

*Dr. Ramsaran*

*Ms. Manickchand*

*Mr. Nadir*

*Mr. Benn*

*Dr. Anthony*

*Dr. Westford*

*Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett*

*Dr. Ramsammy*

*Mr. Rohee*

*Mr. Hinds*

**Noes**

*Mr. Patterson*

*Mrs. Punalall*

*Mrs. Holder*

*Mr. Ramjattan*

*Mr. Trotman*

**Decline**

*Ms. Hastings*

*Mr. Fernandes*

*Ms. Kissoon*

*Ms. Baveghems*

*Ms. Wade*

*Dr. Austin*

*Ms. Selman*

*Mr. Mervin Williams*

*Mrs. David-Blair*

*Mr. Elliot*

*Mr. Danny*

*Ms. Sampson*

*Dr. Norton*

*Mr. Basil Williams*

*Mr. Carberry*

*Mr. Corbin*

*Clause 1 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill*

## **Clause 2**

**Mr. Corbin:** Mdm. Chairperson, there are a number of amendments in my name, seconded by my colleague Mr. B. Williams. I am not sure how you wish to proceed, but the first one as stated there is at clause 2 which is really making what is currently clause 2 into clause 2(14)(a)(i). I do not know whether you would like to put all of them..., because what is now at clause 14(a) will in fact become clause 14(a)(i) with some further amendments. I am not sure how we proceed, whether you want to go that way or whether you would prefer I amend what is now clause 14(a) into 14(a)(i) and at the same time advance the amendments to what is now part of clause 14(a) into 14(a)(i). We can then move on to what becomes clause 14(2) later.

**Mdm. Chairperson:** Yes, Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Let me propose the question. I think it is wise to put the bundle of amendments in clause 2 as one, since all pertains to clause 2. So the first amendment in clause 2 is that 14(a) becomes clause 14(a)(i), that is the first amendment. The second amendment that you would like to move...

**Mr. Corbin:** In the second line of the Bill that is circulated where you have the word “insert” after the word “*written law*”, if you will insert the words “for the specific preparation of the 2011 official list of electors for the 2011 general and regional elections”, that is before you get to the word “and”.

**Mdm. Chairperson:** Yes, I see. The second amendment in clause 2 is in line two of the body of clause 14(a)(i), after the words “*written law*” you insert the words “for the specific preparation of the 2011 official list of electors for the 2011 general and regional elections”; that is the second amendment.

**Mr. Corbin:** Mdm. Chairman, at the same 14(a)(I), if you go down to line six, where you have the words “*laid before it*” you will insert “duly observing the procedure for the registration of those eligible electors” and delete the words “where it is reasonable”.

**Mdm. Chairperson:** The third amendment in clause 2 will read, “consider the information laid before it duly observing the procedures for those eligible electors”, and you then delete “where it is reasonable”.

**Mr. Corbin:** That will complete the amendments for what was originally 14(a).

**Mdm. Chairperson:** Mr. Corbin I need to understand. Will this now be the end of clause 14(a)?

**Mr. Corbin:** The end of 14(a)(i).

**Mdm. Chairperson:** This will be the end of clause 14(a)(i) with the word “electors”.

**Mr. Corbin:** No Mdm. Chairperson, it will continue. What happens there is that the words that will be removed from the original draft are “where it is reasonable”, so the remaining words “direct the commissioner” and all the rest right on to “revised list” will remain. So we are just inserting some words and deleting four words.

**Mdm. Chairperson:** Okay, so that is clause 2. And, you are creating a clause 14(a)(ii) as part of clause 2 also.

**Mr. Corbin:** Yes, we are creating 14(a)(ii).

**Mdm. Chairperson:** Is that a new clause or continuing clause?

**Mr. Corbin:** It is a new sub clause, 14(a)(ii).

**Mdm. Chairperson:** You are creating a new sub-clause. Will that now take this to a new clause 3?

**Mr. Corbin:** No Madam.

**Mdm. Chairperson:** It will still remain as part of clause 2? I just want to know in terms of clauses, because we are dealing with the whole bundle in clause 2. So clause 14(a)(II) will remain part of part of clause as per the Bill?

**Mr. Corbin:** Yes, I believe so Madam, but we may have to do a subsequent amendment at clause 2. I am now seeing this, but this is just a tidying up which the Parliamentary Council may advise. Subsection 14(A)(ii).

8.12 p.m.

Clause 2 reads:

“The principle act is amended by the insertion immediately after section 14 of the following section 14(A).”

That may have to be amended to section 14 (A) (i) and 14(A) (ii). I would leave it to the Counsel to tidy up that.

**Mdm. Chairperson:** All I wanted was the total bundle of amendments within clause 2 as per this Bill I have in front of me. Now another part of clause 2 will be inserting another subsection

**Mr. Corbin:** Yes, subsection 14 (A) (ii), which reads as amended:

“The Commissioner shall make available to all registered political parties the names of all eligible electors registered subsequent to the enactment of this amendment.”

**Mdm. Chairperson:** So, that is a new sub-clause in clause 2 of this Bill.

**Mr. Corbin:** Those are my amendments.

*The Committee divided and voted as follows:*

**FOR**

*Ms. Hastings*

*Mr. Fernandes*

*Ms. Kissoon*

*Ms. Baveghems*

**AGAINST**

*Mr. Patterson*

*Mrs. Punalall*

*Mrs. Holder*

*Mr. Ramjattan*

*Ms. Wade*

*Mr. Trotman*

*Dr. Austin*

*Ms. Selman*

*Mr. M. Williams*

*Mrs. David-Blair*

*Mr. Elliot*

*Mr. Danny*

*Ms. Sampson*

*Dr. Norton*

*Mr. B. Williams*

*Mr. Carberry*

*Mr. Corbin*

*Mr. Pereira*

*Rev. Dr. Gilbert*

*Dr. Mahadeo*

*Mr. Whittaker*

*Mr. Seeraj*

*Mrs. Sahoye Shury*

*Mr. Parmanand Persaud*

*Mr. Neendkumar*

*Mr. Lumumba*

*Mr. Nandlall*

*Mr. Khan*

*Mrs. Edwards*

*Mr. Chand*

*Mr. Atkinson*

*Mr. Nokta*

*Mrs. Chandarpal*

*Ms. Teixeira*

*Mr. Ramotar*

*Mr. Ali*

*Mr. Prasad*

*Ms. Webster*

*Dr. Ramsaran*

*Ms. Manickchand*

*Mr. Nadir*

*Mr. Benn*

*Dr. Anthony*

*Dr. Westford*

*Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett*

*Dr. Ramsammy*

*Mr. Rohee*

*Mr. Hinds*

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*The Amendments were carried.*

*Clause 2 as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Clause 3**

*The Committee divided and voted as follows:*

**FOR**

*Ms. Hastings*

*Mr. Fernandes*

*Ms. Kissoon*

**AGAINST**

*Mr. Patterson*

*Mrs. Punalall*

*Mrs. Holder*

*Ms. Baveghems*

*Ms. Wade*

*Dr. Austin*

*Ms. Selman*

*Mr. Williams*

*Mrs. David-Blair*

*Mr. Elliot*

*Mr. Danny*

*Ms. Sampson*

*Dr. Norton*

*Mr. Williams*

*Mr. Carberry*

*Mr. Corbin*

*Mr. Pereira*

*Rev. Dr. Gilbert*

*Dr. Mahadeo*

*Mr. Whittaker*

*Mr. Seeraj*

*Mrs. Sahoye Shury*

*Mr. Parmanand Persaud*

*Mr. Neendkumar*

*Mr. Lumumba*

*Mr. Nandlall*

*Mr. Khan*

*Mrs. Edwards*

*Mr. Chand*

*Mr. Atkinson*

*Mr. Ramjattan*

*Mr. Trotman*

*Mr. Nokta*

*Mrs. Chandarpal*

*Ms. Teixeira*

*Mr. Ramotar*

*Mr. Ali*

*Mr. Prahsad*

*Ms. Webster*

*Dr. Ramsaran*

*Ms. Manickchand*

*Mr. Nadir*

*Mr. Benn*

*Dr. Anthony*

*Dr. Westford*

*Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett*

*Dr. Ramsammy*

*Mr. Rohee*

*Mr. Hinds*

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*Clause 3, as printed, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill*

*Assembly resumed*

**Mr. Rohee:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker I wish to report that the Bill was considered in Committee clause by clause, and I wish to move that it be read a third time and passed as amended.

*The Committee divided and voted as follows:*

**FOR**

**AGAINST**

*Ms. Hastings*

*Mr. Fernandes*

*Ms. Kissoon*

*Ms. Baveghems*

*Ms. Wade*

*Dr. Austin*

*Ms. Selman*

*Mrs. David-Blair*

*Mr. Elliot*

*Mr. Danny*

*Ms. Sampson*

*Dr. Norton*

*Mr. B. Williams*

*Mr. Carberry*

*Mr. Corbin*

*Mr. Pereira*

*Rev. Dr. Gilbert*

*Dr. Mahadeo*

*Mr. Whittaker*

*Mr. Seeraj*

*Mrs. Sahoye-Shury*

*Mr. Parmanand Persaud*

*Mr. Neendkumar*

*Mr. Lumumba*

*Mr. Nandlall*

*Mr. Khan*

*Mrs. Edwards*

*Mr. Chand*

*Mrs. Punalall*

*Mrs. Holder*

*Mr. Ramjattan*

*Mr. Trotman*

*Mr. Atkinson*

*Mr. Nokta*

*Mrs. Chandarpal*

*Ms. Teixeira*

*Mr. Ramotar*

*Mr. Ali*

*Mr. Prashad*

*Ms. Webster*

*Dr. Ramsaran*

*Ms. Manickchand*

*Mr. Nadir*

*Mr. Benn*

*Dr. Anthony*

*Dr. Westford*

*Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett*

*Dr. Ramsammy*

*Mr. Rohee*

*Mr. Hinds*

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*Question put and carried.*

*Bill reported with amendments, read the third time and passed as amended.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** This brings the House to the end of our business for today

**Mr. Hinds:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I move that the House be adjourned to next Thursday, 28<sup>th</sup> July, at 2:00 p.m.

*Adjourned accordingly at 8.26 p.m.*