

LC Paper No. CB(2)877/00-01(05)**PROVISION OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES (REORGANIZATION) BILL****Resumption of Second Reading Debate on Bill****SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS** (in Cantonese):

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In the debate yesterday, some Members asked whether we would consider the possibility of enhancing the status and role of District Councils. I can only say that we do not rule out such a possibility. But I cannot say that the Government has arrived at any positive views in this respect, nor can I say that the Government has already drawn up any timetable. But here I can assure Members that we will continue to explore this issue as an ongoing concern. Members will understand that we will have to proceed stage by stage, and we have only just made a start. But how long will it take us to complete the work of this present stage? I cannot possibly give any definite answer to Members, but I do hope Members will understand that we do have to prioritize things when it comes to political development. In other words, we will need to attend to issues of greater importance. Having said all this, I must reiterate that we have never said that we are not going to look into this possibility. We will consider the idea at a later time.

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Third Reading of Bill

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Bill: Third Reading.

PROVISION OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES (REORGANIZATION) BILL

SECRETARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS (in Cantonese): Madam President, during the Second Reading debate, some Members expressed support for the streamlining of the three-tier system of representative government into a two-tier structure. At the same time, they hope that the Government can strengthen the functions and representativeness of District Councils. After the commencement of the first term of District Councils of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region next year, we will work in this direction to promote the development of district organizations, and consider ways to enhance the role of District Councils in district affairs and to strengthen their functions.

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MISS CHRISTINE LOH: Madam President, I am responding directly to the Secretary's opening remarks for Third Reading, since they were partially directed at me. So, I ask for your patience, but I promise you that I will be very brief.

The Honourable Andrew WONG and I have been trying separately to ask the Administration to give an explicit undertaking about the evolution of District Councils. Mr Andrew WONG even dug out an amendment in my name which we worked on together and which we failed to win sufficient support during the passage of the District Council Bill calling for greater powers to be given to the District Councils at a time deemed to be appropriate by the Chief Executive. Mr Andrew WONG used that to try to lobby the Administration, I believe, throughout today.

At Second Reading, the Secretary gave some very vague comments which were totally inadequate to me. At the resumption of Third Reading, he made another attempt. Let me say that I appreciate all his efforts to meet the concerns of the Citizens Party. Allow me to repeat them, however. Indeed, we want an undertaking of further devolution of power to the District Councils. Furthermore, we want to know when appointments will be abolished. I know how hard the Secretary and his team have tried to meet our concerns. I can just about accept the latest statement on the direction towards devolution of power. It is not perfect, but I believe it is the best that the Administration can do today. However, our concern for District Council appointment remains.

I have made a number of very quick, urgent calls to members of my Party to seek their views. The Party still instructed me to vote against the Bill.

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