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**Speech by the Hon Mrs Selina Chow Liang Shuk-Yee, JP
Motion Debate on Improving Administrative Procedures to Enhance
Efficiency, 14 March 2002**

Selina Chow:

Madam President, I believe everyone may have many different views on the need to improve government efficiency and enhance co-ordination. I think the Government itself should really consider several major subjects carefully and thoroughly before this ultimate goal, a goal that all members of the public would like to see, could be achieved.

Firstly, the government structure is really too bloated and overlapping, and compared to some private organizations, there are too many tiers of management. The Chinese saying for describing this situation is "h₁ °₁ » Ĩ h₁ °₁ ° " and the English saying is "too many cooks spoil the broth". In the Government, not only the broth would be spoiled because there are too many cooks, but sometimes, the cooks would engage in many arguments among themselves even before they started to make the broth. Under this bloated structure, communication between the top and bottom has to pass through many levels and if an officer at a certain level does not wish to take up the responsibility for a certain job, he would try to shirk the responsibility onto others. I think such an organization should really be made "leaner" ;X I do not wish to use the term "downsizing" ;X as some private organizations have advocated, that is, to remove as many overlapping structures as possible.

Secondly, as regards civil service culture, civil servants are most capable of acting in accordance with regulations, so even if a job is not properly done, they are just going by the book or using this book as a pretext for not doing their job. I think a review should really be conducted in this area. However, we should not place all the blame on civil servants for each of them has his own responsibilities. I said some civil servants would tremble when they learn that they have to attend Legislative Council meetings and some may even have rehearsals before the meeting. If we ask the civil servants some questions, the questions would have to go through many levels before we can get an answer. Why? This is because they do not want anything to go wrong, they are afraid of impeachment and even more afraid of criticisms, so they have to find many ways to deal with the Legislative Council. Moreover, civil servants are also in awe of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). Though civil servants who come under the prosecution of the ICAC may eventually be found not responsible after investigation, they would actually not be in any mood to continue to perform their duties during this period of time. Although it is said that investigations are confidential, in fact, many people would learn about

them.

Moreover, civil servants are also worried about investigations instigated by the Office of The Ombudsman and the Audit Commission. Civil servants would try their best to avoid these four structures. The best they hope is not to be subject to any investigations, but even if they were investigated, they would hope that there would be no loss on their part. I think we should really address such situations seriously.

It is undeniable that civil servants are quite reluctant to make the so-called value judgements. And, for this reason, they are used to adopting an across-the-board approach for all matters, regardless of good or bad. When it comes to making choices, instead of just choosing the good ones, civil servants would treat all options alike, and sometimes even if they know very well that a certain option is good, they still cannot support it, because they have to adopt the so-called objective criteria. The acceptance of the "lowest bid" is a very good example, whereby civil servants merely base their decision on figures without considering the quality of the bidder and refrain from making any value judgement. In other words, very often, the decision of civil servants is not based on quality or the best interest of Hong Kong, but rather on figures that have nothing to do with quality. Furthermore, more often than not, the decision process of civil servants is very bureaucratic for they would only follow the usual practice without considering whether any procedures are overlapped; though this may include certain usual practices provided for under the law and regulations, it does not mean that they have to carry on with those practices. Have the civil servants ever reflected on this? Of course, civil servants have some political considerations and this is also one of the factors for the cumbersome and lengthy procedures. I believe it is necessary for the Government to conduct a review, that is, the so-called process re-engineering. If 10 steps have to be taken under the existing arrangement, it could consider whether the same result could be achieved with only five steps?

I would like to clarify on some of Mr CHAN Kwok-keung's comments. In the document that Mr CHAN sent to us, he pointed out that the functions of the Hong Kong Tourism Board are only very limited because it is not an executive body. However, we could not say that the Hong Kong Tourism Board is not an executive body, for one of its functions is to promote tourism in Hong Kong. However, Mr CHAN pointed out that the Board is not responsible for matters like infrastructural improvements and developing new scenic spots. Now, a Tourism Commission has been established and Mrs Rebecca LAI has taken up the post of the Commissioner of Tourism. The Tourism Commission has actually made some achievements since its establishment. The Financial Secretary has also talked about an internal co-ordinating committee on tourism in this year's Budget, therefore, Mr CHAN was actually seriously wrong in apportioning the blame to the Hong Kong Tourism Board. Government co-ordination in this area has improved recently and this shows that improvements could be initiated

within the Government and that it is really redundant to create yet another committee on improving the administrative procedures. Therefore, we do not support the establishment of a administrative procedures review committee.