

**MR THOMAS CHUA, PRESIDENT OF SCCCI,
NOMINATED MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
AT PARLIAMENT SITTING ON 15/16 AUGUST 2016**

Ministry of Manpower: Singapore Workforce Development Agency Bill

1. Madam Speaker, the Singapore Workforce Development Agency has contributed a great deal to the upgrading of Singapore's workforce. Now, in keeping with the changes in its role, it has been renamed to Singapore Workforce Agency. I support this decision.
2. After restructuring, the Singapore Workforce Agency will be responsible for building the Singaporean core in the workforce for all trades and industries, assist enterprises to maintain their competitiveness, and not to have an over-reliance on manpower. This is a role of great responsibility.
3. Under the double whammy of economic restructuring and manpower shortage, local enterprises need to change their business mindsets and management models. Some businessmen react fast and act swiftly, and have already made their adjustments. But some others are still blinded to this reality, adhering to the notion of "there will be a way out once we reach the bottom of the mountain", and moving one step at a time, asking for help only when problems arise. I hope that the Singapore Workforce Agency could find a way to communicate with these businessmen effectively, convincing them that a mindset change is necessary to counter the challenges of an ageing population, and to create more attractive employment opportunities for Singaporeans.
4. These are areas where high value-added industries and newly emerging industries have a distinct advantage. MNCs and large enterprises have always had the greatest appeal to job-seekers. Those which need the Singapore Workforce Agency's help most are the traditional industries and SMEs. Moreover, these industries cannot be assessed in terms of economic gain but their social contribution. Methods used by some large corporations may not apply to traditional industries or SMEs. For example, the government encourages enterprises to mechanise and automate; SMEs can buy the machines but have no use for them. It gets even more problematic when the equipment become faulty, and become intermittent pains of the overall restructuring process.
5. During the restructuring process, SMEs realise that change is necessary, but may not have the means to implement the changes. Now, with the setting up of the Singapore Workforce Agency, there will be a specific government agency to steer enterprises towards creating good job opportunities for Singaporeans, and I hope that with everyone pitching in to work hard, the situation could be changed for the better.

6. However, a crucial factor is how everyone could play a complementary role. In the battlefield, businessmen need weapons and ammunition. The Workforce Development Agency needs to assist businessmen to upgrade their artillery and equipment, while the SkillsFuture Singapore Agency should be responsible for manufacturing the bullets. This shows that the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Education have to work very closely together in order to reap real benefits for the business community.