

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2017) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

76TH Sitting

Wednesday, 6TH December, 2017

Assembly convened at 10.10 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2017

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2018 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2017-11-27.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2018, of a total sum of two hundred and forty three billion, three hundred and seventy five million, two hundred and eighty eight thousand dollars (**\$243,375,288,000**), **excluding twenty three billion, seven hundred and eighteen million, four hundred and eighty three thousand dollars (\$23,718,483,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to further provision in respect of finance. [*Minister of Finance*]

Assembly resumed Budget debate.

Mr. Anamayah: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasant morning to all Hon. Members sitting in this National Assembly and to you, Sir. As I rise to make my contribution to the Budget debate 2018, let me say, at the outset, that the Hon. Minister of Finance who, regrettably, is not here, deserves a *Pulitzer prize* in the category of fiction for this presentation.

The ‘good life’, as outline in this Budget, is an imaginary construct. It is so far removed from reality and out of touch with the needs and aspirations of the common man. It does absolutely nothing to arrest our crumbling economy, which is in a free fall. Some were guardedly optimistic that, given that this was the fourth Budget presented by the Coalition Government, the Hon. Minister would finally get it right, but that was not to be. This could now be added to the litany of failed policies and broken promises that epitomises this Government’s track record in office since May, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, permit me, at this point, to address briefly some comments made by Hon. Members Jermaine Figuera and Ronald Bulkan when they called for what they term constructive criticism and for the Opposition to present alternative plans, but we did that and we have been doing that. There was a motion.... Well, we sought to present a motion in this House with alternative measures to mitigate the harshness of the three previous Budgets and to correct what was going wrong in this present Budget, but, unfortunately, that never saw the light of day.

I recall also, when the Leader of the Opposition made his contribution to the debate on the Petroleum Bill, he was subjected to what could only be described as an unhinged attack by an

Hon. Member in this House. Despite the fact that we have presented sound, reasoned arguments and proper alternatives, not one suggestion has ever been adopted.

For this Budget 2018, firstly, there needed to be an unequivocal acknowledgment that the three past Budgets did not deliver and, certainly, did not deliver the ‘good life’ as promised.

Secondly, we needed to see a change in policy, a change in direction, a drastic change from the path and course that has been set by this Government. The Guyanese people are not gullible and have long since come to the conclusion that all this talk about the ‘good life’ has been just that, *gaff*, as the Trinidadians would say, *old talk*.

There is also this fallacy that is being perpetuated by the Coalition Government that it inherited a bankrupt economy and that the country had to be rebuilt. This fallacy found its way into page 1 of the Budget Presentation, where the Hon. Minister is saying:

“...we were never in doubt about the enormity of the task which lay ahead. We were in a hurry to rebuild a country that was marred and scarred...”

He is talking about Guyana, here, Your Honour.

“...by poor and corrupted governance under the PPP/C. We had to restore hope, inspire confidence and shape a new destiny for our country and our people.”

Wow. What noble aspirations. Despite the best efforts of this Government, and, try as it may, it cannot rewrite history. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C) legacy is intact. It is there for posterity, especially the economic history. It is an undisputed fact that it is the PPP/C Government that took this country out of bankruptcy and brought peace, progress and prosperity and enhanced the lives and wellbeing of every man, woman and child in this country, regardless of the colour of their skin, their ethnicity and their political background; even if one did not vote for the PPP/C, it did not matter. We brought progress to everyone. That is what our legacy is.

This is why the Leader of the Opposition could visit any community in this country, from Parika to Crabwood Creek, Linden to Lethem, and he is welcomed with open arms. Could the Hon. Members of the Coalition Government say the same? We all saw the reception that a very prominent Member of the Coalition Government received in Berbice, the village of his birth.

Remember, there is always an armed entourage with these visitors now. They are going to the place of their birth and they need armed entourage, a battalion of police and army officers to protect, but from whom?

The Coalition Government's policy, 'spend, tax and borrow', coupled with a complete lack of vision, is a lethal combination and it has put our economy into reverse gear and it has shattered the confidence of the private sector, the business class, the investors and the people of our country. So, if the premise on which the Budget is based is wrong, how could anything good flow from it? How can it possibly deliver a good life? It cannot.

We also need to match the rhetoric with the reality. Let us examine what was said and what the reality is in our country. The speakers on this side of the House have already established that the essence of the Green State Development Strategy is painting national buildings green, a garish green and shades of green, the colour of the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU). It is green and only green; there is no yellow in there; no room for yellow; no room for the Alliance For Change (AFC), the irrelevant partner in this Coalition. And I am sure that this green makeover has received the blessings and stamp of approval of the Hon. Prime Minister and the Members of the AFC in this Government. This policy of painting, firstly, the Ministry of the Presidency, then the State House, green, is showing us that what is creeping in again and what the plans are - party paramountcy. And that party is the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R). So what is next? Are they going to paint the Parliament Buildings green? They might as well paint the Court of Appeal green.

It has long been established that this Government, as a whole, is unbelievably incompetent, incapable of executing even the simplest of projects and is corrupt and arrogant, to top it off. What is also well known is that the default setting of the Government, what it always turns to, relies on or falls back on, is all of the Members of the Government blaming the PPP/C for all of their failures and all of their shortcomings and botched projects.

The Guyanese people are tired of hearing excuses for these fiascos like that one at Palmyra earlier this year - that monument that collapsed. The Coalition Government needs to recognise that it is the Government; it is in Government and it has been there for 30 months. Accept your

responsibilities and discharge your duties; stop blaming everyone else for the current economic crisis that you have orchestrated. If you cannot deliver, then do the honourable thing and resign.

The Hon. Members on that side of the honourable House must really stop boasting about the size of this Budget or the last one and stop saying that it is the largest Budget ever presented in the House. We know that. But the PPP/C did much more with far less because of prudent management and sound planning. We had competent people in charge who delivered the good life.

What is also clear in the minds of the Guyanese people is that this Government is also completely without compassion and empathy; it is completely without those two qualities. How else would you describe the coalition's treatment of sugar workers, rice farmers, sawmillers and loggers?

10.25 a.m.

The coalition inherited a thriving rice and forestry sector. Sugar had its problems, but it was a significant contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it certainly brought in foreign exchange. There were certainly no talks about closure on the horizons, either from the Government or Opposition. There were no talks about that when they went into power in May 2018. What has changed? The Government has changed, that is what has changed. As a direct result of the Government's blundering, the Venezuelan rice market is in crisis and the rest is history. I shall not repeat it. Instead of supporting the sector, we heard the public pronouncement that rice is private business and not the Government's concern. A *Pontius Pilate* was done there. You washed your hands of that sector - that is not your concern.

The forestry sector saw Government's meddling and intervening with backward policies and Value-Added Tax (VAT). As a result, the businesses, the sawmillers, loggers and lumberyards, have experienced an 80% decline in their business. The industry has been thrown into crisis, a crisis engendered by the coalition Government. The measure in the Budget to remove VAT from logs and sawn lumber would not help, what needs to be done is that it needs to be removed completely from lumber. [Ms. Wade: You should have removed it.] It was

never there, you put it there and we are asking that you remove it. You are asking for constructive criticism and that is one, remove that.

More recently, we heard these sectors, which are the pillars of our economy, especially the economies of Regions 5 and 6 where rice, sugar, logging and the forestry sectors, described as curses. A most unfortunate statement but it shows what the thinking process is. This is how the coalition treats these sectors, as curses.

Another pronouncement was that sugar needed to be removed from the books. Sugar needs to be removed from the books just like a line item, you scratch it out and that is the end of sugar. Like *Pharaoh's* pronouncement, so let it be written, so let it be done, an *imperial edict* and you close the sugar industries. That is what formulates your policies. Surely the Government must have some appreciation for the impact and importance of rice on the economies of Regions 5 and 6 and the consequences that will flow from interfering with these sectors, from damaging these sectors. For all intents and purposes, it is to my mind a deliberate policy to cripple the economy of Berbice, Regions 5 and 6, the Peoples Progressive Party Civic's (PPP/C's) stronghold.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Mr. Anamayah: Despite the unfolding tragedy, that is the Wales Sugar Estate, this Government intends to proceed with closing the Rose Hall, Canje and Skeldon Sugar Estates. We have already learnt that 400 letters were dispatched to the sugar workers in Rose Hall and Canje and more are coming. That is not in the budget, no mention was made of them, no provision for them. What was not there also, and I see two Hon. Members on the Government's side of the House had a public tiff in the media, what has not been told to the people is that, as we speak right now, it started Monday of this week, 1,750 letters are being issued to the workers at the Skeldon Sugar Estate. One thousand seven hundred and fifty workers will be laid off before the end of this month. Those workers are junior staffs and another 50 senior staffs will follow shortly. This is the good life.

Our sugar workers are being robbed of their dignity and we cannot allow that to stand. We have to make representations for them. Under the PPP/C's Government, a sugar cane harvester or the daughter or son of a sugar cane harvester could have become a doctor, an engineer or a lawyer. Now, the parents cannot even afford to send them to school. What the coalition is trying to do defies logic. Then there is another, very recent, public pronouncement that this Government will put people before profit. Rhetoric again, what is the reality, another lie. There is absolutely no

exit strategy. If you are going to close the estates at least have a plan. Tell us your plan. There is no plan.

Combined, these two estates contribute \$6 billion to the local economy in Berbice annually. What is there to absorb that? What new industry have you created in Berbice to employ these people? There is nothing. You are throwing the entire economy of Berbice, from the food and market vendors, the private sector and the business people, every single person is being affected adversely. We have said it time and time again, you are asking for constructive criticisms and solutions and the answer is not closure. Our problem in Guyana has been and still is production. We have the markets to supply, but we have never been able to meet our quotas, so the answer is not closure, it is to increase production. In the budget, even before we heard from the Minister, we heard from the Hon. Minister Holder, when the State Paper was presented to the House, who said that the three estates that would remain open will produce 147 tons annually but in the Budget's Speech 2018, the Hon. Minister of Finance is saying that the target for next year is 115 tons. Can we trust or believe any of the figures presented to this honourable House by the Minister? No, we cannot. We know what a farce the growth projection has been, your can will never get that right. How can you plan? How can you believe anything that comes out of Members of the Government's mouth? How can anyone plan an economic strategy or plan their lives around it? One cannot. It is whims and fantasies. One does not know what they will do on any given day.

With those few words, it is clear that, we, on this side of the House, cannot, in good conscience, support this 2018 Budget that has been brought to the House. Bring a budget with good measures and we will support it, not this. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister within the Ministry of Natural Resources [Ms. Charles-Broomes]: Mr. Speaker, a pleasant good morning to you. Please, from the outset, for all those persons around Guyana and the world, I intend to present on facts because there is an old song that says, *teacha Percy seh if yuh tell an untruth yuh going to hell as soon as yuh die;* and I do not intend to go there.

Allow me Sir, to sweep up, let the broom sweep up some of the untruths that remain in the House. The Hon. Member before me said that persons should resign, but when that power attorney was forged, I did not see the person resigning. I rest that one there.

Let me thank the Hon. Catherine Hughes. Somebody in the House with technology could just send a message to the Hon. Winston Jordan and his team since they are not here, so that he can hear me saying thank you. Maybe the Hon. Gillian Burton-Persaud, my friend, no you cannot, because of the technology. I will finish my presentation and the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) will not hit home there. Let me thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Winston Jordan, the Minister of Finance and his team.

Sometimes I feel as if I was not in Guyana for the past couple of years or like we are in two different countries. It seems as if Guyana began in 1992, closed off in 2015 and we now start again. That is the impression and the picture that is being painted out there because the Hon. Member does not have a lot of things to boast upon, but allow me to rebut some of the comments.

The Hon. Member, who opened the debate, in his screaming style, mentioned small and medium scale miners. The only thing that Hon. Member knows about small and medium scale miners is when that they were going to look for the \$3 billion from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) that the small and medium scale miners paid for with some plan with that which had to do with housing. That is the only thing I can remember that particular Member knowing about small and medium scale miners.

The Hon. Member, my wonderful Friend on the Opposition's side, spoke about women and about how there was nothing in this budget for women. It really hurts me sometimes because it is this Government that has recognised that in the extractive industry there are women. For 2012 to 2015, where were all these specialists on women issues? Where were they? They were like *Adam*, they were hiding but now, thank God for this Government, women are talking about women's issues. I am qualified to speak on matters dealing with women. Where were these women when women were trafficked and in a suitcase being pulled through an airport? Where were these women? On the Government's side of the House, let me tell you about women.

The Hon. Member spoke about my Hon. Minister, the Hon. Mr. Raphael Trotman, as if it was a joke but, today, I want to say to my Colleague that I am proud of you because marriage is honourable by God. On this side of the House we know about wives. Wives are absent on the other side of the House, so let me congratulate you on that. **[Ms. Ally: [Inaudible]]**

Okay, thank you Chief Whip. The head on the Government's side of the House, the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, as if it is a joke about a stamp, but Hon. Prime Minister, we on this side of the House are proud of you because you are the stamp to change. You are the stamp to the coalition Government and unity. You are the stamp to bring it together. The kind of divide I am speaking about is not the kind of divide which we saw on a placard in this House. It is about bringing people together. You are the stamp to that and it must go down. We on this side of the House are proud of you.

We heard a lot about corruption. Again, my father would have said, careful before *yuh* get sore mouth. The people that are talking about corruption are the people that are before the courts. What are we talking about shame and corruption? Let us address corruption and that is what this Government is doing, we are addressing it. That is why people are scared of the State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA). I rest my case.

Before I move into my presentation, I am no sugar specialist but allow me. When I took office at the Ministry of Social Protection, there was a matter that I could never forget. Some years ago in this country, several sugar workers were assaulted by the hands of drunken managers and the Skeldon Sugar Estate was shut down. The people protested across the sugar estates but nobody paid attention because, in that case, the person who faced the assault was a good friend of a past President.

10.40 a.m.

When this Government took Office, it was the same Minister who called in the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU), including my Hon. Friend who is not here today, to say that there was a matter with a man being assaulted. The Hon. Member had said to me, "*Ow* Minister, the matter *deh* a Court and me *nah* know when it *ah* done because we tried everything". I said, "Listen, this Government will stand at the side of every worker in this country". It was under this Government that particular gentleman was given back his job. The sad part of it is that he lost his house and family and, today, he is at the Skeldon Sugar Estate with the same shift. All the money he was not paid, this Government paid him the money and now he has a job. The only thing that we could not have given back to him was family, but that too shall happen. Are we talking about sugar workers?

Upon inspection, there were human beings with sticks fixing boilers, men crying and this is not a *Nancy Story*. [Mr. Dharamlall: *[Inaudible]*] I will get there; you relax yourself and learn Hon. Member Dharamlall. Learn a little bit. They are talking about how much they did for sugar workers. I have capable Ministers who will speak after me to deal with that.

When we talk about the mining and extractive sector, this Government has a vision, it has a plan. This Government has the word 'vision' and in the vision of this Government, we would look to have a sector that is free. [Mr. Dharamlall: Proverbs 29:18.] Allow me to save you with your two mining properties. Rest your mouth Hon. Member Dharamlall and let me make a good presentation. The Hon. Member has property and he does not even know where it is.

This Government is looking to have a sector that will be transparent, have accountability, a level playing field, that looks at gender and one that will fight free of human trafficking. How will we do that? In the 2018 Budget, this Government will work with all the stakeholders in the extractive industry - this is not grabbing for a little land - to put together a policy that will guide the extractive sector. Hon. Member Dharamlall, I am speaking on vision and that is what you do not have. Listen a little bit.

Within that framework for vision, one of the things that we had inherited was the fact that there was no oneness in the sector. The small miners cried out about landlordism, *bullyism* and all the *isms* that we know we inherited. We are in the fixing business, so it was this Government with a vision that had brought about the syndicates. I am proud today to recognise in this House the big change that is taking place. Every time the Minister of Natural Resources is presenting - and we do not pay for people, respect miners - they come here in their numbers from all parts of the country. I salute you.

The syndicate initiative that the Government has put together, I had mentioned it in my last year's 'budget presentation. Allow me to bring the House up-to-date about what I had said about syndicates. As of today's date, we have 13 syndicates and we did mention that we would have about 20 syndicates. Out of the 13 syndicates, we have 339 members registered, that would look at a rough average of employment of 2635 persons coming out from the family households. If one would look at the amount of dredges that there are, maybe a rough average of 10,540

households will benefit, not forgetting the man who sells greens, sells fish, drives bus and moves a truck, I am pleased to announce that this syndicate initiative is up and running well.

It is because of a vision that, come 2018, all miners in this sector could look forward to the good life.

In this year's budget consultation, the miners came together and we are happy to report that we are not dealing with the divided sector that we inherited. All miners came together, united themselves and called themselves a united movement, which deals with small, medium and women miners. Today, we are pleased to announce that social cohesion is at its best in the extractive sector.

I am pleased to announce that, in the budget, there is money to deal with fatalities. The Hon. Minister Jordan spoke about the reduction in pit cave-ins. It is hard work and, in 2018, we will work harder because of what we have inherited. On the same day that His Excellency was sworn in at this Public Buildings, there was a pit cave-in where 10 miners lost their lives. That is what this Government is heading to – a 100% fatality free. We are an ambitious Government.

With the syndicate initiative, no syndicate allocated land will be allowed to have labour trafficking, sexual exploitation, abuse...I am still a woman in this House and oftentimes, from the other side, there is a particular gentleman, who has a female alongside him, who would say "Do not bother with she, she is Broomes; she is a pork-knocker. The other Hon. Member, who is a female, would say, "What we do call her again – a pork-knocker". How could you look at women, who would stand and toil from day-to-day on rough roads, hills, gullies and falls, how could you refer to women who work that hard as pork-knockers? How could you do that and then talk about women? How could we do that to these women? *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your protection. How could we do that to these women who sit here in this House today? Who can relate with what I am saying? They would often fall down and die of hard attacks – no health, road, security or nothing at all and we brave them. We are an educated and bold set of people. We, the women, are a bold set of people but still in this House, we are *faking* to talk about how we care about women. I listened carefully to the other side and in

my heart I said, “Okay, this is how you care for the women, the pork-knockers. But there it goes, this Government, who respects all women in this country and, today, Simona Charles-Broomes, from a past miner, into a Minister representing and going forward. That is the Government.

Allow me, before I move off from syndicates, to tell this House about a little success. We are already getting successes. There was a 50 year old woman in a syndicate who has some mining properties and the properties were worked, and she was frustrated. As a 50 something year old, she was not able to get there, and one of the males in the syndicates said “Aunty, relax, I am going go there for you and deal with that matter”. That male folk went, dealt with the matter and that woman is collecting her honest percentage from her property. That is success. That is gender, both male and female working together to build the extractive sector.

On the road to the vision, *The Journey Continues to the Good Life*. In the 2018 Budget, \$81.6 million was allocated to the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) to deal with tail end management and tail end pond environment. Hon. Dharamlall, get your notepad because you need to take this information to be guided into the sector. Mr. Speaker, I ask for your protection from the Hon. Member who chews without a *chico* in his mouth. Please, protect me.

Money is budgeted to look at occupational health and safety and the output is that the Government is looking for at least 80% compliance with tail end pond; 65% of mercury because we have to deal with our environment. This Government will not shut down mining; it will work with miners to strive for a green mining industry.

Like I said earlier, we are looking for a 100% fatality free. What does that mean? It means that we will work harder. It means that we will educate. It means that we would go out there on the ground because we know one of the miners who was a fatality. Just the other day, at the inquiry with the Minister, fingers were pointing left, right and centre and that is why the miners were allowed to work in an illegal fashion which took the lives of persons. That will not continue to happen.

In the 2018 Budget, \$36 million is allocated to the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission to look at quality monitoring of the water in our regions. This means that in all parts of this country, whether mining is taking place or not, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, and more so in the area of mining where persons are living, be it coast landers or Indigenous brothers and

sisters, is ensuring that the water in their communities that are running in creeks and rivers are in a safe condition so that they could drink it. Money is provided for that in the 2018 Budget. I am speaking about the vision of this Government.

In the Mazaruni, Potaro and Cuyuni, in all those places, we will have... For my Hon. Friend on the other side who is chewing non-stop, in Essequibo, it would be taking place too.

I thought I heard the *goat neighing*.

To improve the monitoring in the extractive sector with regard to the act... *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this began yesterday afternoon. Members will decide whether they will deal with one another in a proper manner, as is required in this building or whether they are going to indulge in insults. Members on both sides of the House are guilty of that. I will warn Members one other time and if we want to indulge in insults, then the House will descend. Insults are not acceptable on either side of the House and Members are adults to know that. Members feel that they can use it if they feel that they can escape the attention of the Speaker. We must decide what we wish to do. Hon. Member, please take your seat. We must decide what we want to do. What House we want. Please proceed.

Ms. Charles-Broomes: The sum of \$140 million is allocated for the Mines Division. The output from that is like, as I said earlier, the Government is looking for proper management of the extractive sector, which will enhance that division in its inspections and monitoring in the mining districts of Guyana. I am pleased to announce that in every area of the extractive industry this 2018 Budget provides an allocation to improve working towards the vision of the Government.

The Mines Inspectorate Division was allocated \$419 million; the Minerals Processing Unit \$32 million; Land Management Division \$50 million and in this division, I am pleased to announce, again, that the miners continue to complain of the time that division takes to deal with their matters and so the division is aiming to reduce that time by a 20% going forward.

10.55 a.m.

Again, within the Geological Service Department, there is a lump sum of money allotted to that project that they are working on. The cost of the geological data was \$3 million. When we took Office, in that area, there were data for which millions of dollars were expended. That went missing. Where are they? I do not know if the Hon. Member could help me. I see he is engaging me. Where did that information go? Nobody can say up to now, but this Government is ensuring that adequate information is at the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, so that we will be able to improve the mining sector by having information to give to the miners.

Mining in Guyana is something new, even for the media that persons are hearing about because of neglect. It comes as if it is something new that we are talking about. Who knows about the Geological Service Department? Who knows about the land management? Who knows about these divisions? It was under the past Administration that the neglect to this sector took place. Mr. Speaker, the truth hurts.

This year and also in 2018 – the new year, the Government of Guyana, along with the Ministry of Natural Resources will be engaging in a series of training exercises with the miners, after we had all found out that little was done in the mining sector. We would not be going there to impose this and impose that. It is a job and we are heading there and we will get there.

Today, miners are happy. A person talked about the taxes that were removed but never, ever before had miners shut down Bartica, and, at that time, the Government still did not pay attention. We are proud to know that that is going to the table for negotiations. That is what negotiations are about. When the Minister and the Government can listen to the people and make changes, we are proud of that.

Again, the miners called for amnesty and they received it. It is because the Government wants to work with them. We do care. There is much to go on and on about mining, because, from the time we took Office, we have been moving upward and upward we will continue to go.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, allow me to thank all the staff that worked hand in hand with both Ministers in getting this sector in the position where it ought to be, the vision that the Government is talking about.

In closing, let me recite some of the words from the miners when the Budget was presented:

“One love,

Let’s get together and feel alright.”

Miners, our Government is happy because you are happy. We are happy because, come 2018, your cries will be answered. You know it better than anyone else sitting in this House. We are happy because, come 2020, you have hope. There is light in the tunnel. This Government has brought light in the tunnel and light will always make darkness vanish and that is what the Government is doing. The dark clouds that were over this sector, light has now cleared them and brightness it will be for all miners in this country.

I have no doubt; I have no question in my mind where the extractive industry is heading. I have no questions for the Hon. Minister. Today, I am proud to stand in this honourable House and commend Budget 2018 for passage.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. *[Applause]*

Ms. Selman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to offer my contribution to Budget 2018 which was presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*.

What I have heard presented over the last two days does not mirror this theme. As a matter of fact, the budgetary measures outlined by the Hon. Minister of Finance does very little for the vulnerable, the poor, the single parent households, the elderly, the small business operators, the unemployed, the taxi operators, the farmers, the pensioners and the students.

This Administration’s version of the good life is nothing more than a fleeting illusion which has been reincarnated in different forms in the last three years. The end results of reckless, political promises, without regard for the fiscal realities of the country has left behind dissatisfied public servants, frustrated youths and unhappy households. The future is bleak. The A Partnership for National Unity’s (APNU’s) illusion of a good life offers us nothing now or for the future.

The meagre \$500 increase for the elderly is nothing to celebrate about. It is nothing to smile about. In fact, this insult to our pensioners should be publicly rejected by the populace. Would it not have made better sense to have formulated a comprehensive package for our senior citizens who toiled tirelessly to build this great nation we call Guyana?

The Hon. Minister of Finance, though absent, I am sure would have allowed good conscience to prevail, I hope, and allow the restoring of the monthly electricity and water subsidies, and ensuring that mechanisms are in place that would influence the expeditious implementation of facilities that would ensure that pensioners access their money in an orderly and friendly environment, instead of standing in long lines for hours in the sun.

In 2017, our senior citizens received an \$800 increase in their pension. In 2018, they will receive \$500. Is the Hon. Minister of Finance saying to our senior citizens that giving less would put them on the journey to a good life? It is my humble submission that pensioners should be given no less than \$25,000 per month in keeping with the rising cost of living. While \$25,000 is not enough for our senior citizens, it is way better than what this coalition is offering to continue the journey to the good life.

I would now like to focus my attention on Government's plans for the education and tourism sectors. I wish to state firmly that I support the Minister of Finance when he stated on page 58 of his presentation that:

“Mr. Speaker, there is clear need for reform and innovation across all levels of education delivery – nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary.”

As an educator, education is always on my mind. Parents and teachers, like myself, must be very disappointed and left feeling discouraged by what was presented on 27th November, 2017. The importance of education, which is both transformative and pivotal to the development of citizens and this nation, cannot be over-emphasised. The real problem, however, is not the sums allocated, but ensuring that it filters down to the lowest, and most vulnerable groups of children, those living in the far flung areas. The current Administration is aware of the challenges in the education sector, as highlighted by the Hon. Minister of Finance.

While the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) into the Education Sector may be a welcome initiative, it has been overcome by scandal. Despite spending \$26,743,300, inclusive of \$4.8 million paid to the Chairman, Mr. Ed Caesar, and \$2.4 million to the other members of the commission, the final report has not yet been submitted. This, I daresay, is deceptive. Millions of tax payers' dollars were spent on this inquiry held in 2016. We are at the end of 2017 and, yet, the final report is missing in action and a single man is \$4.8 million richer. Where are we heading? When will this

Administration stop deceiving this nation? Our children deserve more and our teachers deserve better.

I ask you Hon. Members, would it not have served a greater good pumping this money into the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE)? Does this coalition Administration expect this nation to sit quietly, while citizens are deceived and the public coffers are being repeatedly abused?

It is time that our children, in the public sector, no longer be subjected to frequent teacher absenteeism, poor curriculum delivery, shortage of text books and materials, and non-submission of grades at the tertiary levels. I urge that this final report be delivered and made public in the shortest possible time. Also, it is necessary that a thorough investigation be conducted to ascertain or determine the contributing factors for the chronic teacher absenteeism in our schools, especially since this is a critical factor in the poor performance of our learners.

I wish to urge that, rather than reinventing the wheel, Guyana should effectively adopt the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) human resource development strategy, which CARICOM Heads of Government approved in July of this year. This strategy is intended to prioritise the construction of, by 2030, a globally competitive, innovative and integrated education system to drive growth and development in Guyana. I submit that Guyana's goals are the same, so let us stop wasting money on a report that may never arrive and use the funds to begin to roll out the strategy.

I wish to refer to some excerpts from the Hon. Minister's presentation:

“Mr. Speaker, we will continue to add to the pool of trained teachers, which currently stand at 77 per cent, in order to ensure that each child is afforded the best possible education. This year, we expect that 450 graduates will join the trained teacher workforce and 37 untrained teachers will complete the teacher upgrading programme, to prepare for the trained teachers' certificate programme. In 2018, we expect an additional 335 trained teachers to join the workforce.”

“Mr. Speaker, we can do everything I have just mentioned and more, but there is still one thing that will prevent us from achieving the good life as it relates to education – that is, ensuring that teachers are available in all corners of the country. Too often, as we go out

to the hinterland regions, the stories of quality of the living comparisons to the coastland abound from our education officials. The cost of bread, water, cooking gas, the isolation from the wider communities, having to travel miles to get the basic supplies, are only some of the daily issues confronting our hinterland teachers. In order to ensure that we improve the quality of education and the opportunities for our young people, the availability of good teachers is vital, and we must both retain and move additional teachers to those locations. As such, Budget 2018 caters for an 80 percent increase in the Remote Area Incentive (RAI).”

These excerpts speak a lot to the ordinary man. How can this Hon. Minister come before this House and tell us this.

11.10 a.m.

Was the report of the commission of inquiry (COI) not expected to address some of these very issues? It appears that instead of dressing and treating our wounds, everyday this administration adds a bit of salt.

It is my view that there must be a teacher’s training college or centre in every region of Guyana. This will ensure equal access to training opportunities. Those in the hinterland will not be left out. No need to travel to the coastland at an enormous economic cost. The huge sums of moneys spent on the COI could have been used to lay the foundation for such an initiative. The administration has to be smart about its approach to education. It is something it has failed miserably at since it took office in 2015, one disaster after another. I dare say, if the Hon. Minister of Finance is serious about giving life to the budget theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*, then establish a training facility for teachers in all ten administrative regions. This will be the start of a “good life”.

A great percentage of the time allocated for teacher/pupil interaction is spent on workshops, which do little to improve the competency of both teacher and pupil. Very often the knowledge acquired at these workshops is not transferred to pupils as many teachers often are stressed out and uncomfortable. Aside from training, focus should also be centred on improving salaries and enhancing teaching environments. Can a teacher, who is taking home \$80, 000 a month, enjoy the “good life”? Can a teacher in the Hinterland who has to walk miles to get to the classroom be

on the “journey to the good life”? Can a teacher teach in a classroom with a leaking roof, little space and no ventilation be on this “journey to a good life”? Will a teacher from the coastland, who is posted to the interior, be content with a merged \$12,600 allowance? No. What you will have is a miserable teacher and children who are unable to learn.

Teachers must be able to take care of themselves and their families. That being said, I would like to suggest that teachers in the hinterland be given an allowance of no less than \$30,000 a month and return air tickets to those in the far-flung regions. It is unfair for teachers to have to travel via road to get to Lethem and other interior locations, twice a term. I hope the Hon. Minister of Finance would have a conscience and accept my humble suggestions.

The quality of teachers entering the profession must be improved. It is incumbent upon the administration to craft specific initiatives and more attractive salaries and benefits so as to retain teachers to continue to their professional development. Too many leave within five years. Too many, including school leaders, receive no adequate training once they join a school.

I wish to turn my attention to tourism. It is a sad reality that A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) coalition pays little attention to tourism. Tourism in all its forms, music, eco, sports and domestic among others, has the potential to boost any economy. This administration robbed Guyana of its opportunity to become a top tourism destination by scrapping the Ministry of Tourism. What we now have is a Department of Tourism in the Ministry of Business. Both of these areas have vast potential for economic growth and should not be paired. The rationale for this move will never be understood.

The Hon. Minister of Finance, in his presentation, spoke about the growth of tourism continuing at a steady pace with visitor arrivals totalling 170, 322 persons between January to September, a 5.7% increase over the same period in 2016. Again, the deception continues. Returning Guyanese are not tourists. That is the part that was left out. How many of these arrivals are Guyanese? How many of these arrivals are either Guyanese returning from vacation or are overseas based? How many of these visitors, when they come, visit historical sites and tourist spots? On page 43, the Minister of Finance informed us:

“the Guyana Tourism Authority, in the coming year, will focus on areas including: (i) promoting the Guianas Shield as a tourism product; (ii) deepening links with industry

operatives and investors; (iii) supporting the execution of cultural, heritage, and sports events; (iv) strengthening our diaspora relations to develop and exploit tourism opportunities; and (v) preparing and implementing a Tourism Development and Destination Marketing Plan.”

What does all this mean? We need to hear about the location of tourist sites, the best way to get there is to capitalise on overnighting at those places, security at those sites and cut costs. Majority of the tourist sites are located in the interior and one can get there by boat, airplane or road, so why not invest in roads close to these sites? Why not invest in building airstrips closer to some of these tourist spots? Why not turn the area around, some of these sites, into a resort where people can camp or overnight?

In his presentation, the Hon. Minister of Finance said that several key hinterland roads to facilitate “gold miners and loggers” will be upgraded. There was no talk of road works to benefit tourists. The state of bridges in the hinterland is another downside to tourism. Which tourist would be comfortable driving across an unstable, wooden bridge with no guard rails? None. People want to see our wildlife, our birds, our flora and fauna. One of the biggest obstacles to tourism is the state of our roads, many of which are impassible when it rains. The tourist from London, the tourist from Canada and the tourist from Australia do not want to be in a small plane flying from one place to the next. He wants to be on the road seeing and experiencing nature, virgin terrain. That is how we sell our tourism product.

Another big obstacle to tourism is security. It is well known that we have a lawless interior, fuelled by the rough terrain and lack of an adequate fleet of security personnel. I would suggest that the Ministry of Public Security and the Department of Tourism work together to formulate a comprehensive plan to treat with these issues. The Guyana Police Force, first of all, must be brought up to strength. The availability of ranks and resources is of paramount importance to ensure that tourists are, and feel, safe. Security officials accompanying tourists to far-flung destinations should be taken into consideration.

In conclusion, this administration has so much it can work with to ensure that citizens have the “good life” it speaks of. Education and tourism are only two areas which give this Government a chance to make an impression. It is a travesty that this administration, whose mantra during its

first year, was about ensuring a fresh approach, has repeatedly failed to listen to suggestions from the Opposition benches, a phenomenon which has stifled development and progress in Guyana for over 50 years.

Finally, I wish to urge this current administration to use the partnership in meaningful ways to advance the growth and development agenda so that all can be a part of the “journey to the good life” that the administration boasts of.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Ms. Wade: Mr. Speaker, tabled before this National Assembly is Budget 2018, under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. Let me say to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his staff, thank you for a job well done. Region 5 welcomes the early presentations of the Budget 2018. Our pattern is designed to bring happiness to our people of this land. Who determines what will make our people happy? The simple answer is the people, of course, and not the Opposition whose sole concern is their own welfare and well-being. That is why, prior to this national budget, we embarked on a series of consultations with the people in various communities, villages, streets and towns for weeks to ascertain their concerns and how they felt they must be addressed. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all those patriotic Guyanese who took time to participate in the consultations and for informing my presentation here today.

The Regional Democratic Council (RDC) continues to be plagued with disrespect from the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) councillors. It is clear that they are bent on non-support of the Government's programmes and activities. We are fully prepared to execute all works of the Budget 2018, just as we did in 2017. Over the years in Region 5 we worked together while we were in the Opposition. But today, it is not so. The Opposition is opposition by name and nature. However, this Government will not be distracted, regardless of its behavioural patterns. “The journey to the good life continues” in Region 5.

I would like to correct the Hon. Member Mr. Collin Croal on what he said yesterday. He stood in this highest forum to say that the Regional Executive Officer (REO) of Region 5 does not attend the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) meetings. I do not know where he got this information from, but it is not correct. I want to say that the REO was never absent from any

meeting. He is always at the meetings, but when the disrespect starts, as we are seeing in this highest forum, he will leave. He has a right to do so, because the disrespectfulness must stop.

The Government expended large sums of money on drainage and irrigation in 2017. These funds went towards rehabilitation and maintenance of drains and channels, excavation of outfall channels, completion of embankment and empoldering works, construction and rehabilitation of structure and sluices in all ten National Democratic Councils (NDCs) in Region 5. The following is a breakdown of funds used in the NDCs: Blairmont-Gelderland, expenditure to date - \$23,632,233, Rosignol-Zee Lust, expenditure to date - \$73,716,019, Woodland-Bel Air, expenditure, to date - \$26,650,061, Bath-Woodley Park, expenditure, to date - \$34,997,870, Union-Naarstigheid, expenditure to date - \$171,082,285, Tempie-Seafield, expenditure to date - \$57,471,948, Profit-Rising Sun, expenditure to date - \$80,108,003, Mahaicony-Abary, expenditure to date, \$67,243,269, Hamlet-Chance expenditure to date is \$55,615,535, the last NDC, Woodlands-Farm, expenditure to date, is \$75,812,161.

11.25 a.m.

The total amount spent to date in the NDCs in Region 5 is \$681,329,384. Some of these works would minimise the incidence of flooding and improve the effectiveness of water management in the agricultural areas.

In the interest of time, let me turn my attention to works completed, thus far, in Region 5 despite the odds from the Opposition.

Education paves the way for employment in any country. This Government is placing all emphasis on boosting and enhancing education delivery through increased budgetary allocation and also by introducing programmes such as - buses, boats, bicycles, books and breakfast, the Five 'Bs' Initiative. This Government wants to make sure that every child stays in school and is given the best possible start in life.

Some of the works completed are in the education sector: the construction of the information technology (IT) lab in Belladrum Primary School, never before, to the tune of \$13,679,000 and also tiling of the bottom flat, to the tune of \$3,770,000, works in the Home Economics Department of Rosignol Secondary School, to the tune of \$3.2 million, renovation works at

Woody Park Primary School -\$4.5 million, joinery repairs to the Fort Wellington Secondary School - \$1.7 million, tiling of Lachmansingh Primary School - \$4.2 million, renovation works to Karamat Primary School and Nursery School - \$2.7 million, renovation works to Mora Point, Mahaicony Creek - \$2.7 million, construction of nursery school at Perth - \$26 million. Perth suffered all kinds of atrocities. Now, this Government delivered a new school to Perth. General repairs, Mahaicony Secondary School - \$1.3 million, and it is just to mention a few. Every school in region received works. There are improved teaching and learning environments for teachers, students and the general public. The “good life” continues.

The Department of Public Health has planned its budget based on core values of the Ministry. Guyanese must be amongst the healthiest. Some achievements to date in Region 5 are the construction of a Diabetic Foot Centre at the Mahaicony Cottage Hospital, construction of two model laboratories facilities at Mahaicony and Fort Wellington Hospitals which operates on a 24-hour service, functional operating theatre at Mahaicony Cottage Hospital, functional Accident and Emergency Department at the Fort Wellington Hospital with a 24-hour service, general renovation works at the Mahaicony Diagnostic Centre Complex - \$7 million, construction of a health centre at Mon Chosi - \$22,109,327 and a construction of a health centre at High Dam. It is just to mention a few. The “good life” continues.

The infrastructural works in Region 5 is necessary to provide easy access to farm lands and communities. We were able to improve and expand the region’s infrastructure in several areas, for instance, upgrading the farm to market road in De Edwards. Mr. Speaker, you would notice the level playing field right, through the region, in all areas, not a few. We are a Government for all the people. Excavation and irrigation in Bath, Block ‘D’ - \$5 million; upgrading of sideline at Catherina Lust - \$18.2 million, upgrading of quarry to market road, Bush Lot - \$10.3 million, excavation and cleaning of drainage canals at Number Twenty-eight Village, these are the worst low lying areas, - \$2.6 million, excavation and cleaning at Number Twenty-nine Village - \$1.6 million, excavation and cleaning at Number Thirty Village - \$2.9 million, excavation and cleaning at Naarstigheid - \$1.9 million, excavation and cleaning canals at Bush Lot - \$12 million, excavation and cleaning of drainage canals at Lovely Lass, Golden Grove - \$920,000, cleaning of canals in Belladrum - \$4.8 million, maintenance to quarry, market sideline dam, Dundee - \$9.2 million, general rehabilitation of greenheart bridge - \$4.6 million, extension of Baiabu

access road, Mahaica - \$11.9 million, replace sluice at Ithaca - \$800,000, construction of foot bridge between Number Four to Number Five Villages - \$3.5 million. It is just to mention a few. These works would make life easier for cash crops and livestock farmers in Region 5.

I am sorry that the Hon. Member Mr. Gill is not in the House because he is a stranger to Region 5. I really wanted him to hear about the development works in Region 5.

In the effort to address the housing needs in Region 5, the Government is looking at ways to deliver the promise of erecting homes for citizens on individual lands. Those homes would be built and delivered on a "first come, first served" basis. The Hon. Minister, my neighbour to the left, also distributed house lots to residents of Region 5 in areas such as Burma, Hope and Bath Experiment during the month of September. In the month of September, a few residents of Block 'D 1', Bath Settlement suffered from a storm that hit the area causing extensive damages to homes. One house was completely destroyed. However, quick response and assistance were offered from the Regional Democratic Council in Region 5 and from the Office of the Prime Minister. This brought relief to the families. The roof was replaced and the house rebuilt. Sincere thanks, the people say to the Government of Guyana.

I must say this: Even though the people went through that state, there were persons who picketed for sugar and rice. They were driven away because the people said that "this is not the place for that, we are going through a crisis now. How dare you come here to protest?" They got six women from somewhere to protest, but all of a sudden they had left. The persons affected were even annoyed with those women who they brought. Everything is an opposition by the Opposition.

Guyanese women are hard-working and are very progressive. The coalition Government respects this and is placing much emphasis on the empowerment of women across region 5 and Guyana at large. Women are already involved in many skilled training programmes which created employment for themselves and other villages. Thanks to the First Lady Empowerment Programme. Quite recently the trainers of trainee programme was completed and seven women benefited from Region 5. They are now fully equipped to train other women for the market out there.

Region 5 is also grateful for the assistance given to some women's groups in projects such as cash crop farming and poultry rearing by the Ministry of Social Protection. The Hugo Chavez Centre in Region 5, which is one of the care facilities in the country which falls under the Ministry of Social Protection, has now opened its door to large economic programmes, including poultry rearing and red tilapia rearing. Please note that the centre is already supplying other care facilities in the country with meat birds and ducks. Come January, 2018 red tilapia would be on the market. When the Christmas is finished season and you are tired with beef and chicken, come to Region 5 and buy your nice fresh red tilapia. Thanks to the Minister of Social Protection and to the staff of the Hugo Chavez Centre.

Region 5 Berbice Mining Syndicate, the Hon. Minister Charles-Broomes went to task with that. Trading under the name Jaguar Mining Syndicate, the largest in the country with a membership of 151 persons, would now benefit from all that is being offered in Budget 2018. The Members are very grateful. The "good life" continues.

We are aware that young people represent a significant per cent of Guyanese population. The Government's policy should be applauded because it focuses on reducing risk factors such as crimes, drug abuse, teenaged pregnancies, suicide and violence. Our programme is aimed at generating support and to allocate resources to make our young people comfortable. It is also stated at page 64, of the budget speech, paragraph 4.152, that "Government stands resolute towards ensuring that concerted efforts are made in satisfying the needs of our young people."

Sports and culture are our Government's concerns. We would create a healthy and happy lifestyle for all. In 2017, the sum of \$18 million was allocated for recreational facilities in villages such as Ithaca, Blairmont, Lovely Lass, Golden Grove, Seafield and Paradise along with other areas. Come 2018, other areas in Region 5 would benefit.

In 2015, 2016 and 2017 this Government bailed out the sugar industry to the tune of billions of dollars. The year 2018 would not be different. The Government would inject the sum of \$6.3 billion to assist in the recovery. The industry continues to be the concern of the Government. The yearly bail out, the poor health of the industry, the oil machinery, buildings, the high production of cost, weakened sugar prices and the multimillion dollars white elephant in Skeldon, among

others are the concerns of this Government. Tell the sugar workers why you did not fix it over the 23 years. Are we magicians to inherit a broken system and fix it in 30 months?

The Government would continue to promote the competitiveness of the rice industry. The Hon. Minister stated on page 7, paragraph 3.3 that “new markets are available.” This is good news for the rice farmers in Region 5. The Government saw the need for the implementation of a plan to aggressively market Guyana’s rice which would preserve the well-being of farmers. This is exactly what we are doing. Suddenly, the Members of the Opposition are pretending to have all the answers to everything when it comes to development of this great nation of ours, which I must say, suffered immensely under them for the years. They are angry, they are bitter because this 30-month old Government has begun to demonstrate that it is serious about delivering a “good life” to all Guyanese. They are now ashamed of themselves. They had their chance to deliver and they shamelessly failed. “Opportunity lost would never be regained.” Nowhere in the world would a budget deliver to its people all that they want because you never get what you always want in life. We do not even get what we want in our homes. Guyana is doing well when compared to other parts of the world so give us our space to govern. All that the Opposition is delivering is non-cooperation at all levels.

Rice cultivation, Region 5, the autumn crop, Mahaica/Mahaicony – 25 acres, Mahaica/Abary – 26 acres, Abary/Berbice – 46 acres, a total of 97 acres planted in the autumn crop. The average yield was 34 bags per acre. Farmers had good price for their paddy and they are thankful. The rice crop could have been better but because of the down state of the Mahaica, Mahaicony, Abary - Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA), that we received from them. Some farmers had it rough, especially those in the south of the main canal. Three sea sluices in Number Twenty-nine Village - Golden Grove were activated. This would assist them greatly.

In conclusion, Region 5 budgetary allocation is before the House. I could safely say to Region 5 that the sum allocated would be spent wisely throughout the region as we did in 2017. I am proud and excited about the prospects of delivering yet another “good life” for all in the region. The nation’s budget, Budget 2018 is before the House. The debate is ongoing, while the entire nation is watching and listening with keen interest. The Opposition must tell the nation and its supporters that they refused to support the Government. The Members criticised in 2016, 2017, for 2018 and come 2019 they would use the same words to criticise too. Budget 2018, “*The*

Journey to the Good Life Continues, Region 5 is on board. To my fellow Guyanese, I want to say most profoundly that the 30-month old Government would deliver a “good life”. All we need from you is your cooperation.

Proverbs 16:3 states, “Ask the Lord to bless your plans and you would be successful in carrying them out.” This Government is doing exactly that. As a result, we are confident that we were created to succeed, designed to win, equipped to overcome all obstacles, anointed to prosper and blessed to receive all blessings. We are unstoppable.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

11.40 a.m.

Dr. Ramsaran: I want to first of all wish a very warm good day to all, and more particularly to those health care providers and administrators who have taken time out to be with us today. I congratulate them on continuing that tradition, which started a few years ago, in being engaged, not only at their desks or technical work, but in the actual administration of the sector and seeing how they fight for the moneys for their programmes.

Yesterday, Hon. Member Mr. Charrandass Persaud threw out a challenge to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to one of our Members who spoke before him. He said that he challenges the PPP to stop criticising the administration, the coalition, and start giving advice and recommendations. Mr. Charrandass Persaud must have been sitting on his ears for the entire of yesterday, because that advice and recommendation were exactly what every single PPP/C speaker was giving. It is either that he was reluctant to hear, was otherwise engaged or simply cannot absorb those simple recommendations.

Let me hasten to bring to your attention, again, some of the recommendations. As a matter of fact, they are quite public and historically and very ironically that this was announced on the 5th October of this year. The 5th October, of course, being a very historic date when in 1992 we had a new era emerging. On that date, the Leader of the Opposition made a press release, and that press release, I noted, had been discussed here indirectly when Mr. Croal made references to it. On the 5th October, there was a release by then President Jagdeo, now Leader of the Opposition, it is here in the *Mirror* newspaper, and I can share a copy with the House, a newspaper that

brought to us the points which states that, the Opposition was presenting in the form of what it hoped to become a motion, “calls for 124 actions in 17 areas to stimulate the economy and reduce hardship”. That was later presented, as I understand, by the Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira with the hope that it might have engaged the National Assembly.

That document is entitled, *MOTION ON PROPOSALS TO STIMULATE THE ECONOMY, AND REDUCE POVERTY AND HARDSHIPS IN THE 2018 BUDGET*. It is contained here and I would like to remind the Hon. Member Mr. Charrandass Persaud before I move on, and the entire Members of both benches, Opposition and the Government, that they are those measures presented. Ms. Gail Teixeira referred to them also, the Hon. Member of the Assembly, 124 actions in 17 areas. For example, Mr. Charrandass and the Government might want to note that we are saying, that you need to fix fiscal and taxation policies. There is need to revert or get rid of some of the actions that have been imposed recently. For example, restore the purchasing power of the people by removing the imposition of value added tax (VAT) on zero-rated items. New fees and licences, imposed in the Budgets 2016 and 2017. There are 17 concrete, 17 discrete, areas containing 124 measures. Mr. Charrandass Persaud and the Government need to wake up and know because this is what the people are calling for.

Now, transparency and accountability, enhancing the business environment and sending the right signals, and that means the right signals to investors, infrastructural development, and here I will come to the fact that we have stagnation. That is what we are a critical of over this budget, not critical of those projects that are ongoing and belong to our era, but the fact is that you have not expanded on them. The 124 points included here, I would like to again submit them to the Government, from this forum, and to call its attention to the fact that they were published on the 5th October, as a press statement from the Leader of the Opposition, and they are very much available here.

The finance sector and what the reforms should be. Education, restore the cash care programme for each child registered from nursery through to secondary students, and it is to increase the amount to \$20,000 per child. These are concrete measures, 124, in 17 discrete areas: fiscal taxation, infrastructural development, agriculture sector, social services, Amerindian, majority, regions; sugar industry and the rice industry, they are all here. The PPP/C has been very active and we have canvassed these all across the country. Recently, I was in Region 10 and there is full

support from significant sections of the population, in spite of certain efforts to physically disrupt those meetings for these points.

To correct the impression or the misinformation, yes, honourable colleagues of the House, there are concrete suggestions from your alternative Government, suggestions that have been well thought out and that we want to see in this budget. There are other things that we would like to see. For example, if you look at the budget speech and the quotations from the presenter himself, he spoke of his aim or his objective of getting value for the dollar. In other words, when he invests, he will be giving the Guyanese taxpayers the full benefit of that investment. However, again, this volume of the Report of the Auditor General, for last year, is replete..., especially from the Ministry of Public Health where moneys are paid for medications and reagents and they are not available until long after. In 2017, then the Ministry is not getting them. Obviously, although there were some progress in rectifying those problems, it is obvious that you are not getting value for your money. Hundreds of millions of dollars in things are ordered, goods and services, especially, medications and reagents. The Minister needs to have a good look at that and that is why we are somewhat critical of the budget. Those are areas where you are losing in two regards, not only you are under threat for spending money for things you do not get. Even if you were able to get them at some later time, you have lost opportunity. In other words, the services, the treatment that should have been given could not have been given in time after that.

Under the PPP/C, there was a massive expansion of infrastructure, nationally, but, more so, in the health sector. We are critical of this budget. We have frown on, in some aspects, in many areas, because there is not continuity. Yes, you have spent, I think, it was \$40 million on expanding the Dr. C. C. Nicholson Hospital, which I personally made as a project of my own to get things done from a shabby hospital a few years back, and it is good to continue that. That is puny – \$40 million is puny. We had invested massively in Diamond Hospital, Leonora Cottage Hospital, Suddie Hospital, Mahaicony Cottage Hospital, Port Mourant Hospital, Linden Hospital Complex, Mabaruma Hospital, two twin hospitals which were funded by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), and then, of course, massive changes at Moruka Hospital. Where is the momentum? That is what we are critical of the Hon. Member Mr. Charrandass Persaud and many others over there are saying that you are critical of your own programme.

A certain Minister, the Hon. Minister of Public Health waived again, the Vision 2020. Yes. Coming out of that, we would have expected a higher level – do not think of building only a \$40 million addition to the Dr. C. C. Nicholson Hospital. We would have liked to see the 100 to 150 inpatient beds facility at the Diamond Hospital. You cannot say in your budget speech that you want to protect the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) from pressure from the periphery and you are going to put a few more beds at Nabaclis. We have to do what the PPP/C had envisioned and what we were speaking about regularly at this level, on the televisions, on the radios and all over, which is very much known. You need to invest substantially.

My constituents have pointed out to certain things. If the money is spent on D'Urban Park, if the money is spent, I think, it was \$71 million on an inauguration campaign and fiesta, there cannot be money to do the real things, to go to a higher level. The higher level would have been the East Bank area, a quickly developing corridor, lots of our population points are developing there, there would be need to have a full-fledged hospital. That is what we are critical of. It is not that we are saying that what we did should not be continued, but we are frowning on you for failing to have a vision, failing to have leadership.

I note another interesting point. The Government is going to be rolling out, and quite admirable so, the human papillomavirus (HPV) programme. I recall a few years ago, and to be exact, sometime in April, 2012, that there was a massive criticism by no other than Dr. Norton who was over here. We were attempting to that and they had mobilised and encouraged a handful of picketers, four of them. I see some of my previous staff here, they recognised them. I remember one of them, a very large, a very buxom woman, always dressed in ethnic wear and she would have come. There were four of them, along with another one who has become known as the national miscreant, and they were picketing against the vaccine. This is what Dr. Norton said from over here.

“This vaccine was introduced to 11 years old girls in La Penitence, a community that was described by the Hon. Minister in his budget speech as being the poorer levels of economic scale, living in the home overcrowded with children. Was that why the Hon. Minister invited all the little girls who took the shot to an appreciation lunch for the show of bravery? When this is added to the fact that we heard that this vaccine was approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and is supported by the

American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), and the Medicine Health care Regulatory Agency and about all the adverse effects, we cannot help but remembering the Tuskegee syphilis study.”

Imagine the nonsense he is talking about. He is comparing what we were doing and he is bringing in the race element...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am sure you could express it differently.

Dr. Ramsaran: I fully apologise. I would say that he was being disingenuous in trying to compare our introduction of the HPV vaccine with the Tuskegee syphilis experiment where the White establishment in America was using Black servicemen in the American army in an experiment with syphilis. It was embarrassing, for it was an insult to the health care providers, especially the public health nurses who rolled this out. That is why, especially the ‘lady’ Ministers of the other side, the ‘lady’ Members, should fully reprimand him.

This is a good thing being done. It is a PPP/C initiative which started on 2th April, 2012 and was opposed. It is here for the record because this came from the *Hansard*. Those are things that make us wonder, that so many years have gone and there was a man - the goodly gentleman, the Hon. Member Dr. Norton - who then became one of the three Ministers of Public Health in this Government who was opposing it. I want the health care providers to remember that and remember when they were mobilising to have people picketing outside the Ministry to stop progress. That is part of the problem.

There are other things that we need to look at. We need to look how we could mobilise resources for other activities. We notice, for example, that there are going to be issues of consideration for a mental health institute. I noticed that that is going to be built in Quamina Street. If the Members check in the plans there is one project, not so long ago, in which the design and bills of quantity were done by François and Associates, \$110 million, for a similar facility there. The difference I want to say is that we should not be having mental health as a separate stand-alone issue. We have to go back and ask this administration about the Presidential Commission on Non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Mental health and the health workers would understand me. It must be seen as an integral part of the NCDs. That is what we were pushing and if you do not see that, then something is wrong. I am certain that the technical people are advising you, but

you want to have a 'big hip', that you are doing something for mental health because PAHO and everybody else are talking about. In other words, it is a fashion.

I am saying that we do not frown on the emphasis of mental health or the effort to make an institute. We are going to frown on and say this: you are misguided to separate the two. Mental health has to be as part of the NCDs. You remember a few years ago that we had started the Presidential Commission on NCDs, and mental health. It is usually referred to as the Commission of NCDs because mental health is understood.

Those are some of the things that we find remiss or find wanting with the thought process. It seems to be cut and paste. Everybody speaking about mental health so we have to speak on mental health. "We have a plot of land that Mr. Ramsaran had discovered, in Quamina Street, we going and build something." I am suggesting that we do this. As you may remember in 2013 when Health Vision 2020 was launched, the Private Sector Commission joined with us and it helped us to form the Presidential Commission on NCDs.

11.55 p.m.

Thirty-seven or such number of persons took part and they helped with the launching. Dr. Etienne, Head of Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), came down here to help us launch it, and President Ramotar launched that said document. What was the aim? I am suggesting that you need to have headquarters for the presidential secretariat. You need to recognise it. It is not a People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) era invention; it is what the necessary flow for the health sector is. I am suggesting that you need to review your approach and integrate, directly, mental health. You do not need a mental health institute; you need to have the training done at the grass roots. Suicide training and the fight against suicide start with fighting depression at the community level.

You are going to train, I see, 500 healthcare providers. That was not the approach of my Administration. What we were doing was training teams. You have to train teams. You have to bring in the policemen, the pandits, the majies and so on. I know the technical people understand where I am going; the politicians are suppressing them. So, yes, spend money on mental health, but make it an integral part, the infrastructure of a secretariat or an office for the NCD presidential secretariat and do many things from there. Emphasise instead on training, using

some of the money to train the workers at the community level. The Community Health Workers (CHWs) must become the first eyes and ears to pick up depression in the communities.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have four minutes remaining.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will wrap up. There are many things that are ours in the Budget, but still are not ours. Because we wanted you to go to a higher plane; to get there; to get bigger. I want to re-emphasise that the East Bank Demerara Regional Hospital is calling out desperately for that 150-bed, multi-ward facility - female ward, male ward and paediatrics - so that the pressure could be taken off of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation is bursting at its seams.

A next claim by the Hon. Minister: He said that they are dispatching specialists to Region 9. That is *old hat*. We have to say that we are dispatching them to the private sector, like Qualfon, Fogarty's and Laparkan Group of Companies. We use to send them regularly. I see in this hall, some of the people who use to organise it and we will have access to the workforce. In other words, there would be public-private partnership in health. When you send them to Qualfon, there are thousands of workers there and Qualfon provides the space; the Government does not have to create it. Those are the things we want to hear. Dispatch them to Region 9, yes, but we have been doing that for years.

I want to close by saying this: those specialists that you are dispatching, those are the Jagdeo scholars. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is a few minutes before midday, when we should take the suspension. We would take the suspension now and we would return at one o'clock to continue the debate.

Siting suspended at 11.59 a.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.03 p.m.

Minister of Public Health [Ms. Lawrence]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On 2nd November, 2017, His Excellency President David A. Granger graced this honourable House with his presence and he did highlight the Coalition's system of inclusive democracy over the past 30 months that has

consolidated cooperation for the common good through Government's various initiatives and programmes with a strong focus on the green development agenda.

The President's dynamic leadership and guidance have provided the vision for this 2018 Budget titled, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. The Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, has captured the vision and spirit of this Coalition Government's advocacy for consensus, cohesion and unity to provide a solid economic and social framework for the common good of all Guyanese. Please allow me, therefore, Mr. Speaker, to extend congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his committed staff for this Budget which provides the platform for the achievement of the common good and for the journey to the good life to proceed.

The Ministry of Public Health, for the period under review, has embraced the President's vision of providing a good life for all Guyanese, prioritising enhancement of the delivery of quality healthcare and health services through all the Administrative Regions of the country. The Ministry has had its challenges, but has kept the momentum and focus on Goal 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which seeks to ensure the health and wellbeing for all at all ages.

I must turn my attention to the deliberate attempts by the Hon. Members, Dr. Anthony and Dr. Mahadeo, to mislead this Hon. House in their misrepresentation of the truth, despite being provided with accurate information by the staff of the Ministry of Public Health. Their presentation sounded like *Fright Night* on Elm Street. It was like we were exposed to Freddy Krueger and Jason at the same time.

We heard of the disposal of large quantities of expired drugs in 2016. What we were not told was that, since 1997, the Auditor General, on a yearly basis, called for the disposal of these expired drugs but it fell on deaf ears. Having large quantities of expired drugs in the same place where unexpired drugs are stored fitted the purpose of the same persons who are *crying wolf*. It was under the APNU/AFC Administration that we saw attempts to adhere to the AG's recommendations.

After careful examination of the inefficiencies of the consultant and contractors on the doctors and nurses' quarters at the Port Kaituma Hospital Complex, the management of the Ministry of

Public Health took a prudent decision to halt all works and seek the advice of the Attorney General's office. As we speak, the refrigerator for the Port Kaituma Hospital Complex is in the country and will be installed during this month of December.

All of this information was shared with the Hon. Members on that side of the House. Yet, they choose to misrepresent the facts over these couple of days. What Dr. Anthony failed to mention is that, upon the request for information on the installation of the computerised tomography (CT) scanner at Bartica, he was informed that the contractor is approximately 55% complete on the area to house the scanner, while, at New Amsterdam, the area to house the scanner is presently housing the Laboratory which will move to its new location in another week or so.

Regarding the Sussex Street Bond, let it be recorded that the Ministry did take action since October, 2016, by way of a notice to quit. One is left to conclude that the Hon. Members are the descendants of Ananias and Sapphira. It was under their Government when Guyana entered into contractual arrangements in 2000 with the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) and the terms and conditions are based on co-payment. The system dictates incremental increase by Government until they are paying in full. Further, since 2015, Guyana stopped qualifying for new vaccines support, after it was classified as a lower middle-income country. One of the prerequisites, however, is a plan which gives details on how the Government will absorb cost.

This brings me to those claims of upfront payments to contactors. What we heard the Member repeat from the 2016 Report of the Auditor General (AG) is *child's play* to the comments of the Auditor General for the past 23 years under the PPP/C. Just after two years into office, the Auditor General, in 1994, commented continuously of no evidence of adjudication, no evidence of competitive bidding and no involvement of central Tender Board. As far back as 2003, the AG's comments on upfront payments of suppliers could be followed. Case in point, in November, 2003, Cabinet gave its no objection to a contract valued US\$2.77... [Mr.

Ramjattan: It was millions.] ...Millions, yes. By July, 2004, the full amount was paid; delivery should have taken six months. Yet, in 2005, US\$68 million was not supplied. In March, 2004, the same supplier got another contract for US\$1.4 million with the same conditions. In December, 2005, US\$309,000 was not supplied and this trend continued until their removal.

I hereby conclude that the descendants of Ananias and Sapphira are clearly bent in their wicked ways; may God have mercy on their souls. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to highlight, for this honourable House, the significant milestones achieved in this sector and the plan of action envisaged for advancing the health sector's agenda in 2018 and beyond.

Programme 1 - Policy Development and Administration: A competent and efficient administrative sector is pivotal to the success and sustainability of the Ministry's operations. With this in focus, the Ministry has sought to establish a much needed human resources department in collaboration with the Department of the Public Service and our partner, PAHO/WHO. The Ministry of Public Health cannot continue to operate efficiently with a small personnel division managing a workforce of approximately 3,000 employees. You could well appreciate the challenges and constraints as well as the duress under which the staff of the Ministry have been operating. This valuable department is being established to identify and fill the gaps of key and critical positions to enhance the service in all departments.

The Ministry created history in October, 2017, when, for the first time, a general staff meeting was convened at the National Cultural Centre. The staff felt much appreciated and meetings will be held quarterly where the staff will have the opportunity not only to voice their concerns, but also to participate and make recommendations for the improvement of services in the Ministry.

The Ministry took another strategic step in establishing the Public Relations and Health Awareness Department.

1.14 p.m.

It is the Ministry's belief that this Department can play a pivotal role in educating the population, which will help citizens to make better choices which will strongly impact on more persons at all levels enjoying health and wellbeing as envisioned in our Health Vision 2020.

Another critical area that is under the Ministry's radar is the Statistical Department. Sir, this Department is presently deficient, in terms of its human capacity, to provide up-to-date information and reports needed for forward planning. Hence, this Department will be strengthened in terms of equipment and human capacity so that pertinent information can be

accessed in a timely manner and the Department can function at a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness.

Within the first quarter of the year, given the small interventions, we will see the Chief Medical Officer's Annual Reports for 2013, 2014 and 2015 being laid in this National Assembly in the first quarter of 2018.

Government Health Information System (GHIS): It is the Ministry's perception that informed decisions must be made on evidence-based data and GHIS has been identified as the integrated electronic platform. GHIS will enable standardised and complete documentation of patients' health information in order to increase capacity for surveillance, reporting and decision-making activities, among others.

To date, there has been acquisition of two programmers with the help of our partners, PAHO and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a Stakeholders' Communication Plan to initiate and engage consultation with stakeholders for e-health legislation with a view to identifying advantages, disadvantages and ramifications of the proposed storage, use and accessibility of electronic health records; and engagement of two consultants again with the help of PAHO. It is projected that our pilot will begin at the East La Penitence Health Centre between 8th – 14th December of this year with other pilots envisioned for Campbellville Health Centre, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) and the New Amsterdam Hospital. Kudos to the APNU/AFC Government.

Programme 2: I would now address vector control, Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and tuberculosis (TB). At the Sittings over these last two days, my esteemed Colleagues of the Opposition presented to this honourable House an array of inaccuracies to gain political leverage. My esteemed Colleagues inject politics into every strata of life but our Government's priority is to ensure that our people's health comes first.

With regard to vector control and malaria, among some of the achievements are the pilot of rapid diagnostic testing, testing for malaria at the community level for early diagnosis and treatment of uncomplicated malaria in Region 8 and there will be a scale up, in 2018, in Regions 1, 7 and 9.

With regard to the control of tuberculosis, our surveillance and collaborations have led to the following accomplishments: procurement of a digital radiologic equipment for patients diagnosed with TB and its complications; and launch of the GeneXpert as the Standard for early diagnosis of TB in the laboratory. Notable mention ought to be made of their reduction in the new TB cases. Since in 2015, we had a record of 510 new TB cases and, in 2016, 489 new cases. As we speak today, for the third quarter of 2017, the record shows 340 new TB cases. Kudos to the staff of the TB Department.

Among the projections for 2018 is the decentralisation of the other GeneXpert machines funded by PAHO and Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the Government of Guyana so as to improve access, reach and screening of TB closer to the patients. This will see Regions 6, 10, 2, 3 and 4, including our National Reference Laboratories receiving machines.

The Ministry is pleased to report that, at the end of 2016, the HIV prevalence was recorded to be 1.66 with an estimated 8,492 persons living with HIV, according to the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) 2016 Spectrum files. Some of the steps initiated in the HIV/AIDS programme are as follows: an Oversight Steering Committee to guide implementation of the Sustainability Plan 2018 - 2025 was established; adoption of the treat-all approach to all pregnant mothers, children under five years, all HIV clients with non-communicable disease (NCDs), discordant couples and all persons under 50 years old. Programme continuation request was made to Global Fund for a grant and I am pleased to report to this honourable House that approval has been received for the next three years in the amount of US\$4.5 million.

Non-communicable diseases: The Ministry of Public Health wishes to acknowledge the hard work of the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Shamdeo Persaud. With regard to the re-commissioning of the NCD Commission. This presidential Commission is unique since, for the first time in the region, a president will be involved. His Excellency President David A. Granger will serve as Chairman of this presidential Commission. This Commission will be responsible for addressing the major risk factor for NCDs, namely, tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy eating and a lack of physical exercise.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry, with your permission, will enumerate the outstanding accomplishments, re: NCDs, such as: the passage of the Tobacco Control Bill in this very House and the formation of three Subcommittees having met for three meetings by this Commission.

The Department of Family Healthcare Services: The Maternal and Child Health Department is always an area of great concern to the Ministry and initiatives of great import have been undertaken to improve the health outcomes for mothers and children. The Department embarked on training across the different categories of health workers to improve their skills in the identification and management of obstetric emergencies with the alarms training. There is now availability of a new contraceptive method in special clinics held in Regions 1, 2 and 9. Early detection of microcephaly with training in basic obstetrics ultrasonography in collaboration with RAD-AID International... There was training for staff for the Water Ambulance Service to initiate service for mothers before arrival at the health facility and a refreshers' course training for birth attendants was done.

Child Health: As it relates to child health survival, health workers of all categories in Regions 1, 5, 6 and 9 were trained in helping babies breathe, to care for sick neonates until their arrival at the facility to receive appropriate level of care.

Prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV: Guyana is on target with the preparation and completion of this Report. Submission will be done in December, 2017 for a regional assessment, followed by an international assessment, after which Guyana will be granted a certification of elimination.

Immunisation coverage: Acquisition of seven domestic refrigerators and eight solar refrigerators through funding from GAVI for Regions 1, 2, 4, 6, 7 and 9 was done; the installation of solar refrigerators in Regions 7 and 9 for the villages of Annai, Issano, Kamarang and our remotest village – Philippi. They never had services before but it was done by this APNU/AFC Government. On the implementation of solar system project, including Regions 1, 5 and 7, at villages such as Issano, Kamarang and Philippi, including Waramadong will now have solar refrigeration.

Guyana is proud to state that though there was a vaccine preventative outbreak of yellow fever in Brazil and measles in Venezuela, Guyana remains free of the diseases due to the strengthening of

active surveillance, early response and capacity building, not only of health workers but also other stakeholders. Congratulations to our immunisation team.

Projections for 2018: The maternity waiting home is intended to reduce the distance to health facility and remote areas. In this regard, the maternity waiting homes in Georgetown and Lethem will be upgraded and a new waiting home will be constructed within Annai sub district of Region 9. Works will commence on the Dr. CC Nicholson Hospital in 2018.

The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, in an effort to improve accountability and adherence to the recommendations of the Public Procurement Commission and the Public Accounts Committee, has embarked on several things, one of which is the computerisation of the pharmaceuticals and medical supplies management systems.

Listen to this, Hon. Member Damon, in 2018, \$3.1 billion of the GPHC budget will be allocated towards the procurement of drugs and medical supplies. For the first time, tenders for 2018 have been opened already. This has never happened in the health sector. This is the efficiency that the APNU/AFC Government speaks of - “a fresh approach”.

Developing human resources: In 2017, the GPHC continued to function as the country’s premier teaching and research facility and several programmes are ongoing, among which is the new residency programme which led to a decline in maternal deaths from an average of 25 deaths per year to eight deaths in 2016.

Service delivery: The Ministry of Public Health continues to partner with its international missions to conduct several medical outreaches. Among these missions are International Children’s Heart Foundation, Baby Heart, that does cardiac interventions for children and it is presently in the country, carrying out another stint; the Health and Education Relief Organisation (HERO); medical mission that looks at vascular, plastic and orthopaedic surgeries; and the Guyana Diabetic Care Project, among many others.

Health infrastructure: In 2017, a sum of \$233 million was expended on the construction, upgrading and maintenance of infrastructural facilities at the GPHC, among which is the construction of the Institute of Health Sciences Education and the Oncology Departments. Also, on the Waterloo Street Staff Quarters, which was left to decay and to fall to pieces, we have

begun to improve and to do some maintenance work to this very staff quarters and, at the end, we will see it hosting some 45 apartments for our doctors and staff.

1.29 p.m.

During the year of 2017, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation procured a 64-slice CT scan machine, costing approximately \$190 million. This machine will be installed before the end of 2017 and be operational in early 2018 when the training is completed. This will see a saving of some \$55.57 million for the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. That is prudent management. In 2018, we will see new storage facilities to the tune of \$58 million.

Programme 5 - Health Science Education - Nursing Sector: The workforce is critical to the sustainability of any sector and, for the period under review, the institute has been working in collaboration with the University in Guyana and several external universities to train personnel with special skills for the health sector with the focus on development of human resources. So training in the nursing sector is ongoing through collaboration of PAHO and external universities.

The way forward: As part of the Ministry's Strategic Plan, this area, among others, will be prioritised. Human resources for health will see the support, development and implementation of a nursing human resource action plan that will promote better recruitment, management, deployment and retention of qualified, healthy and highly motivated health workforce which is responsive to the population's needs and the requirements of the package of publicly guaranteed health services.

Programme 6 - Standards and Technical Services: The need for establishing this pharmacy unit was critical to the monitoring and management of pharmaceutical management and services in the health sector. For 23 years, this position was vacant. It is the APNU/AFC Government that came and ensured that it filled this position. In collaboration with PAHO, the drafting of a pharmaceutical services and management road map will occur and we will also see a review of the National Medicines Policy, including a review of the list of emergency drugs that the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, spoke about as "Guyana having a list of emergency drugs of over 230 something". This is never heard of in any State. It was never heard of.

Training: We will use available data on the status of regional bonds to provide training as to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness and accountability.

Programme 7 - Rehabilitation: I cannot give you all the accomplishments but I will give you a few. The Audiology Department partnered with the Starkey Hearing Foundation and, this year, they screened 700 persons in March. Then, in June, they came back and distributed 870 hearing aids to patients.

Nineteen differently-abled young adults graduated from the Open Doors Vocational School and we, at the Ministry of Public Health, are proud to say that several of them are employed by the Ministry of Public Health. In 2018, there will be two major training workshops to facilitate the continuation of the community-based rehabilitation training for the rural and hinterland areas, among many others.

[**Mr. Damon:** *inaudible*] Mr. Speaker, I do not believe my Friend is satisfied with the little paddy so I brought some grass as a backup for him.
[*Interruption*]

Projection for 2018 and beyond: As the Ministry of Public Health focuses on 2018 and beyond, the Ministry of Public Health will like to thank the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan, MP, for the confidence he has placed in the health sector by injecting \$33.3 billion which represents an increase of 7% over... [Interruption] [**Hon. Members (Opposition):**

Withdraw that.] [**Ms Manickchand:** Let her withdraw that and then we will...]
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, if we continue to hurl insults at one another, the results will be precisely what we have now. I thought, after the experience of the 71st Sitting, Members will be doing their best to move forward, but it seems as though we want to stay there or to go back there. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: It seems to me that Members want the rules to apply only when they wish them to be applied. The rules apply across the board in this House. Some Members, in debate, hold themselves free to conduct a running commentary when speakers are on the floor. Now, it is

inevitable to invoke a response that you will not like. That is not what the Speaker is here for. The Speaker is here to keep order and to encourage the debate, but Members must understand that they, too, have a responsibility and their responsibility is to allow speakers on all sides on the floor to say what they have to say.

Please proceed.

Ms. Lawrence: Projections for 2018 and beyond: As the Ministry of Public Health focuses on 2018 and beyond, the Ministry of Public Health will like to thank the Minister of Finance, Hon. Winston Jordan, for the confidence he has placed in the health sector by injecting \$33.3 billion which represents an increase of 7% over the 2017 Budget, thereby providing the Ministry with the financial resources so that our nation can continue to enjoy the journey to the good life.

With regard to the infrastructure development capital projects, we will see \$243 million allocated for the construction of a new public health head office complex to accommodate all departments in an effort to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. Provision has been made in Budget 2018 for the construction of a modern food and drugs laboratory for testing foods and other commodities to ensure that the items meet the required standards. An allocation to the tune of \$52.8 million has been earmarked for the construction of an entomological laboratory to facilitate research and study on the biological makeup of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. This will determine chemical resistance during fogging exercise.

The amount of \$628.2 million will be spent on the following: completion of the Port Kaituma Hospital Complex which will enhance healthcare delivery in the Port Kaituma sub region and its environs; storage bond at Kingston and Diamond - no more renting; additional clinics to Linden Hospital Complex; the construction of additional departments to conduct various clinics at the Complex include urology, orthopaedic, dialysis, psychiatry and others.

Capacity building is of utmost importance and so training in specialised areas such as master in public health, internal medicine, medical oncology, dermatology, among many others, are being pursued. This training is being facilitated by PAHO in collaboration with GPHC, the University of Guyana and many external universities.

In concluding, I wish to remind my esteemed Colleagues on the other side of this honourable House that the APNU/AFC coalition Government is intent on continuing the development of a comprehensive plan of action for the health sector that will encompass the participatory approach and, in so doing, transform the lives of all the citizens, which include you too.

A healthy nation is a wealthy nation so the Ministry of Public Health stands firm in its commitment to provide quality healthcare to the nation of our beloved country. It is our vision and mission to fulfil Goal 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 agenda which will facilitate the journey of the good life for all Guyanese citizens, and this will take place throughout the length and breadth of our dear country, Guyana.

It is with much anticipation that I look forward with great eagerness to the adoption of the 2018 Budget in this honourable House. Let the games continue. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I thank you. Hon. Member, the words which you used have just been relayed to me. They are words that ought not to be used in this House. The remark you have made should be withdrawn.

Ms. Lawrence: Which one is it, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: I understand that you used the term “grass” in a sentence.

Ms. Lawrence: Sir, I said that I brought grass. If that is offensive, I do withdraw.

Dr. Persaud: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Colleagues in this House, this Budget can only be termed uninspiring. Like its predecessors, the Budget is bigger. Yes, it is 20% more than the 2016 Budget, almost 8% of the total expenditure of last year’s Budget, but my concerns are the priorities that have been given in this Budget, how the moneys have been allotted and the gross underspending that occurred in the previous Budget? I am very concerned that this Budget will not bolster the stagnant economy. It will not stipulate growth and development. It will definitely not lead to sustainable economic development.

The last speaker left much to be desired in some of the things that she said. This is what concerns me, especially since the Hon. Member was once the Chairperson of the Public Accounts

Committee: she said that tendering has already started for 2018, and the Budget is still ongoing; appropriation has not occurred. That is illegal and unlawful. I am shocked.

There was mention of what the Hon. Member said in terms of access to healthcare. That is a big difference from delivery of healthcare. Delivery of healthcare is in total shambles in this country. I, with Members on the other side, have had the opportunity to visit many of the health institutions across this country. The shelves are bare in the bond; equipment has not been working since 2016 and there is a severe shortage of human resources. To date, that has not been corrected.

1.44 p.m.

To say that things are all hunky-dory and rosy and that all of these things have been dealt with, is definitely misinforming this House, when we have had the opportunity to visit and see and to make recommendations, which to date have not been dealt with. To say that the speakers Dr. Mahadeo and Dr. Frank Anthony, the Hon. Members, have made allegations, they have mainly said what is in the Auditor General's Report and that includes overpayment of contractors, which is in the Auditor General's Report. These are not allegations; these are things that have been tabled in this House - the Auditor General's Report.

When I consider that the Minister is saying that the delivery of health care will improve with a new building, that was the same thing the Hon. Member, Minister Lawrence, had said in her last presentation when she had presented for the Ministry of Social Protection, that the delivery was stymied because of no building. Are we to assume then that we need a building and that is the only thing that would help us to deliver services to the people of Guyana? I say not good enough at all.

The budget is replete with flip flopping on taxes. It is a flip flop budget. One year you put a tax on education and because of public pressure you take it off. It is not a gift to the people. [Mr. Williams: Is that not good?] Mr. Speaker, why did you put it in the first place then? There is big talk about the miners not having taxation. The Government put the taxes on the miners. How is that a gift? In fact, this budget has seen a fusion of *scroogenesis* and *grinchisms* that have been unleashed on the people of Guyana. Is it that we have analogue leadership in a digital age? What are we to assume but that?

Once again, women have been side lined in this budget. Yes, there has been mention, a collective of four times, but effective programmes are not mentioned to deal with the many issues that plague women in our country. Countries around the world have seen that side lining women is not good for sustainable economic development. For years, women have suffered from domestic violence, they continue to do this. I have not seen anything in the budget that addresses this issue of domestic violence. Domestic violence continues to batter our women in this country, the infrastructure is weak and not a programme or a policy has been mentioned in this year's budget speech. When we speak of women, in terms of their place in the working world, 50.9% of females are found in the working age population. Less than 35% of females actually work. That is terrible; it is a travesty.

When we have the non-involvement of our women in the economic sectors or women working in the world, what it does is, it gives more strength and more forcefulness to their partners in the home who control their finances and their faith. This encourages domestic violence as more women are not financially independent and cannot make hard decisions and sometimes the necessary decisions for their children and themselves.

The budget is devoid of programmes that would empower women. I do not see anything that would enable women economically; that would empower women; that would give them leadership skills. The Guyana's Women's Leadership Institute has not been functioning for the last two and half years. This is an institute that was established under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and has provided leaders to this country at various levels. To date, it has not functioned. In fact, in the last budget, the Hon. Minister, Volda Lawrence, admitted the collapse of the institute saying,

“I regret to inform this honourable House that the Ministry was unable to achieve its objectives with the Guyana Woman Leadership Institute.”

It seems that the current Minister is also in a stupor, Hon. Minister Ally, because nothing is happening there again and still. There are no programmes that have been ongoing at the Guyana Woman Leadership Institute. There are no initiatives that have been put forth to help women in the hinterland and in the coastal area through this institute. It is a good institute. It has been put there to develop leadership skills and to train women in technical vocational skills and, also, to

address social issues. It is there; you have a building. In this case there is a building so please use it.

The budget continues to promise a good life, a journey, an approach or otherwise. Nothing has changed for the better. People have been let down just as they have been let down previously by other budgets. I want to say that poverty is fuelled by social injustice and if a government abets it, then that government could never be a good government. I want to bring to this House's attention, again, as many of my Colleagues have, the plight of the sugar workers. That is why I made that comment. The relentless onslaught against the workers in the sugar industry would have put them in a position of uncertainty of their future. I have listened to the Hon. Minister, Simone Charles-Broomes talking about working with the mining sector. Why was that same effort not expended with the sugar workers, to work with them, to keep the industry alive, why?

Thousands of people will be placed on the breadline when this industry collapses. Hon. Prime Minister, it is not racism, it is people. I see it that way. That industry, through the efforts of its workers, would have supported this country for years through toil and sweat. Sugar workers have been contributing to the economy of this country and Members of the Government talk about "injecting fortunes", and I put that in uplifted commas, into the sugar industry and gave blinker dollars and sense arguments. Where is the humanity, the humanness, the compassion, where is it? Why are there no alternative projects, proposals or alternative places of employed? Why have these not been put into place if you knew this is what you wanted to do, to transition those people out? Why? It is a reasonable question. I am happy to see the Hon. Minister Harmon nodding his head. I read the headline that there is descent in the Government when it comes to closing the industry, so I am hoping that that nod of the head would be seen as going back on it.

I would have, like many of the families of the sugar workers, like to see alternative plans for the sugar industry, but it seems to me that I am looking in the wrong place. You know, before the Government gives a solution to a problem, it might be as bad as the problem, so, maybe, this side of the House needs to guide that solution to the problem.

The Ministry of Social Protection deals with the welfare of families, women and children, some of the most vulnerable in our country. When I looked at the budget, with minimal increase in the current expenditure, it clearly tells me that enough has not been placed in the budget to cater for

the needs of these people who would definitely need it going further. It seems as if Santa Clause has stayed home and the Grinch is going to visit and has visited.

If we look at the severance package for sugar workers who have worked five years and less, do you know what that person is taking home? Five weeks pay or less. How long is that going to tide that person over? If somebody is just short of a year towards the pensionable age, they would also lose those benefits that would have been accrued from working their whole life in the sugar industry. How is that fair? I would have expected, if not in the sugar industry, that programmes for the women, who will be affected through the closure of the industry, programmes for women would have been rolled out where new avenues of employment would have been created. I have heard a lot about jobs in this House from the other side of the House, but there has been no details when it comes to where these jobs are. We are still at a very high percentage of unemployment in this country. Young people constitute 40% of the unemployed in this country and that, again, is a travesty.

Two and half years are more than enough time for the Government to get it right and it has not gotten it right. If unlocking the potentials of women who make up more than half of the population is not part of the plan to provide the good life, then who is the good life really for? The women in this country need to ask a lot of questions.

The infrastructure to address a number of social issues that are inflicted on women and children is woefully inadequate. Even for women in the workforce, they suffer many indignities. We are all well aware of two instances. One comes to mind right away with the women in the guard services who are being harassed and asked to give sexual favours for minor infractions by someone who was their employer. The Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection said, "Well, do not employ women to work as guards at night". I thought that was untenable. How would anyone give that as an option to deal with an issue that is more deeply rooted? Since that has occurred has this Ministry put any mechanism in place to deal with sexual harassment at workplaces? Has the Ministry, in the budget? No, it has not offered anything with regard to infrastructure, to deal with reporting and how these women, and persons who complain, will be dealt with. I know that this is resonating with women in here and women who are listening because it is a serious problem. Even on the rare occasions, where offences do make it to the

court, it is not clear that the Government is up to the task of ensuring that mechanisms are in place to allow prosecutions to occur.

Even for women and girls preparing to enter the working world, the school system is not safe. We have been reading in the newspapers, recently, of young women who are being preyed on in schools and there are predators in the school system that prey on daughters, young women, who are preparing for life outside of school. Has the Ministry of Social Protection addressed this? The answer is no. Nothing has been put in place. I would hope that my Colleagues would see this as very important thing for us to deal with because this is not a partisan issue, this is one that we should collectively take a stand on to ensure that the schools are safe for young people. In this case we may be speaking of girls, but what about the boys? There was a good step in 2010 with the Sexual Offence Act, but since then what has happen with the National Task Force for the Prevention of Sexual Violence? Let us push for that to happen so that it could be dealt with. The Sexual Offence and Domestic Violence Unit has been set up in the Ministry. That is what was said by the Hon. Minister Lawrence. To date, what has it done? Nothing - one fat zero.

I have scrutinised the budget because I was looking for something that I have asked for personally on the floor in this House on several occasions. That is the expansion of services like counselling; placing children first by putting counsellors in schools. I have not seen any provision for this in the budget. These are safety nets for our children and our women. The budget advocates nothing for this problem and I know the mothers are with me on this. We need counsellors. We have less than a 100 counsellors in the country that are placed anywhere. When we think of the burden placed on these few counsellors, these few social workers, when it comes to women and children, I really feel sorry for them, especially when I know that they have to take money out of their salaries for simple things like transportation and they are required sometimes to cover more than one regions in this country.

1.59 p.m.

We need to have more counselling hubs, human resources capacity building and more movements towards dealing with post-stress traumatic disorders. The people have a lot of stress in this place and nothing is in place. There is no collaboration that I have seen or that I have heard being mentioned to deal with any of these things. We have seen the consistent increase in

deaths when it comes to domestic violence. We have seen a number of increases in violent deaths. Do we see any mention being made of any of these things in the budget? No. What would it take to shake this current Minister out of her slumber? I do not know, but I do know that she needs to wake up soon. Too many lives are being lost in this country. Young women are murdered; old women are slaughtered in their homes and out of them. We have been reading the newspapers, crime continues unchecked. What is being done about it? No one should be saying anything against this because this is the reality in which we live. The system stinks of inefficiency, incompetence and corruption. It is not only about putting units in the Ministry like window dressings and cosmetic surgery, it is making sure that these units function, making sure that these units are staffed and making sure that these units have policies and programmes. That is how it should work.

I mentioned education - the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) needs to be constituted. It needs to have a system in place to deal with misconduct and discipline. Is it that the Government will continue to disregard these constitutional commissions - that is why that has not happened? Is it because it involves impinging on their authority? The mid-term of the Government has seen Ministers being shuffled like a deck of cards but it has not brought any respite to the population out there. We are not playing *go in the pack*, we are dealing with people's lives and if people are placed in positions they cannot be shunted somewhere else, they would not function as well. We are talking about employment. There are young people out there who need to be employed. Give them a chance.

There is a good quote by Alexander Hamilton and I would like to share it with all of you:

“A feeble executive implies a feeble execution of the government. A feeble execution is but another phrase for a bad execution; and a government ill executed; whatever may be its theory, must be, in practice, be a bad government.”

Who the hat fits, wear it.

Youth makes up a very important component in this country. It is one of the larger components in this country. What we have seen with the Department of Culture Youth and Sport is that it is being kicked like a football. I think it is now temporarily in the Office of the President. Why are youths' issues not given a fair hearing? Why are youths not being given priority by this

Government? I say shameful. The word unemployment is mentioned once in the 84-page budget. The 2012 Population and Housing Census reported a national average rate of employment at 12.5%. We have about 2000 students graduating from the University of Guyana and these students have Masters and Bachelor's Degrees. We have young people leaving schools with Caribbean Secondary Education Certificates (CSECs) and many others are going on to sixth form. Where are the jobs for these students? Anybody in this House can go around the country and ask these students, who are brimming with enthusiasm and loaded with degrees, where they are finding the jobs. That is reality. Many mothers have a child of whom they are very proud of, who would have gotten degrees and certificates but there are no jobs and that is a fact.

Why are the youths not being given jobs? Why is there no investment in terms of employment for youths? Could it be because the economy is so stagnant? Could it be because there is no investment in this country? Could it be because it is just hard because of an over-taxed and overburdened business community, a tired set of people? There has been very little and no genuine effort to provide employment for the youths in the country.

I have noted, in the Budget's Speech, that the Hon. Minister said that the public service is not able to absorb young people and give them jobs, and that entrepreneurship has been advanced. How are you going to get into entrepreneurial fields when, one - you are not trained; two - you have no money to invest in starting a new job; and three - who is going to buy your services or products because the economy is staved of disposable income? It is like the chicken and the egg. I really do not know what to say on that one. There has been glaring silences in all of the budgets when it comes to young people and jobs.

The flip side of this is the upswing in crime involving young people. We have also seen the upswing in the use of drugs and alcohol. Violent crimes have been associated with drugs use and alcohol abuse. Alcohol can be considered legal in a sense, but what programmes have been put in place to deal with the rehabilitation of alcoholics? What programmes have been put in place to deal with the rehabilitation of drug addicts? Nothing. The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) offers counselling, but it is overburdened. It cannot deal with all of these things that come before it. There needs to be the decentralisation of these support and safety nets so that people out there, who need these services, can access them.

In terms of suicide, a motion has been brought to this House by me. Nothing has been put in place when it comes to dealing with the issue of suicide in this country, it continues unabated. I mentioned counsellors in school; there is no policy or anything in place to deal with suicide. I noted that there is supposed to be the training of people. Is it the Gatekeepers Programme that we have asked for in this motion? Is that going to be reintroduced? When the motion was presented, there were a number of recommendations given and they were voted down by this House.

Child labour - according to the Child Labour and Forced Labour Report by the United States (US) Department of Labour:

“children in Guyana continue to engage in worse forms of child labour, including in mining and commercial sexual exploitations, sometimes as a result of human trafficking.”

Hon. Minister Ms. Charles-Broomes a lot more needs to be done. This is the US Department of Labour’s Report, not mine. The reason given is that:

“law enforcement agencies have insufficient funding and capacity to enforce laws related to child labour, including its worst forms and the legislation does not fully protect children.”

Listen to this Hon. Members and Mr. Speaker:

“moreover, the Government does not have a comprehensive policy to combat child labour or to target social programmes to fully address the extent of the problem.”

I move on to the Child Care and Protection Agency (CCPA) - this is the agency that is responsible for the welfare of the children. The agency continues to be starved of human resources. In fact, when I had looked under the staffing of the Child Care and Protection Agency, I have seen a depletion of the staffing and not an expansion, as I would have expected. A lot needs to be done in our country where more than 500 reported cases of sexual child abuse happened in 2017, more than 500. Guyana has no centralised data systems for cases relating to children. The present system is decentralised *ad hoc* and it is still on paper. That needs to be dealt with. Case management could be strengthened to facilitate the flow of information. Less than 5% of the budget allotted goes to the Child Care and Protection Agency. I think a lot more needs to be done when it comes to the Ministry of Social Protection.

The vulnerability continues with children and women. Me being me, I would like to give some recommendations and suggestions because, obviously, those on the Government's side, who have this responsibility, lack the vision to do it. There needs to be investigations and prosecutions of cases involving sex and labour trafficking and hold convicted traffickers accountable with time in prison that is commensurate with the severity of the crime and revise legislation to increase the time perpetrators are sentenced to jail.

In terms of the Family Court, it is a good thing, it is here, but there must be training of the officers in the Family Court so that they must be more child and family friendly. There needs to be partnering with stakeholders to develop and publicise written standard operating procedures to guide and encourage frontline officials, including police, health, immigration, labour, mining and forestry personnel to identify and protect victims of forced labour and prostitution. Strengthen and have more awareness campaigns on all the issues that we have. We have hotlines, but how many people know the phone numbers? Very few. How many people actually use the hotlines? In fact, in this budget there are a number of studies and all of these things that are going on to see action emanating based on those. What does that say? Are we not guided by any of these things?

I would like to talk a little about the pensioners. Yes, there is a bigger budget; yes, the budget is bigger than the last; yes, we have seen that there has been under-spending, but what about the pensioners? The history of the pensioners is this, when the pension system was looked at under the previous Government, a means test was removed, which meant that half the number of pensioners, who are now getting pensions, were not getting it, so a universal delivery of pensions occurred. In addition to that, there were other benefits along with the moneys for pensioner, including spectacles, and water and electricity subsidies. Those things have been removed to the tune of \$1.5 billion from our pensioners and we have given them a paltry \$500.

I have noticed that mobile money has been touted as the way forward. I am happy that concern is being paid to the pensioners lining up, but mobile money? You need to look at what you are doing. When you want to use mobile money, it is assumed that the pensioner would have a phone and \$500 must be deposited. That is the \$500 you give to them to access mobile money. The other thing is that, when a person has mobile money, they do not have disposable income in that community because mobile money can only be used for certain things, so it is guided how that money will be spent. One cannot go to the corner shop or to the lady on the corner to buy

vegetables with mobile money. What are we really doing? In fact, if memory is short, go back to 2010, when the Alliance For Change Party (AFC) party, at the time, wanted 26,000 people to be removed from the list of pensioners because it said that the list was too big. Where are we going? Only four days ago, a pensioner came to me, the Hon. Ms. Gillian Burton-Persaud had directed the pensioner to me... *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gravel.]

Mr. Speaker, thank you. It seems that pensioners are given the royal run around. This lady missed collecting her pension by a month or two and she was back and forth with the little money she had because she was not there on the specific date and time to uplift her pension. How is that helping pensioners? This is a real case.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you Mr. Speaker. When I look at the figures for pension, I would like to query the figure that is reflected in the budget – the pension figure. Included in the cost for pension is an amount of \$3.3 billion for pension increases or 24% of the total pensions and social assistance budget, a sum that requires explanation. Given that the increase is only \$500 a month, it does not add up. According to this, they should not be getting \$500. We need to look at our figures Hon. Minister of Finance. Go back to the books and look after our seniors.

With the tinkering and the flip flopping on the taxes, with the poor care and attention to our women, children, pensioners and the sugar workers, I can only conclude that this Government is top-heavy, incompetent and tax-mad. When a budget comes at this point in time, at the end of a year, everybody, from the housewife at home to the student in school - because the parents are involved - to the people who are working, they look for something to benefit them in their day-to-day lives. It is macroeconomics.

2.14 p.m.

When we tout these huge figures and they do not filter down to the population that has to deal with the daily burdens of paying plenty taxes, and also to deal with all of the new costs that have been added on things that previously were not the way they were, how do you think they feel?

They are going into the year 2018 in a very uncertain position. In fact they are going into 2018 as unhappy people in this population.

I think there needs to be more public pressure because it seems that is when this Government listens. More people should be on the streets, like they were for the parking meters, the miners and for education. There is still VAT on health services. The health care system is starved of drugs and there is still VAT on educational supplies and goods. The Value-Added Tax still exists in some of these key areas. When literacy is a problem in this country, education and VAT should not be in the same line. That is just ridiculous. When I speak about these things, I become passionate because, unlike my Colleagues on the other side, I talk to people at the grassroots every single day. [Mr. Seeraj: You do not bring grass.] Bringing grass is one thing. Talk to the people at the grassroots level. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

I think the Government Ministers need to come out of their high towers and talk to people. The people on Regent Street, the vendors in the market and the people at the stelling, to understand how hard it is to make two ends meet. Why are we trying to have a country where people live from pay cheque to pay cheque? I have not, and I would be unjust to the people who have elected us to represent them, if I did not raise these issues here. It needs to be said that this Government has failed the people, continues to fail the people and could be considered not fit to remain in Office.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Minister of Social Cohesion [Dr. Norton]: If it pleases you Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, in his Budget Presentation, noted this coalition Government's commitment to creating a harmonious society based on the principles of mutual respect and tolerance for one another, regardless of age, gender, race, religion or sexuality. He confessed that creating a socially cohesive society is a mammoth task, given the distrust that has been shown among the people of Guyana and the intolerance for those who are viewed as being different.

Minister Jordan, continued:

“In 2018, we will continue to engage civil society groups, local and central Government agencies through sensitisation and information sharing initiatives, to ensure that they are aware of their roles in achieving social cohesion.”

I pledge that this coalition Government would do nothing to propagate a divide and rule culture, but would instead use the mechanisms established within the Ministry of Social Cohesion, through culture, youth and sport, to unite the people of Guyana so that we can all prosper. A cohesive society is the foundation of improving the quality of life, and by extension, the enjoyment of the good life. The coalition Government promised and the Ministry of Social Cohesion is prepared to do its fair share in this regard.

This commitment is evident in the numerous programmes that the Ministry of Social Cohesion has pursued since its establishment in 2015. I must say that I am extremely proud of the programmes that we have rolled out to date, given that we are one of the new Ministries. I take great pride today in informing this honourable House of some of the initiatives that we have undertaken so far.

As most of you are aware, the Department of Culture, Youth and Sport has been delinked from the Ministry of Education and it now falls under the remit of the Ministry of Social Cohesion. Let it be known, for those who have expressed their lack of knowledge, that I am the Minister who is responsible for culture, youth and sport, meaning that the mandate of the Ministry of Social Cohesion has been expanded.

You may also know that, with the financial support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), we have been able to complete the development of the Social Cohesion five-year Strategic Plan for promoting and enhancing social cohesion in Guyana for the period 2017-2021. An extensive consultative process in all 10 administrative regions in Guyana was the basis for this document.

This Ministry is serious about our efforts for be all inclusive. The consultative process was a true reflection of inclusion and participation in the democratic process of a myriad of stakeholders. The aim was to ensure that all citizens participated in determining the focus and direction of Guyana's social cohesion process. Stakeholders were drawn from regional bodies, faith-based organisations, non-governmental bodies, civil society, the joint services, and cultural, political,

youth and vulnerable groups. We were overwhelmed by the responses we have received throughout this process.

The Ministry of Social Cohesion had organised a validation workshop, which was held in March of this year, to unveil the draft strategic plan and to permit participants to provide inputs and suggestions for its finalisation. On completion, we from the Ministry of Social Cohesion have moved with full steam into the implementation process.

The implementation plan and the initiative contained therein, have the potential to move Guyana to the place where Guyanese would have a greater appreciation and respect for their differences and would be willing to work together for a unified country. We realise that cohesion and harmony cannot take place in Guyana, without an appreciation for our differences. It is against this background that the Ministry has focused on the regional training in diversity education and inclusive workshops, which commenced in October 2016.

The training also facilitates the development of cross-community understanding and helps participants to learn about changes and challenges that are associated with our diverse nation. This series of workshops is intended to promote and encourage respect for other cultures, by seeking to break down stereotypes, and advocate for good relations within and across communities. Altogether, 48 such training sessions have been held.

The Ministry undertook an Inter Village Exchange Programme in Region 9, targeting 160 young people from 23 south central communities, from 13th – 20th August, 2017. Young people from villages such as Semonie, Yupukari, Fly Hill, Quatata, Kaicumbay, Shulinab, Katoka, Parishara, to name a few, were in attendance.

The process of unifying our people, especially our youths, has come a far way in a short period of time and anyone who has not seen it, is not looking for it and is probably not interested in social cohesion becoming a reality.

We will continue to undertake such initiatives using our 2018 allocations, with support from corporate Guyana, which we had good contributions. The fruits of the Ministry of Social Cohesion are there for all to see and that cohesion and harmony are not myths, but are achievable by those who want to see it happen and are willing to support the cause.

I am extremely confident that we are on the right path to achieving a cohesive nation. The Ministry of Social Cohesion enabled by culture, youth and sport, will take Guyana to the place where we can be seen as a model for peaceful coexistence, strengthened ties and relations, at the community and national levels and where Guyanese display a willingness to contribute to nation building, irrespective of our differences.

The year 2018 would see the completion of the civic education booklet, which is expected to be distributed in all the primary schools throughout Guyana to students from grades one to six. This booklet is intended to educate our primary age students about the value of being good citizens, love, respect, and knowledge of our multi-ethnic society and about valuable contributions made by our diverse groups. We are nurturing a cadre of children who would have positive attitudes and behaviours to differences.

I can boast today that the Ministry of Social Cohesion has gone to all 10 administrative regions of Guyana. Our work is not only on the coastland. We have interfaced with the Indigenous people at Monkey Mountain, Kamarang, Maraikobai and Amakokopai, just to name a few. We go where Guyanese are because it is our philosophy that geographical location must not be a barrier to cohesion and integration.

The Ministry's tag line for 2018 is: *Fostering harmonious relationships and building a unified country*. Enabled by culture, youth and sport, let me tell you that, in all the programmes to foster cohesion and harmony, aspects of culture and sport would be mainstreamed. The process would be advanced with the active involvement of our youthful population.

The allocation of over \$700 million under Cultural Preservation and Conservation will be used in 2018 to construct the Institute of Creative Arts. This project would entail the construction of buildings for the improvement of the National School of Music, as well as the National School of Theatre Arts and Drama.

The continued development and enhancement of our museums form an integral part of our capital profile for 2018. The Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology, the Guyana National Museum and the Museum of African Heritage would all be upgraded. Under the National Trust, Guyana will see the restoration of Fort Zeelandia and provisions for new monuments - the 1823 Memorial Monument, the Chinese Arrival Monument, the Portuguese Arrival Monument, the

Ruimveldt Massacre Monument and the restoration of the St. Georges' Cathedral. For the benefit of the House, the monument of the Indian Arrival at Palmyra has corrected the initial geo-technical mistake that was inherited, and very soon will be completed by this Government. Cohesion in our country means that every Guyanese must be given an equal opportunity to showcase their heritage, as well as understand and celebrate the contributions of others in developing our country.

The 2018 allocation would be used to support regional expeditions, outreaches, workshops and training in all the administrative regions and in Georgetown. Activities would vary from children's camps to training in drama, music, dance and visual art. We would build cohesion and harmony by including all and creating enabling environments for inter and intra youth exchanges. This is how our young people would be able to establish partnerships, build synergies and have greater appreciation for differences.

2.29 p.m.

The Guyana Film Festival would have a different form in 2018. A new and broader spectrum of participants would be involved, International Museum Day Exhibition, Emancipation Day Exhibition, outreaches and lecture series would be taking on new dimensions and innovative approaches. The Guyana National Museum would be celebrating its 150th Anniversary and the commemoration activities would be of great significance. This budgetary allocation would also be used to contribute to the Ministry's 2018 activities as follows: Archives Week, our 52nd Independence Anniversary Exhibition, the Institute of Creative Arts Combined Performances, Amerindian Heritage Month activities, the National Dance Festival, the National Music Festival, the National Drama Festival, Arts and Crafts Festival, Mashramani 2018 activities, our traditional Independence Flag Raising Ceremony, the Festival of Carols and Lessons, the Rupununi Music and Art Festivals at the Banakari Ranch.

Our youth programmes would absorb a sizeable portion of the Ministry's budget. For over \$1 billion would be invested in youth programmes in 2018. The vision for our youthful population is for them to be united, educated, trained, safe, happy and healthy and integrally involved in the decision-making process, which would affect their lives while enjoying equality of opportunities and equal access to the resources of our country. The Ministry of Social Cohesion wants to

meaningfully contribute to the development of a youthful population who are politically, economically and socially empowered, either by attaining the relevant skills for employment or to be able to venture out on their own.

We, from the Ministry of Social Cohesion, will continue with programmes that are already in place since the Government's policy is to concentrate their responsibility for youth training with effect from 1st January, 2018. Programmes such as the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development, the Hinterland Youth Innovative Project of Guyana, the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training Programme and the Hinterland Employment and Youth Schemes will all continue. An assessment of the effectiveness of these programmes would be undertaken to ensure they implement and support our technical, vocational and entrepreneurial programmes, in order to ensure value is added to the programmes of the Ministry.

Youth empowerment is critical for the Ministry of Social Cohesion, as this population represents the agents of transition, change and transformation. The Ministry would facilitate youth's participation in youth innovative projects, in entrepreneurial skills training, leadership and empowerment training, peer mentorship, civic engagement and social dialogue, so that they can play their role in ushering Guyana into the dispensation of cohesiveness along the journey of the "good life."

Youths represent a significant portion of Guyana's population. The future success and growth of Guyana depends on how equipped this section of the population is to handle emerging and future challenges. To this end, Government's approach to the development of young people is based on youth empowerment and youth employment and entrepreneurship.

We have seen the vital role of sports in contributing to a cohesive society. We are proud of what we have achieved in sports since this Government came into office. If this is what is referred to by the Hon. Member as "sporting with sports" then this coalition Government will continue to 'sport with sports.' This achievement in the field of athletics alone allows Guyana to now stand as a proud nation, not only in the Caribbean and in South America, but all over the world. Track and field has soared to its highest since 2017, especially in youth and junior categories. This was not a flash in the pan. It came from some amount of planning and training, starting off the year in association with the Athletic Association of Guyana (AAG). There was also the Coaches

Education Certification System Programme where 30 coaches across the length and breadth of Guyana received certificates. With this new knowledge coaches were equipped to dispense their charges in producing athletes performing at a higher level. This was evident in our first international meet of 2017, the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) Games held 15th – 19th April.

Guyana got its highest medal count earning three gold, one silver and three bronze medals. Out of five athletes we had seven medals. It must be noted that in the forty-sixth hosting of these games it was the first time that Guyana would have won goal medal in the 100 metres boys under 20 and this was done by Compton Caesar of Linden, beating athletes from Jamaica, Barbados, Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I ask you to reclaim your seat for a moment. Hon. Members, I apologise for this interruption, but it has been brought to my attention that there is some interference emanating from the chamber in relation to the livestream. It has been suggested that Members use only the Wireless Fidelity (Wi-Fi) provided by Parliament Office, if they must use their cellular equipment. You are asked to use the Wi-Fi provided by Parliament Office only. Thank you. Hon. Minister, please proceed.

Dr. Norton: Other gold medals were from Natricia Hooper in the triple jump and Shantoba Bright in the long jump. At the World Youth Championship held in Nairobi, Kenya, Daniel Williams warmed the hearts of the world with his silver medal performance in the 400 metres. His time of 46.72 seconds was then the new National Schools Championship and South American Junior Championship youth record. While it remains the South American youth record, Mr. Williams broke that record only recently, last week, at our National Schools Championship. Mr. Williams, it must be noted that joint efforts have been made for him to not only to follow up with his training in athletics, but also his academic training in Jamaica very shortly.

Guyana hosted the South American Junior Championship at Leonora in June 2017. At this biennial championship, with a history of 52 years, Guyana so far, before then, had only accumulated a total of eight medals. However, in the 2017 edition of this championship here, in

Guyana, we earned 25 medals. We got three gold medals which went to Compton Caesar in the 100 metres, Shantoba Bright in the long jump and the girls' 4 x 100 metre relay.

Also on the international scene, Winston George represented Guyana in the South American Senior Championship where he won a gold medal in the 400 metres. Later in the year, great performances and successes continued to flow from Kenisha Phillips, earning two silver medals in the 100 and 200 metres, Jermaine King of Cumberland Canje, Berbice, a silver medal in the 100 metres and DeShanna Skeete, a gold medal in the 400 metres, at the just concluded South American Youth Games held in Chile. These youths have made us proud. I cannot hide my emotions of how I feel, because in the very near future these same youths will cause the Golden Arrowhead to raise and our National Anthem to be played at the Olympics in 2020.

It is not that which happened in 2017 that we are all proud about, but we are looking forward to what can happen in 2018 and beyond. There is the coaches' education in 2018 where the coaches will have higher levels of training. We will enjoy athletic stamp, high level training for athletes especially from the outer regions. It is important to note this, because, right now, our national under 16, 10,000 metres record is held by a young lady from a village in Region 9, known as Achiwuib that she won in 2007. I personally approached the then Minister of Sports and the then Minister responsible for Amerindian Affairs to help that young lady to earn some form of scholarship for a means for her to continue training. It fell on deaf ears. I want to assure you though that this year, again, another young lady from the same village of Achiwuib won the 10,000 metres. That will not happen. We can guarantee this House that so long as the athlete is willing to, that this caring Government will give her that opportunity so that she can reach her full potential.

We have noticed that the athletes, so far, are from the coastal areas, but we have recognised that in the distance running, there are a lot more athletes from the hinterland location. It is for this reason that every effort is being made to bring in an international coach of cross-country and track and field in the person of Melissa Stoll. There would be a camp in the hinterland region to train athletes in distance running, so that they too can get *a piece of the pie* that Guyana has to offer the world.

In our athletics camp we will place emphasis on diet and nutrition. When I was informed of this, it reminded me of an incident that took place and of a song by a Jamaican mega star and reggae singer known as Pluto Shervington. He sang a song that we might know as *Ram Goat Liver*. Somewhere along the line, a sport authority probably thought that the great Jamaican runners from Usain Bolt to Bert Cameron to Elaine Thompson probably had this ram goat liver. We have a facility that will come into function shortly where athletes will be given special meals. I thought probably that sport official was thinking about giving our athletes that special meal, hence, a ram goat was slain at the national sports hall that happened some time ago. Our national sports hall was desecrated. It certainly was not for that.

2.44 p.m.

Our athletic camp would involve the process of physiotherapy and recovery. For the first time, the Government will have, at its disposal, a sport psychologist who will shortly be employed at the Ministry of Social Cohesion. We were looking forward to our international competition in 2018. We can say to this honourable House that at the Commonwealth Games in Australia, next year, we will have 23 participants. At the Central American and Caribbean Games in Colombia we will have a large contingent, including both male and female hockey teams which have qualified recently in Geneva. Only last week we had our male rugby team performing creditably in Mexico, which will permit the athletes to participate at the international level.

All of this is happening because the facilities that we have are being made available to the athletes and because we have the political will and the interest. It is not as if we are looking at our facilities whilst hoping they will not be destroyed and are not allowing the public to use it. There is the aquatic centre which has allowed an under 11 athlete by the name of Leon Seaton to participate in the Goodwill Games and earning seven gold medals, competing against international nations. He has managed to just break a record in the 50 metres breaststroke of the 22 years that it was standing, and we are continuing in that line. This Government has facilitated transport for athletes to leave Georgetown to go across to Leonora to train on the synthetic track, something that is being done. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please regain your seat. I am saying this for the last time. If this interruption continues, that Hon. Member will pay the price. Please proceed. *[Interruption from*

Opposition Members] Hon. Member Mr. Neendkumar, you will have to rise. You are out of order and if there is any more of this interference, I will have to ask you to leave this chamber.

Mr. Neendkumar rose to his feet.

You are warned, Mr. Neendkumar. Take your seat. Hon. Minister, please proceed.

Dr. Norton: Against this background, in 2017, the Ministry moved to enhance a number of grounds for recreational purposes. All of the regions have been targeted because of the value that this Government has placed on sports and, in particular, the availability of open spaces for promoting social cohesion. We certainly are not where we want to be, but we can boast that we are much better than where we used to be.

Phasing into 2018, we see two additional synthetic tracks being completed in Guyana in the coastal and interior hubs of Regions 6 and 10. Both sides identified are located in the vicinity of established townships, notably New Amsterdam and Wismar, Linden, which are known for their thriving population with sporting potential. These tracks will be hosting venues for competitive events with training and access to recreational facilities for our citizens.

The remodelling of our national gymnasium located on Mandela Avenue continues with the addition of two multi-purpose courts to facilitate sports as well as addition of bleachers to these courts. The repositioning of the lights on the external courts will enable play after sundown, greater access to the facility and utilisation of the existing space. This allocation would ensure that the multi-purpose facility being established in Bartica to cater for six disciplines would be completed. The ground will now be a hub of sporting activities in the municipality with the completion of the courts as well as the construction of the bleachers.

The budget for the Ministry of Social Cohesion will be expended in the areas outlined. It will enable the Ministry to make contributions to support Guyana in achieving the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly goal 10 which addresses reduced inequality, goal 11 which gives attention to sustainable communities and goal 16 which emphasises peace, justice and strong institution. Similarly, the allocation will also position the Ministry to provide support to this coalition Government's vision of a green economy. It would allow the Ministry to ensure that our country becomes a unified one where

diversities are embraced, conflicts are resolved, networks and collaboration with stakeholders are strengthened, equity is promoted and the decision making process resulting in equal opportunity benefits for all.

Without hesitation, I recommend that this budget be presented to the House and passed as presented.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Ms. Chandarpal: I wish to begin my examination of Budget 2018 by making reference to what was said by the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan, when he presented Budget 2017. He informed the nation that the budget sought to address a suite of tax measures to support a green agenda, protect the environment, reduce inequality and increase disposable income, spur economic growth, enhance revenue collection and improve tax administration. That theme was *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. The first part of the theme, “Building a Diversified Green Economy”, speaks to what already exists in Guyana, a country that is agriculture based with pristine forests and a high level of biodiversity. All thanks to our Indigenous peoples who have practised sustainable management of their eco systems as a part of their way of life.

Guyana’s Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) was developed approximately eight years ago as a comprehensive framework for addressing climate change and sustainable development. Why is there so much emphasis now on rebranding the LCDS into the Green State Development Strategy? A high level of effort and time was put into the development and implementation of the LCDS. We all know by now that critical actions are needed to address climate change and to enable sustainable development. Guyana is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and we need strong and prompt action to strengthen our resilience. We need to seek high levels of funding to protect ourselves as we did under the LCDS. Developing another national strategy, at this stage, with a green stamp on it, is just for legacy.

We were advised of the seven measures outlined by the Hon. Minister of Finance. He said that four were non-contentious and were supposed to be incremental rather than transformational. Those measures were intended to provide exemptions on the importation of items for wind and solar energy investment, the exemptions of customs duties and taxes on machinery and

equipment to set up charging stations for electric vehicles, among other things. The other three issues were the used tyres phasing out, the reduction of custom duties for new tyres from 30% to 15% and the environmental levy of \$10 per unit on beverage productions using non-returnable metal, plastic or glass containers. We were told that those measures were supposed to help diversify the economy. Perhaps it is an opportune time to ask the Minister, through you Mr. Speaker, to tell the National Assembly how many persons have benefited from the exemption of wind and solar energy. He should also tell us how many persons have benefited from the exemption of custom duties and taxes on machinery and equipment to set up charging stations for electric vehicles among other things. I would also like the Minister to inform the National Assembly of the amount of moneys collected on the environmental levy of \$10 per unit of beverage production.

The second part of the theme was “Delivering the Good Life to All”. I want to ask all of you who are watching this debate to answer that question. Are you satisfied with the way your Government is managing the economy. How good has your life been?

Your Government promised, in its 100-day plan, to significantly increase salary for Government workers, including nurses, teachers, security personnel and civil servants. It also promised the removal of VAT from food and other essential items. Instead, the cost of living has gone up because of the re-classification of some commodities that were previously zero-rated. The VAT on water, electricity and education has added salt to your wounds. The “good life” to all Guyanese budgets saw 200 different taxation measures and increases in fees. Two initiatives, which were intended to help parents, especially the single mothers, were denied, the \$10,000 cash grant, while they were being burdened with tax on educational services to the tune of \$342 million.

You have denied pensioner \$1.5 billion because of the removal of the water and electricity subsidies. The decision made to assist pensioners with electricity and water subsidy was made against the background that women are living longer than their men folk. A lot of these elderly persons have not worked and are not eligible for any benefits except their old age pension, which they have to wait for until they are 65 years old.

2.59 p.m.

Private citizens and businesses were forced to pay \$33.2 billion more in taxes over the past three years. Thousands of workers who were displaced from the downsizing of the sugar industry as well as those who lost their jobs because of the difficulties experienced by the ailing rice, forestry and construction sector. It is inconceivable to talk about the “good life” when you have saddled the nation with all these taxes. It is unconscionable to talk about the “good life” when you have failed to turn the economy around because of poor economic policy decisions and mismanagement.

Not only do we have to deal with more taxes but we have to deal with more criminals in our midst. Where people who have an income are finding it difficult, imagine the plight of those who have nothing. Having said that, I do not believe that because one is jobless and poor it means that they have to steal from others who are also struggling to take care of their homes and families.

Criminality has always been a reality but the upsurge in almost all communities is taking a toll on people. Persons of all walks of life are affected. Unfortunately, we are unable to have a true reflection of the occurrences because victims feel that it is a waste of time in reporting them anymore, because of the slothful manner in which they are treated and the amount of time which is wasted. A lot of young able-bodied men who should be gainfully employed are seen loitering in almost all strategic places in the city. Criminals take advantage of these types of situations and use it effectively in stalking people and following them to wherever they are going in order to rob them. Guyana cannot continue in this way any longer. People are fed up with the constant attack on their properties and their lives. They are voting with their feet. Since 2015 more than 18,500 persons have left our country. When asked why, they talked about the criminality which was driving them out.

Guyanese who want to return home are not confident about their safety. Those who are living here have the same fear. There are enough reasons that amplify that fear. People are being followed from the airport and robbed, homes are invaded and people are injured and killed. Something as basic as going to the sea wall for a walk has become dangerous. Some communities have to be on guard continuously. Most Guyanese who return home do so for family events, whether it is death, sickness or weddings. Whenever these tragedies occur it sends a message to others that their life is at risk. Two stories come to mind immediately, the young man from England who got killed even before he arrived properly and the family who came to participate in a thanksgiving

ceremony for their father when bandits invaded their premise, robbed and killed family members. They arrived for one sad event and two more occurred.

This situation is not conducive for tourism. We have had a number of cases where foreigners are robbed because it is felt that they have a lot of money. Unless we can reduce these incidences of criminality, we will not be able to tap into the tourism sector in a comprehensive way. On the Government's side we have a lot of experts in dealing with criminals and I believe we need to put our collective expertise to action.

Another area which I wish to speak on is the management of the economy. The mid-year budget which was presented to the National Assembly this year provided an insight into the management of the economy and the Public Sector Investment Programme. The Minister admitted in his introduction of the half yearly report for 2017 that spending was less than one-third of the budget allocations. I wish to quote what the Hon. Minister said:

“Notwithstanding the historically early budget, the required shift in planning cycles at the sectoral levels failed to keep pace and, though the PSIP recorded higher levels of expenditure at mid-year than the similar period in 2016, spending was less than one-third of the budget allocation.”

What is very interesting is that from July to December spending has jumped remarkably. What were the reasons for this accelerated spending? I searched the budget speech and saw a few measures which the Minister outlined in page 26 which would be helpful for the Budget 2018, but not this one. I do not want to give the details because it is available on the performance of all the sectors. I want to say that within a mere five months the magic wand was waived by the Minister of Finance and suddenly in the slothful manner the inefficiencies and incompetency were removed and the galloped started thereon to reach the goalpost. Should we believe that the slothful manner was deliberate in an attempt to avoid the procurement process? I wonder.

The Auditor General in his report identified an increase of 50% in overpayment on Government contracts amounting to tens of millions dollars. The Audit report also highlighted 82 breaches of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act 1997 and 71 breaches of the procurement.

I wish to quote from Ram and McRae from the article “Budget Focus” who tested the constant complaint of substantial over-spending on the capital budget against publicly available

information. In 2017 actual spending exceeded budget by 2.4% while in 2016, actual spending was below budget by 10.7%. However, in both years, spending in the second half of the year accelerated dramatically.

We find these numbers unbelievable and support that this is a clear case of a conspiracy to violate the provisions of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act 1997 by senior Government functionaries by leaving the cash book open and cheques on the old year well into the new year. The law requires that unspent funds at the end of the year should be returned to the Consolidated Fund. The data that is available supports the observation made by Ram & Mc Rae.

Page 5 of the coalition manifesto stated that there will be zero tolerance for corruption and the promotion of transparency, financial probity and accountability at all levels of Government. Your Government, Hon. Minister, is riddled with scandals and scams and those were exposed in a mere 16 months of your being in office. Presently, the amount of scams is about 56 which are in the public domain, the last being the \$600 million for which the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation Chief Executive Officer (CEO), acting, sought retroactive approval after apparent override of tender procedures. I wish remind you of your manifesto's commitment on page 13, Good Governance Action Plan, number two, in which you stated that you will ensure transparency and accountability in Government by granting access to citizens of all aspects of the Government transactions and activities. We hold you to your promise.

Page 14, under public enterprise, we are informed about the performance of Guyana National Newspapers Limited (GNNL), the Rice Development Board (GRDB), the Mahaica Abary Rice Development Services (MARDS), the Guyana Post Office Corporation (GPOC), the Guyana Oil Company Limited (GUYOIL), the Guyana National Shipping Corporation and Guyana National Printers Limited had a surplus of \$2.5 billion. However, Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo)'s production shortfall and the Guyana Power and Light, Inc. (GPL) aggressive capital programme helped to erode this surprise.

I would like to know how much money is spent annually on GPL and how much we are recovering annually. It is said that too much theft of electricity is taking place and there are places where it is happening in full view of officials. There are persons and communities who are not even switching off their electricity while some are asked to pay too much and there are those who will

find every reason not to pay. Again, the idea of a ‘Cadillac’ lifestyle in a ‘donkey cart’ economy comes to mind. We need to put an end to this wasteful and lawless behaviour. The coalition had promised to end blackout. We are waiting and watching.

I wish to ask the question which is the minds of many persons: Why it is that the government is unable to implement the projects which were voted for in the National Assembly? We have to a large extent a number of the same people in positions of authority. Could this be a symptom of a bigger issue? If the information coming out of the Ministries is true then I can understand why some public servants are slothful. Is it true that retired army personnel are given lucrative and strategic positions in a number of Ministries? Is it true that preference is given to friends and comrades who are not equipped to take on the jobs assigned to them? Is it true that old-timers, who were brought back, are harassing the younger persons who are in position? Why is it that qualified professionals who worked with the last Government are harassed and sidelined and some are even sacked? Why is it that some professionals are sent on administrative leave in order to sully their reputation and make room for the persons who are anointed to take their place?

The Minister in his introductory remarks on page 1 referred to the abiding wish of the coalition to become

““a change agent for healing and reconciliation in recognition of the role that conflict and strife have placed in destabilising race relations.” This has had devastating consequences on the psyche of our people which has left them being “distrustful, disrespectful and disdainful of each other.””

On 9th October, as Guyanese celebrated Diwali, the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) was sworn in. As we celebrate Christmas, thousands of workers are on the breadline. So far 400 workers from Rose Hall, 1,700 workers from Skeldon and 1,448 from the East Demerara Estates have received termination letters in which their services will be considered redundant. In addition, if we add the managers, security and the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE) clerical workers, it will be a few hundreds. The most blatant act is that no money was budgeted for severance. What a great way to heal and reconcile.

The Minister of Public Telecommunications Hon. Ms. Hughes in her contribution yesterday called attention to the sugar industry and touched on the closure of the La Bonne Intention (LBI) and Diamond Estates. Having listened to the Hon. Minister, I feel compelled to respond to the accusations. For the House's information, the Diamond Sugar Factory was closed in the late 1980s. That closure came not too long after the moneys were spent to improve the factory's performance and efficiency. As a result of the factory's closure, a significant proportion of that estate's cultivation also had to be closed. The small area that was left remained in operation until 2009. At that time, the workers received their lawful severance pay and were offered re-employment at Wales Sugar Estate which several workers took up until the APNU/AFC closed that estate last year.

At LBI, that estate's factory was closed in 2011 but none of the workers employed lost their jobs. Some were retained to work at the LBI field workshop and the others were sent to Enmore Sugar Estate to work in the factory and the then newly constructed packaging plant. This is contrary to what Minister Hughes said yesterday. It is not only now will the thousands who call East Demerara Estate their workplace be sent home as a result of a decision, obviously endorsed by the Hon. Minister and her Cabinet colleagues. On this matter, I recognise from media reports that there is some confusion as we see an APNU Minister saying that the Government was not aware whereas an AFC Minister is contending that GuySuco is right to send home thousands of workers. It reminds me of the famous saying that 'Nero' fiddles while Rome burns.

The situation in the sugar industry is of great concern. Sugar is the reason why we were all brought here. Of course, our first people were always here. We keep hearing about the decline, but we all know that sugar used to prop the economy for as long as we can recall. Sugar and bauxite are two commodities which have always received substantial support from the Government because of their contributions to gross domestic product (GDP) and the people who are employed there.

We understand that there comes a time when changes will be made to some sectors because of many objective realities. When that reality becomes apparent we have to act judiciously. The speed to close the estate and the manner in which it was done leaves a bad taste in the mouth. A high ranking official from the Government at the United Nations (UN) forum informed at the gathering that you cannot put profits ahead of people. It would be good if that official can practise what he preached.

3.14 p.m.

The nation was informed that Government has in excess of 50 proposals for the divestment of the sugar industry and the Special Purpose Unit at work since July and it is yet to present any viable solution. Common sense teaches us that, before you consider getting rid of something, you must ensure that you have something else in place. You closed the industry on the advice of persons who only know how to use sugar and suddenly realise that workers will be out of jobs. So, in hindsight, a feasibility study is undertaken. This is so backward; we have all these Ministers and advisers and we cannot get it right. What is the present number of advisors at this time? I really do not know but it is something that we should know. There is a quote that comes to mind “better few but better”. It is not how many, but it is the quality of what you have.

This is a sad day for me and for all of us who have lived and worked on the sugar estate. Sugar workers are industrious and hardworking. They are militant because we have taught our workers to stand up and fight for their rights. The Father of Trade Unionism in this country, Mr. Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, Mr. Ashton Chase and Dr. Cheddi Jagan were in the forefront of that militancy against Booker’s Guiana. I want to appeal to the Government to reconsider its approach and let the sugar industry survive until we can find a suitable alternative. Remember, Hon. Members, it is not the workers of the estates only but it is their families, the neighbouring communities as well as the cane farmers and their families who provide canes to the estates.

Could it be that the crashing of the Palmyra Monument signified the intensification of the assault on sugar workers?

If Government spending is a major driver of economic growth, then more people who have lost their jobs in the private sector would be looking to the public sector for jobs. The story which abounds is that there is a perception that public sector jobs are not readily available to those who may wish to enter that area. It is for the Government to examine its hiring practice in a multi-ethnic environment to see whether its practice can stand public scrutiny. The only way to be the change agent for healing and reconciliation is by taking the necessary actions to change the perception.

There are elements that are pushing the divide and rule strategy which is synonymous with the legacy of our colonial masters. I urge the Government to urgently set up the Human Rights

Commission and the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), so that the thousands who feel their right to a job and livelihood is denied can come forward.

On page 9 of your Manifesto, under Equal Opportunity, it was stated that A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) will reform and empower the ERC to provide ethnic impact statements of Cabinet decisions and Government departments, where necessary, and such findings will be acted upon in the best interest of all Guyanese. I call on the Government to provide an ethnic impact statement on the hiring practices in the Public Service and at the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). If the Government is really serious in its pronouncement of healing and reconciliation, it should immediately implement initiatives which it promised to undertake. And these are: establishing research programmes at the University of Guyana to study the causes of ethnic and racial tension and conflict in our society, and make recommendations on how to address these; and the second is inclusion of subjects in the school's curricula that will lead to better understanding and appreciation of our origin, cultures and religion and encourage civic responsibility.

I believe that those of us, who had witnessed the different periods of this country's history, when we were at the brink, should ensure that we begin the process of healing. Guyana cannot move forward unless we confront this problem. Each side of the divide has spoken on this issue and has taken important actions to remove the tension. I believe the Government may need to reconsider its decision by removing this serious undertaking of healing and reconciliation out of its ambit, and let the ERC be the body to undertake this important task of nation-building.

When the Government presented its Budget and the mandates of the Ministry of Social Cohesion, we, on this side of the House, reminded the Assembly that some of the mandates are already contained in the ERC and that there was duplicity. I urge the Government to immediately take steps to get the ERC up and running and to disband the Ministry of Social Cohesion. The Minister is an honourable man, but he was given a basket to fetch water. The perception then and now is that it is another ministry of national mobilisation. Window dressing policy in a multi-ethnic environment will only serve to make the issue of social cohesion more farcical. We have to give serious thought of exploring constitutional options in ensuring we establish quotas for all groups, so that all Governments must adhere to those principles. We must not only say that we

love Guyana. We must be bold to do things which we know must be done. But because of our own subjectivity, we prefer to leave it undone.

I wish to turn my attention to the housing sector, which, I believe, the Government is making a huge mistake about. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, in April 1993, embarked on a very ambitious drive to provide a piece of land for people to build their homes on. We did not promise them a rose garden. We promised them a piece of land which they did not have before. We told them, beforehand, that we could only provide minimal infrastructure, which is what we could have afforded. They understood and agreed to take what they never had before. You give them slogans; we gave them land. Our priority was to ensure that persons with four and more children were the first in line. They were asked to pay \$58,000 in three instalments of one and a half years. That was how it all started. Then we adopted a policy where those who had one child or two children and who were prepared to pay more were given the option to buy a house lot. Professionals were encouraged to form themselves into groups, and public and private partnerships were encouraged. We then had homes for those who were at the lower bracket. They benefitted from the collaboration with the Government, the Food For The Poor, and Habitat for Humanity. Young professionals were given the option to buy a piece of land in order to encourage them to stay and work in Guyana; there was a method in what we did. People who were in the middle-income bracket were also given the opportunity to buy a house lot.

That sector provided thousands of jobs for various categories of workers: the sand trucks, the dray carts, the masons, the painters, the labourers, the electrician, the plumber, and every other person associated with building a house. We made the dreams of people, who were living in cramped and overcrowded rentals, parents who had sons, daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren, living in small spaces, come true. Why do you want to abandon a transformational programme that provided jobs to thousands of people to one where some company or companies will be given the contract to build the homes? Why are we going back to a period of tenement yard and people living in close proximity? Guyana has enough land and space for everyone.

The PPP/C Government did an overwhelming job in providing a piece of land and all the necessary support to make the sector such a dynamic one. When people own something, they will learn to care it. They will improve it, and they will leave something for their children. That

is what we wanted for our people. Instead, you talk about people not having concrete drains. Did we all not study with kerosene lamps before we got electricity?

The Minister of Finance, on page 21, referred to the issue of outdated land values...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Ms. Chandarpal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And the need to bring all property values up to date. While this is desirable, I hope this is not a situation where there is *more in the mortar than in the pestle*. Presently, there are Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) which are discriminating against some communities because of which party is in control. In one village, some people pay \$5,000 and others are asked to pay as much as \$50,000. And do you know what is appalling? It is that those who do not pay or are paying less are getting everything done in their communities, while those who paying are being ignored. I will be the first one to go to the Local Government Commission to point out these communities.

There is a very good principle which we all need to be reminded about and that is: you have to first generate wealth before you can spend it. Clearly, the Government does not understand this principle.

Ram & McRae's Focus on Guyana's National Budget 2018, concluded its focus by making this point:

“Without exception, no member of this Government has any experience in managing even a medium sized operation or serious, successful business experience. Those very persons are now entrusted with oversight of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money and making decisions that affect people's lives and livelihoods.”

The Budget is long on the various initiatives to be done in 2018 but is short on the measures to create jobs and turn the economy around. The year 2018 is the year of national policies and plans; I checked them until I lost count. What is needed more than ever is a budget that will encourage job creation in order to give some steam to the economy. I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance for the theme he has chosen: *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. It is a

journey started by us in giving Guyanese a good life. You have rebranded, repackaged and imposed a whole lot of taxations and hardships on the people of Guyana. Therefore, I wish to recommend that the Budget be taken back to the drawing board and refashioned to produce the 'Good Life' which you have promised.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Citizenship [Mr. Felix]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

My Hon. Colleagues, it is my source of pride and joy that I contribute to the Budget 2018 debate. Please permit me to offer congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston De Costa Jordan, whose tireless efforts, supported by an energetic and dedicated team of employees, resulted in a Budget that has been carefully thought out and that responds to the needs of the people of Guyana, as represented by their Ministers.

During earlier presentations, certain erroneous statements were made by various speakers on the Opposition benches, to which I am obligated to respond.

First was the presentation by the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony, who accused the APNU/AFC Government of political spite in the manner in which this Government responded to the Guyana Sugar Corporation's (GuySuCo) financial woes and which resulted in many employees being sent home, and would be without jobs during the Christmas season because they are willing to spend a few measly dollars, as he put it. When the APNU/AFC Government took office in June, 2015, we entered the threshold of Government with a dangerous situation confronting us; that was a sick and ailing GuySuCo. And from then, this Government has pumped \$32 billion to keep this terminally ill patient alive and allows many employees and their dependents to enjoy that 'Good Life', which we promised. I am sure that many of the eminent doctors on the Opposition benches would have met cases in their private avocations which arrived at their clinics and nothing could have been done to prevent the inevitable. This Government was not in that state of mind, but, instead, crafted a policy in which we identified the viable sectors of the Corporation, and are working with those entities to convert them into profitable entities, while those areas which remain unprofitable would either be diversified or divested – call it privatisation. So much for political spite.

By no means could \$32 billion in 2017 and \$6 billion in 2018 be measly sums. These inaccuracies must be set right and the Opposition ought to be contrite for the sorry state in which it left GuySuCo after 23 years in Government, during which mismanagement, incompetence and waste were the order of the day.

GuySuCo was not our only surprise package. There was the threatened foreclosure of the Guyana Marriott Hotel by one of the commercial banks, which triggered our intervention.

3.29 p.m.

I heard, in this House, a former Minister of Finance on the Opposition bench suggesting that the Government could have privatised the facility. Who in their rightful senses would purchase a business with an unhealthy balance sheet? And, in any such business arrangement, the buyer would seek to gain ownership by purchasing it at the cheapest means possibly.

Then there is the Berbice River Bridge which is not fully utilised by the constituents it was intended to benefit and profitability surrounds that operation to the extent that the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), one of the investors, has not received a cent on its investment on the Bridge.

We all know the story with regard to the raising of the requisite funds to finance the building of that Bridge. This Government has had to the rescue of the NIS because of an additional act of deprivation of funds. The deductions of GuySuCo's employees NIS, running into billions of dollars, have not been paid over to NIS for years, exposing those employees who are entitled to benefits. Thanks to the previous regime, the scent of political spite against the NIS is nauseous. These necessary financial rescuing interventions which the Government has had to undertake have deprived the pensioners of their higher increase in their pensions in 2018, and so much more could have been invested in other sectors of the economy.

The second speaker from the Opposition benches, the Hon. Joseph Hamilton, accused the Minister of Finance of repetition of his four Budget presentations. This Hon. Member demonstrated gross misunderstanding of the need for continuity in planning. No sensible financial plan in preparing for the future of a nation could ignore what occurred in the recent

past. Therefore, I would like to direct the Hon. Member's attention to the other Cs, they being coherence and consistence.

In constructing his four Budgets, Hon. Minister Jordan achieved continuity, consistency and coherence in his work. I am equally astonished at this Hon. Member's criticism of Minister Jordan's preparation for the entry into Guyana of hybrid vehicles and their recharging stations with liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The measure was described as *fluff* and *bluff* and he questioned who would benefit from this measure now. This Hon. Member reminds me of those thoughtless persons who would wait until the rain is in currants and then build the shelter. This APNU/AFC Government is in its anticipatory mode of its future task. Therefore, forward planning would be useful to embed in the minds of our citizens that their interests are considered. Prospective investors are given an idea of Government's thinking.

The Opposition has been criticising the 2018 Budget for offering little to Guyanese. We will be granting exempt tax on hybrid vehicles designed to accommodate LPG with an engine capacity not exceeding 2000 cubic centimetres (cc) and not exceeding four years old from the date of manufacture to the date of importation.

Second, the machinery and equipment would be exempted from the payment of custom duties to set up refilling stations for such vehicles as determined by the Commissioner General; a minimum personal allowance of \$720, regardless of whether the person works for the whole year or a part of the year; private sector employees to enjoy vacation allowance up to a maximum of one month of the employee's salary, tax free, and to use it as they see fit.

Pensions will rise to \$19,500 and almost 49% increase in just two and a half years; building of low cost housing up to \$6 million to be exempted from VAT, provided that they are built on or behalf of the Central Housing and Planning Authority or other approved entities.

The sum of \$100 million has been allocated in Budget 2018 to replenish small businesses development fund. Importantly here is the amnesty for delinquent taxpayers filling out true and correct returns will be in effect from 1st January, 2018 through to 30th September, 2018. While those who file from July, 2018 to 30th September, 2018 will have only 50% of the interest and penalties waived, provided that they file a true and correct return.

The Civil Registry at the General Registrar's Office falls under the Department of Citizenship and it is responsible for the registration of births, deaths and marriages. During 2017, except for Regions 3 and 4, members of the staff did outreaches in all the other Regions to register births in order to ensure that we achieve 100% birth registration of children. This is an internationally accepted position which nations are seeking to achieve. Guyana's geographic layout of hinterland riverine communities puts a wide gap between the citizens and the registration staff who provide the service. However, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Guyana is a signatory, places responsibility on the Government, under Articles 7 and 8, that child have a right to a legally registered name... [Mr. Rohee: Was this not last year?]

No, Mr. Rohee; this was not last year. You never did it so you do not know it. ...have a right to nationality, have a right to family ties and have a right to an identity. Therefore, as signatories to this Convention, all Governments must respect their rights to the child to a name, identity and family ties.

Recognising our geographical challenges and the fact that there are registrations of births at health centres and bed side registration, the GRO staff recognise low registration in these areas and, consequently, outreaches are done to capture those births which have not been registered within one year of the child's birth. We have had results that are encouraging. [Ms.

Teixeira: Like what? What are the statistics?] In 2016, we had 491 late registrations. In 2017, we had 1,371 late registrations, and they are broken down into Regions. If you want it, I would give you. [Ms. **Teixeira:** Give us.] In 2016, in Region 1, there were 261

late registrations. In 2017, Region 1 had 1,104. In Region 1, there is a human interest story. There is a man who, at the age of 72, got his birth certificate for the first time under the APNU/AFC Government.

In Region 2, in 2016, 35 late registrations were done and, in 2017, there were 102 late registrations. In Region 5, there were 11 late registrations. In Region 6, there were 4 late registrations; Region 7 – 38 late registrations; Region 8 – 54 late registrations; Region 9 – 43 late registrations and Region 10 – 45 late registrations. Those are 2016.

In 2017, I had given Regions 1 and 2, 104 late registrations in Region 1 and 102 late registrations in Region 2. In Region 4 – 11 late registrations; Region 6 – 46 late registrations; Region 7 – 38 late registrations; Region 9 - 43 late registrations and Region 10 – 27 late registrations. These

figures do suggest that the bulk of late registration is done in the riverine and interior areas. The hinterland communities obviously are recording higher figures of late registration than those on the Coast and efforts are being made to close the gap. Children need to be registered to be able to access medical and educational services and to protect them against exploitation. Mr. Rohee, this came last year. Therefore, our work must continuously seek to register those in the distant communities and to provide parents with the service necessary to enable them to register their children.

Much of this work is supported by funding from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). At this time, UNICEF has undertaken a consultancy to conduct a statistical analysis of administrative data on birth registration in Guyana between 1st January, 2015 and 31st October, 2017. There is an ongoing legislative review of our laws on birth registration and, in addition, we have been asked to provide a national plan of action of birth registration, building on ongoing work in order to secure increased funding in 2018.

This Department has continued its work to digitise the records of GRO and, in this drive, we have employed 80 clerks to input data in the digital format. They have been divided into two shifts and over 1.4 million records have been placed into a digital format, as I would indicate to you here. In the period of 1987 to 2006, births recorded were 372,252; deaths – 95,032 and marriages - 91,358. From 1987 to 1989: there were 657,220 births recorded; deaths – 113,725 and marriages 97,206. In terms of adoptions, there were 906; immigration marriages – 22; deaths overseas – 7; births overseas – 18. In other words, we have 1,427,746 records inputted into the digital format. This work is expected to continue for two years before it is completed and, thereafter, we would be ready to convert a printed birth certificate with possibilities being considered to decentralise the issuance of birth certificates and to develop a unique system of identification of every Guyanese from birth to death.

Our work involves the appointment of marriage officers. During 2016, 36 marriage officers were appointed. In this year 2017, 107 marriage officers were appointed to the Muslim, Hindu and Christian religions and this work continues.

When this Government changed in 2015, there were severe challenges to the Central Immigration and Passport Office in Camp Road, Eve Leary. There were long lines outside of the

Passport Office from as early as 5.00 a.m. This situation drew the eye of the public and the attention of His Excellency President David Granger, who mandated the then recently created Department of Citizenship to examine the situation with a view to finding a remedy since, during the Elections campaign, this issue was brought to his attention.

3.44 p.m.

The efficiency of the staff at the Passport Office was examined and it was found that, while the Passport Office processed approximately 400 passports per day, that number increased to in excess of 500 for the same period. A request for equipment was approved in this honourable House in late 2015 and, by August, 2016, the new equipment was received and put into service. The result was a transformation that literally brought a better life to Guyanese. Two benefits resulted. Firstly, long line disappeared and, secondly, the services have improved to an extent that on one with correct documentation waits in the Passport Office for beyond an hour, and that is the outer limit.

Delivering a better life to citizens is not an event. It occurs with these little and insignificant improvements in the lives of people who want to go about their lives with less delay and time wasting in long lines which are no longer in existence on Camp Road. Our improvement efforts will not conclude here.

Phase two of our improvement work on the Immigration Department involves decentralisation. In this work, it is the view of His Excellency the President that we take services to the people in capital towns and, in this regard, we have gone about identifying which areas are in need of such services. We have identified New Amsterdam and Linden. I will report here that, on Saturday, I will be turning the sod in New Amsterdam since the contract has been awarded for that building to commence and, shortly thereafter, we expect to go to Linden for a similar activity.

At the same time, we have been arranging payments for the necessary equipment to be put into these buildings so that, while construction goes on, the equipment would be prepared to be sent to Guyana, short of any problems with payment.

In the new year, we will move to Region 2 - Mabaruma and Region 7 – Bartica, and I trust that, by the end of next year, there will be some events which will take place. We should be able to

start buildings there and, secondly, we want to move to have certain equipment in this country which will improve the ease at which persons access a passport. First, online processing of passports: you have heard from Minister Hughes that there is a little issue with the PayPal system and that is why the online system is not here. It is because the online system is joined to a PayPal system and it was pointless introducing online processing when the PayPal system would not have found compatibility with other systems here, but I am almost sure that, next year, for online processing of passports, at least the equipment would be ordered. Secondly, next year, proposals will be made for us to upgrade our passports to 64 pages with the chip.

We would not spare any effort to make the lives of Guyanese better. We have the technology and we will certainly use it. We will not sit on our hands or twiddle with our fingers while Rome burns. We would continue to bring improvements to our work in this country.

What is going to happen is that there will be little improvements and, little by little, by the end of our term, we would be experiencing one great success. I have great pleasure in commending this Budget to the National Assembly for approval and I trust that the vision which has been demonstrated by Minister Jordan and all of us as a team will redound to the benefit of all Guyanese in 2018. [*Applause*]

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It seems to be now traditional that I follow Mr. Felix. I do not know why Ms. Ally keeps doing this to me.

I rise in support of my Colleagues on this side of the House in not supporting and, in fact, finding this Budget fundamentally flawed and, in fact, one that will augur and push this country towards disastrous levels, if this is the way this Government is going.

Before I get into the actual text of my speech, I want to raise two things that were raised last year. When we had the first Budget in December, 2016 for 2017, we could not have figured out when the cut-off date was at the Ministry of Finance for the figures that were presented. Therefore, we repeat that we are at a tremendous disadvantage as an Opposition and, in fact, anyone studying this Budget, because, in fact, the figures are projections. They are not based on fact. The year has not finished. The figures have not been accumulated and been digested and analysed. Therefore, we have great discomfort in dealing with figures that, in fact, may actually be wrong.

We also pointed out the fact that the Government had stated last year that the reason why it was coming early was to have a full 12 months to implement the Budget. In December 2016, we passed the 2017 Budget and I regret to hear my Colleague, Mr. Felix, talking about the new centres for Linden and New Amsterdam. They are only turning the sod in December. What happened to the other 11 months? Where did they go? Typically, as we go through the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and all of these things, the argument for the 12 months falls flat on its face but, more importantly, there is the legal issue. The legal issue is that the books close on 31st December. It is law. If the Government wishes to close the books on an earlier date or any other day, it has to amend the law. It cannot come to this House and present figures. In fact, for the first time, we are now seeing the actual figures for 2016. What we dealt with in December, 2016 was the 2016 figures that were appropriated. The midyear report gave us an idea of what you did in six months. But when you have a Budget in January, after the cut-off date, you will then have a more accurate representation of the performance of the economy and the performance of Government, *et cetera*. So, in fact, you have used the Opposition to come to this House to debate figures which may actually be flawed and will probably not be correct by the time we reach into early next year.

My first recommendation is that this Government needs to, if it wants to change the time when we bring budget and we have an earlier Budget, actually amend the law so that the books can be cut off and we can change the cut-off dates so we can actually see the figures that are actual and not projections and “guestimates”.

I have heard the Minister of Public Health talking about going to tender in December for 2018, and my Colleague responded to it; that is totally unlawful. The laws are very clear on this and, in fact, you cannot go for money that you have not appropriated. Therefore, I, again, caution the Minister of Public Health to be absolutely...get legal advice on this. It is against the law.

We have heard a young Colleague on the other side of this House make comments that were quite disparaging about the Members on this side of the House but I put it to his youth and I, therefore, do not take it personally. However, this was repeated by a number of other speakers and, therefore, I wish to point out that, when we speak on this side of the House, we are not alone; we are not isolated; we are not alienated. And, in fact, there is not one statement by any legitimate stakeholder in this country that is in support of this Budget - not one. I am not talking

about the bloggers. I am not talking about Facebook. I am not talking about the Department of Public Information (DPI) professional statements coming out. I understand that Government has got to do what it has to do. However, not one national stakeholder of this country has come out in support of this Budget. Therefore, you cannot be saying that it is the PPP that has the problem. It is not the PPP that has the problem. We are grounded in the people. And your own supporters are crying out, and we will show you in 2020 because it will change.

There have been many people who, in 2015, because they had been critical of the PPP, the Government welcomed with open arms, gave them jobs, Commission of Inquiries (COIs), committees and so forth, but the people became analytical; they are critical; they are free thinking people; they do not belong to any political party, so they have become critical. And, in fact, what has happened is that one was even declared not “fit and proper” as a result of being critical of this Government. The issue of the statements that are being made, and I quote from Mr. Ram who said, at the Business Summit which my Friend, Mr. Gaskin, spent a short time and the Minister, my Friend, Catherine Hughes, spent a short time and Mr. Harmon popped in for a while... It does not matter because they did not play a big role.

This is in *Inews Guyana* of 13th October.

“Public administration is the most bloated it has ever been in this nation’s history.’

Ram said this is the largest Administration with the fewest technocrats and with the highest cost on the budget.

‘Let’s not avoid the real issues...we have to look at the expenditure side of it,’ ...

He suggested there was manipulation or irresponsible spending when he questioned how, at the end of June, a mere 28 per cent of a Ministry’s budget is expended; yet, by December, this jumps to 90 per cent. Ram quipped: ‘Are these incapable managers suddenly experts?’”

3.59 p.m.

“He told the business summit that we were fooling ourselves if we talk about taxation, but ignore Government’s spending.”

That was one of the comments. In fact, one of the most instructive comments he made, and which I am going to expand on as I go along, is the fact that the Government's philosophy is one of running government as a business for profit which is a completely different philosophical attitude to government.

We have the Chamber of Commerce saying that the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) was hopeful that a clear plan would have been articulated in the way of job creation, investments, or facilitating job creating investments. Also worrisome is the fact that there is no elaboration or strategy to absorb workers who will be displaced by Government's attempts at GuySuCo's divestment. The Government's efforts to address the economic and social malaise, stemming from divestment, were reduced to three sentences in a paragraph. That is a great cause for concern given the industry's importance and material impact on the economic livelihood of many communities.

Despite sugar not doing well by the way, it is still producing foreign currency of a rather large amount for this country's economy.

The Private Sector Commission (PSC) asked a question; it quoted from the Minister's speech in the budget. This is what it stated:

“fostering higher growth for more and better jobs;... investing in skills development; investing massively in infrastructure; doing more to facilitate business; stimulating growth and employment in the productive sectors and supporting micro, small and medium enterprises”.

The private sector stated:

“The question is to what extent has this budget addressed these fundamentals?”

There lies the rub my dear friends. It is a lot of words; a lot of shopping and wish lists, but the budget does not translate into addressing these fundamentals. It (PSC) goes on to a number of things. It comments on many issues, including the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and the lack of energy. This is because if one is in business and he/she has to manufacture and produce, he/she will need reliable energy. That is a fundamental issue. The fundamental issues that investors need, local or foreign, are: One – telecommunication, a reliable telecommunication

system; a reliable energy system; and a reliable road transport system and shipping goes along, of course, with transportation and air. These things are not addressed in the budget.

Let us go on. The Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA) pointed out:

“...the Budget has not provided necessary measures to stimulate and expand the manufacturing sector.”

It goes on to state that:

“...they were hopeful that the Budget would have proposed measures to address critical areas such as taxation, access to finance, and energy... According to the GMSA those measures could have provided a much needed catalyst for the manufacturing sector to achieve the projected 2.4 per cent growth.”

Let us put aside the business people, and let us go to the working class because we have a statement from the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG). FITUG represents and the Guyana Trade Union Congress (GTUC)... I heard someone said across there, when I was reading from one of the lists of non-governmental organisations (NGO's), that FITUG was a People's Progressive Party (PPP) person.

Let us go to GTUC first and here is what it states, in the first paragraph. It is saying that it was studying the 2018 Budget and that nonetheless continues to see from,

“...a cursory examination of the 2018 Budget reveals ad-hoc approaches” by the current government “...in the hope of achieving structured development. ...presenting the nation a Shopping List rather than having policies developed to address strengths and weaknesses of the society will not achieve holistic development and tackle serious areas, such as poverty and health.”

It goes on:

“The nation hears about a green economy and is aware of the impending oil and gas industry, making our future economy more complex. It is therefore important that there be a clear vision and plan as to where we are going, how we are going to get there, and the role of the people.”

The same GTUC goes on to state that it has not been included, at all, in any discussion on the ‘green state’ economy or on the Green Development Plan. It felt that it was left out. Labour continues to be excluded in significant ways from major issues in the management and decision-making processes of the State, which contravenes Articles 13, 38, and 149 (c) of Guyana’s Constitution. That is the Guyana Trade Union Congress.

FITUG had also put out a long statement, in which it has made some very serious criticisms, but let me just try to summarise one of them. FITUG reiterates that the “budget styled the people’s budget, by the Department of Public Information (DPI) has failed to live up to that expectation. Though accepting that there were some marginal improvements, the pressures, difficulties and challenges of workers remain, regrettably, largely the same. While the Minister tells us that the journey to the good life continues, for the workers, they see themselves not on the same boat, though they wish to be.”

It goes on to state,

“We recall Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo in his column which appeared in the November 26th *Guyana Chronicle* advancing the notion that the 2018 Budget will be a grassroots budget.”

The problem with grass earlier, it is now coming from the friend’s mouth. My Colleague across the room, the Prime Minister, is saying “grassroots budget”. Unfortunately, the *proof is in the pudding* and the ordinary people remain downtrodden and are sliding into a state of despondency.

The two major and the only two workers’ federations in this country, that represent all the unionised and organised workers of this country, do not support this budget. The three major organisations that represent the business communities have major concerns, disappointment, and lack of trust in what is going on in this budget. So, do not feel bad.

We then have of course the Ram and McRae studies, which I heard a Minister just say are not creditable. The studies state that,

“This Administration does not seem to regard income and wealth inequality as serious issues and, accordingly, there is nothing in the budget that could be considered a pro-poor step.”

It goes on in many other ways, but I would not take up too much time on that.

Even one of the main persons who spoke, who defended and wrote for the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) in their election campaign has pointed out,

“What the 2018 Budget is lacking. It lacks adequate incentives to motivate the people to push themselves at the point where they are more productive and well generated. Rather, what is the ordinary man observing? He is observing Mr. Granger spending hundreds of millions in all kinds of idle and wasteful projects like the Durban Park - \$1.5 billion, a green State House - \$115 million, a green Prime Minister’s residence - \$100 million, a government travel and hotel budget of over \$800 million in 2017 and is expected to increase in 2018, and so much more in wasteful and reckless spending of the taxpayers’ ...”

He concludes,

“This Christmas it is time to light a candle, light a candle for the people of Berbice and the sugar workers of Guyana.”

This was written by Mr. Sase Singh and was printed in the newspapers on 2nd December.

This Government is behaving as if it is a Government with a huge majority, and as if it speaks for the majority of the Guyanese people. It is dismissive of views different from its own, as shown during the budget debate. It is a Government that has to recognise that it is standing on quick sand, or, in some parts of the country they call it ‘sucking sand’. It is a Government with a less than one per cent difference of votes in the Parliament, and, further, it controls only three of the 10 Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) and less than a 35% of the local authorities. Maybe that is why it is so insecure and has to paint State properties in its party colours to brand Guyana as a People’s National Congress (PNC) Guyana. By the way, it is an iguana green and it is not even a nice green. **[Ms. Manickchand: A chameleon green.]**

Therefore, it cannot be disregarded when one is on such a pinnacle that the base is not with you, by elections, you do not control the base of this country. Therefore, your disregard, for the majority of views in this country or any initiative or proposal, including this budget, is an indication that you are moving in an authoritarian direction and that you do not wish to involve the people; you do not reflect the diversity of our nation in Government or at any public level; and that, in fact, you are becoming more insulated and alienated from the people, including your own supporters.

We have gone through four budgets, this is the fourth budget, totalling almost \$1 trillion, \$900 odd billion dollars, and yet what have we seen with the use of this money? Let us leave out the one coming - 2018. What have we seen of almost \$700 billion spent in the last 30 months? We have not seen the benefits; we have not seen the legacies, other than the Durban Park, which is falling apart, all the wood is falling out and everything else. If that is a legacy for you, well good luck my dears. Our legacy is the Guyana National Stadium, which is still a beautiful place and is still recognised and played for outstanding cricket and football.

What is the issue? When people say to me that you are the Opposition and that you are being oppositionists for being the Opposition? No, we are not. Fundamentally, there is a fundamental philosophical difference between how the APNU/AFC Government sees development and how the PPP sees development. If we do not recognise that, we will always be going around in this tail catching - tail spinning area.

Let us ask because I have not heard one Minister in the 2015, 2016, 2017 Budgets, and now in the 2018 Budget, explain to me what the philosophy of this Government is and how it wants to move this country forward. We will see a shopping list.

The APNU/AFC coalition's philosophy - let me try and summarise it quickly and contrast it with ours. Regrettably, for a number of people in our country, they are not my age and maybe thankfully because we need the younger generation, obviously. For some of us, we have lived through the philosophy of the 70s and 80s, and my Friend, Mr. Greenidge, knows it well. This is the philosophy of economic development up to 1985, in particular, which became known as the Burnham Era. Mr. Hoyte's era was different, shorter, obviously, but a different philosophy. In fact, maybe that is why Mr Hoyte is being downplayed now and only Burnham is being proposed because Hoyte's philosophical approach was completely different.

We have been down this road before of an outmoded, antiquated, time warped and myopic development model of the 1970s and 80s. The model of the 1970s and 80s was long before globalisation, long before trade liberalisation, and long before a connected world of global technology. It had its place in 1970 and 80. It has no place in 2018 and 2017. It is outmoded and myopic.

The economic model that is being projected by the Government is one that uses taxation as a means to create revenue. In fact, as Ram and McRae said, "Government being in the business of profit as a means unto itself". Governments, philosophically, are not in the business of profit. Governments are enablers and facilitators.

The role of the modern government versus the role of the government in the 1970s, which were to privatise, take over - big government - run the country, and keep down the private sector was the model of the 70s and 80s. The model of today is basically one in which the Government has a moral, political and social responsibility to be able to enable an environment for growth and equal access and equality for people, and to remove disparities. Government plays a different role in the society.

Anyways, we are back into the 1970s, where the government sees its revenue generation from taxation. We have an example of this in the budget, where you are talking about... you are not giving taxation, having knocked us with 200, you are now going to talk about new valuation of properties. This is a slight of hand. New valuation of properties means that your property taxes will go up and your rates and taxes will go up. The issue is that it is increasing taxation again. It has a one track economy, just like in the 70s and 80s, where we talked about sugar and bauxite. Rice only took off after the PPP/C Government came to Office. It really hit its heights under the PPP/C because it was sugar and bauxite. This Government, now, instead of dealing with diversification and creating a multi-sectoral economy, is downgrading sugar, closing it, no matter in which way you want to call it, privatise it or sell it to whoever will buy it for whatever price. By the way, if sugar is in such a bad place, why are you on your prospectus, when you were advertising to sell the Skeldon Sugar Estate? Why is it put forward as a lucrative investment, when it is such a disaster here Guyana? Come off of it. Who do you think you are fooling these days?

4.14 p.m.

Everyone is bemoaning the fact, “\$32 billion has been put into sugar”. What a crock, a total crock. If one goes to the figures in Budgets 2015, 2016 and 2017, you have not put \$32 billion in. Go to your budget in 2018, what was the figure that you have put forward for sugar? Ask Minister Holder. He got up and spoke. I do not have to an answer for that. There is no \$32 billion that has ever been earmarked by your Government. In fact, what you are putting is \$9 billion in 2015 and you said that you were going to put in \$12 billion in 2017, but it was never in the budget. I do not know where you are taking the money from. Unless, you know that it is from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). Taking out money from the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) and the GGMC maybe, and other State entities, and, under the cover, you are sending it for GuySuCo. It is because there is no record of \$32 billion.

There is a large, top heavy, non-productive bureaucracy overspending and is expensive to maintain and sustain. You have created an unfriendly environment for investors by closing down the concessions of Bai Shan Lin, and by sending out the guy who built the oil depot in Kingston. The Government has chased away the Barama Company Limited. The Government is sending a message to the world that Guyana does not want them to come here; that we do not want foreigners here and that they are not worth it. Unless you are trying to send a signal that there is an ethnic issue in all of this, which I pray to God that you are not doing.

The Government has also been enacting a model of the State that is the largest consumer of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The largest consumer of GDP is the Government. If you all do not believe me, and I think that the Ministers have not looked at this document properly. Mr. Speaker, if you look you at the appendix here, what we are seeing is a pattern from 2015, 2016 and 2017. The forecast for 2017 is the public consumption as a percentage, of the Gross Domestic Expenditure, which has gone up from 14.3% in 2015 to 16.7%, and that the private consumption, as a percentage of the GDP, has gone the other way. It was 65.9% in 2015, it is down to 56.8% now.

Mr. Speaker, you have a Government that is out stripping and out crowding the private sector. This is not the way for development. You now have a Government that is competing with the private sector for credit, for loans and for all sorts of activities. We can show statistically and the

figures which I have referred to, and will come to in the future, are to do with the Midterm Review because we know that those figures are solid. I am not going to, in my speech, rely on the figures of the forecast of 2017 and for 2018. We will wait.

Outside of crowding out the private sector, at the same time, we are the gods of little things; we are the gods of small things. Archers are lovely, but you have to find jobs for people. The D'Urban Park, I cannot say that it is aesthetically pleasing, as a waste of money, but, you know small things. You are the gods of small things. You are not doing things that would bring economic activities for our people, you *are fiddling and diddling* with the economy, you are not pushing this economy to stimulate it. As Government, you are competing with the private sector and you then come here to this House and you talk about "the answers lie in the one industry". Even in your budget debate and budget document you do not have much on oil as you should have. You are reversing this country. You have brought taxes that hurt the forestry sector; you have brought measures that hurt the mining sector; you want to close down the sugar industry. You are not helping the bauxite industry. The bauxite industry is in trouble. I did not hear any of you talk about bauxite; not one of you talked talk about what is happening in the bauxite industry.

What are you doing? You have not brought one new investor to this country and, yet, we have Ministers getting up and talking about micro-enterprises. Philosophically, a government needs to have a mixed economy. The large businesses, medium, small, micro, and the cottage industry - the Government has a role to play in all of them. As Government, you are competing and talking again with small things. Every woman that we could get a job for makes a difference. I would never dispute that. Do you know the old saying of Guyana *one one dutty build dam*? It depends how big the size of the *dutty* is. If you put a little bit of *dutty* it will take a long time to build; if you have big hands you could put plenty *dutty* and the dam fills faster, but you are still the gods of small things.

Mr. Speaker, you are developing an authoritarian State that is violating the constitutional laws of this country – an authoritarian state. This Government has gone into control of the political realm. It creates parallel structures to legally and constitutionally provided bodies. It had created a National Democratic Regional Consultative Committee earlier this year and that body is going to do the plans and so. It has no legal authority. There are Regional Democratic Councils

governed by this *Constitution* that have a mandate of what they are supposed to do, supported by statutes. The Government is creating this administrative body, which, by the way, just for the public to know and for you to know because I do not think that some of the Ministers know certain things either. I think that there is a lack of communication amongst you, basically. I will tell you this, when there is a Regional Consultative Coordinating Committee, made up of the chairman of the region and the mayor in the region, what happens then to the local authorities? There is the Mayor of Anna Regina and the Regional Chairman. In Region 9, there would be the Chairman and the Mayor of Lethem. What happens with everybody else? There is this imposition of a structure that is intended to usurp the powers of the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs). That is why it is sinister; it is a sinister move.

There is the breakdown of the separation of the three branches of Government - the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. Therefore, as my Colleagues pointed out, we are seeing the paramountcy of the party, except in the old days it was the PNC's flag that used to be on all the Government buildings. We now have the buildings being painted in iguana green. My good Friend is very polite, she calls it chameleon. No, it is iguana green.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

In contrast, the lack of inclusion... [Mr. Ramjattan: What are you talking about, the budget?] The budget talks about inclusion. In fact, my Friend has not read the budget because one of the aspect talks about, at the very first page, Mr. Ramjattan... [Mr. Ramjattan: I have not seen any iguana inside there.] You would not have seen it. It talks about healing and reconciliation, and about inclusivity, but where is the inclusivity? The model, they are going back to the lack of inclusion, political discrimination. There is a situation where you are talking about skills. Out of 40 heads of agencies, you have terminated 50 odd of them and 6% resigned. Mr. Speaker, you have 98 Government and State boards, I have analysed it, and the only conclusion I came up with was State instituted ethnic and political discrimination exclusion. The example is that, of the 1,063 places on the 98 State boards, appointed between June 2015 and August 2017, 663 places are occupied by one ethnic group – 62% Afro-Guyanese; 255 places by Indo-Guyanese – 21%;, 107 persons – 1% representing unnamed representative of the various bodies, and 28 members are mixed and is therefore 2%.

If we go to the 43 Board of Guardians, I am very surprised at my Friend, the Hon. Minister, Amna Ally, and now General Secretary of the PNC. Forty three Boards of Guardians with a 187 members. They are comprised by the Government selecting those people. Of the 187 members of the 43 boards, which are supposed to represent the poor people, this is under the Poor Relief Law of Guyana, 48 are Indo-Guyanese – 25.6%; 10% are Amerindians; and the rest, of course, of the 187, are majority Afro-Guyanese.

How do we get inclusion in this country? How does the Government get social cohesion, when it is ignoring the diversity of our nation? How does it motivate people? How does it get people, according to the budget, “to expand and grow” and to do their best as what Mr. Jordan said in his budget speech? How does it do that when it is excluding half of the population? And it has come here and tell us about inclusion?

The PPP/C - our budget and our philosophy is about pro-poor-pro-growth to national development. We are talking about poverty reduction and the expansion of the economic base. We are talking about a modern progressive nation with private/public partnerships, as we showed, and someone mentioned the Berbice Bridge recently, the Amaila Falls and all these low carbon and new areas.

Mr. Granger said that we cannot live with the six sisters. I could only get five sisters; I do not know the sixth one as yet. Anyway, there are six sisters. We have and what you cannot deny my Friends on the other side that climate change and the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) was created by the involvement of people. It was brought to this House and was passed in this House. It was amended and brought back to this House and amended and approved in this House by this House, the Low Carbon Development Strategy and the whole approach for an entirely new area for our country of carbon credits. What you call carbon credit? The services are called carbon credits. We are one of the few countries in the world selling carbon credits and we made US\$235 million, more than what we make with many of our basic sectors. You have inherited all that moneys. What did you do with it *bannas*’; what did you do with the money?

We brought in what is called, call centres. One of the call centres have been here for the longest time and it keeps expanding and it has over 5,000 workers. So, yes, we need to have diversification of our economic base. Tourism, as of 2014, was employing more people in all

those Amerindians villages with little eco-tourism projects and along the coast, than many of the basic businesses and manufacturers in this country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes Sir.

I would just like to repeat one sentence and that is that, the budget is fundamentally flawed and offers no opportunity to counter the cyclical decline of this economy. On behalf our people, thank you. [*Applause*]

Ms. Bancroft: I rise to support the 2018 Budget that was delivered in this House by the Hon. Winston Jordan, and with the help of his dedicated staff. Before I go to the budget, I looked through the list of speakers and in this five-day test match, we are in the third day and I am the closing batsman and so I would like to say to this House that this budget is fit and proper for the nation.

I have listened with concern to all the Members on the Opposition, of which there are 32 Members. Most of whom have already said what they had to say, that they disapprove.

4.29 p.m.

The thing is, I am looking at development and I just want to highlight the development that is taking place in Potaro/Siparuni, Region 8 because I have been living in that region 41 years now.

The Potaro/Siparuni region will experience Local Government Elections (LGE) for the first time in history. Come 2018, we will have township in Mahdia thanks to the APNU/AFC Government. Forty one years ago, when I *hit* the Potaro, the Eldorado, and went to Mahdia, in my wildest dream, no one could have said to me we would have a radio station. Today, I am proud to say that we have Mahdia 95.1. Mr. Speaker, you are talking about development and that is development.

Also, in Region 8, the Communities Organised for the Restoration of the Environment (CORE) group was established and we have young people who are employed in that group, despite what the Opposition is saying, that we have no future for young people, those people that are employed are all young, flouncing and bouncing. This Government, in my mind, is a caring

Government and we all know that, but we are just putting our head in the sand like the ostrich. I now wish to turn my attention to my constituency.

Regional administration and finance - under the above mentioned heading, I have three sub-headings which are as follows: Capital, Recurrent and Training. Under Capital, equipment and furniture were purchased for the staff quarters and administrative offices within the region, in both sub-regions one and two. Recurrent - a number of administrative buildings were rehabilitated. At line item 6211, three statutory and one special RDC meetings were held to address the 2018 Budget. This was to plan the hosting of the RDC's end of the year social in Kato, in sub-region one. Office and field materials and janitorial supplies were purchased for the RDC buildings and vehicles were also repaired. Administration - a staff developmental session was held in Kato and a yearly appraisal was done for staff. This 2018 Budget seeks to increase productivity within the RDC while promoting the enhancement of human resources.

Public works - I have capital - bridges, roads and electricity. While I am on bridges, I want to tell this honourable House that four bridges are being constructed which began this year and the 2018 Budget will see it completed. The Maipaparu Bridge is 120 x 16 feet and Tuseneng Bridge is 160 x 16 feet. The total value of each is \$27,850,600. Then there is the Yawong's Bridge, which is 120 x 16 feet and there is the Kawa Bridge which is 160 x 16 feet. Each of the bridges are valued \$22,402,300 each –that is for the bridges.

Roads - in sub-region two, works on the entire internal roadways have commenced *via* the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and it is almost completed. I want to give some figures for the cost, please listen. The Mahdia Community Road cost \$276,717,630 and the contractor is Technocon Investment. They are all concrete roads; we are now having concrete roads in Mahdia thanks to the Government. Still on the Mahdia Community Road, contractors JR Ranch Incorporated and B and J Civil works cost \$350,310,531, and \$109,800,000, respectively. The Brian Sucre Junction to Mahdia, of which the contractor is JR Ranch, cost \$47,670,263. Then we have the road that would be linking the two sub-regions, Eagle Mountain *via* Konawaruk, the contractor is Mekdeci Mining Company (MMC) and the cost is \$72,490,195. I have never thought for one moment that Region 8 would have been this far. We need to give this Government a round of applause for that. [Ms. Wade: A fresh approach Hon. Member, the journey to the good life.] That is right.

Also, in sub-region one, 11 communities were part of this list and were visited. Eleven communities benefited from contracts that saw the overhaul of their roads. This project was given to villagers as a mean of economic stimulation to implore on community participation. I stand here, not just with this written speech, but I am practically on the ground. Even if I did not have these papers in my hand, I could speak from the top of my head about what is happening because I traverse the entire region.

Electricity – the Mahdia Power and Light Company supplies 19 hours of electricity to Mahdia and its environs, the other five hours are supplied by the means of generators, each of which uses 48 litres of gasoline per day.

Education - Under this programme we have two new Education Officers, who were appointed. This will boost and enhance the delivery of quality education in the region. The first heading, under education is capital. A primary school is under construction at Kaibarupai, this will ease the heavy over-crowding of the old school. A new building was constructed and handed over to the department to serve as a primary school in Micobie, in sub-region two. On this note, I would like to bring to the attention of this House that the long awaited white elephant at Kato is now having the green light and will be opened for educational purposes next month. At the moment, all the furniture and equipment are being put into place. It takes a while to go from Georgetown all the way through to Region 9 and straight into Region 8. The white elephant that was left by the previous Government, we are now making it a green light and a green elephant.

My next heading is transportation which is very important. As per term, children are being shuttled to and from their homes to their respective Mahdia dormitories. That is a very costly exercise. However, this year, a team of 35 students were taken to the National Sporting Games 2017, a trip of which transportation, accommodation and meals were provided for, and so, they were well taken care of. This 2018 Budget seeks to increase the number of trained personnel and qualified students produced by the region and also to ensure that every student is treated with equality and given a fair chance at success.

Health - there is capital, drugs, and disease control and I want to speak a little on that. Work is ongoing at the Mahdia District Hospital, where the entire building will be rehabilitated. An incinerator, along with a drug bond was recently constructed. Additionally, a kitchen was constructed to enhance the delivery of quality health care in the region. In this regard, also, the

Kato Cottage Hospital was extended with the view of the resident doctor being stationed in that sub-region one.

A Drug Fund was warranted to the Ministry of Public Health for pharmaceuticals which would be distributed to both sub-regions one and two. Take into consideration that our region is the most difficult geographical region in the country.

Lastly for health, I have disease control. The health department of this region was tested to its extreme, when the region experienced heavy flooding. Due to careful planning and execution, there were no reported incidents relating to the flooding. However, the Community Development Council (CDC), in conjunction with the regional administration, was able to bring much needed relief to the residents of Region 8.

Finally, I want to speak about agriculture. A Livestock Officer from the National Agricultural and Research Extension Institute (NAREI) was assigned to the Potaro/Siparuni Region to enhance the rearing of livestock. Aside from that, the development there is under three other sub-headings; shade houses, New Jersey Black Giant Bird and drainage and irrigation. To commence the shade house, the agricultural programme has built three shade houses, one in Chenapau, one in Kurukabaru and the other in Itabac. These shade houses are producing vegetables such as, pakchoy, tomatoes and more. For the first time, we now have the New Jersey Black Giant Birds. They were introduced in the region and are currently being reared at two secondary schools. This is to enhance their studies in the subject of Agricultural Science and to aid in their school-based assessments.

Also, Paramakatoi has seen great development as never before. The sun-dried tomato project has begun and it is there to stay.

To bring the umbrella of agriculture to a close I will discuss drainage and irrigation. Creeks were cleared by removing mainly fallen trees and branches to facilitate drainage and irrigation in Monkey Creek, Kopinang, Kato and Itabac to enhance cassava and vegetable production.

4.44 p.m.

I would like to bring my humble debate to a close by saying to this House that all the pensioners in Potaro/Siparuni received their pension book. I would like to also make mention about the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) project. The Chenapau women group has benefitted thanks to the Minister of Social Protection, the Hon. Member Amna Ally.

It is for me to emphasise on this budget "*The Journey to the Good Life Continues*" and so I have no hesitation to commend this budget to this noble House for passage.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I neglected to tell you at an earlier time, but by agreement between the Whips, a speaker will be the final speaker this afternoon and that speaker is the Hon. Carl Greenidge, who will now speak. At the end of that statement, we would have completed our work for today. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge]: I may take this opportunity to extend congratulations to the Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan for an excellent budget presentation. A budget that is to help us achieve the theme set out for 2018. Today, I propose to be relatively brief.

As it is known, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is charged with a number of functions. I think the main one overall being to advise the Government as regards foreign policy, foreign policy formulation and the implementation of that foreign policy and the coordination of implementation with other Ministries and agencies charged with those responsibilities. It is also the case that our responsibility includes protocol and consular matters. We have spoken in the past and I do not want to elaborate on that now.

Trade is also the other area of responsibility. An area, very often forgotten and in that regard the opening of the new embassy in Geneva has added tremendously to our capacity in that area by which we enforce, not only the work done at the head office here, but also the focus at the international trade level which normally is carried by the embassy in Geneva. We also have, as part of that responsibility, or in order to perhaps be more effective in carrying out those responsibilities, the issue of diaspora policy, the process by which we interface with the Guyana Diaspora Board, both to contribute to communication between ourselves and those Guyanese

residents aboard, but also to ensure that they can contribute as far as possible to our development. Investment is one of the areas, of course, in which they have a special interest as well as technical assistance by way of their skills. All of those are areas, I think, at this point in time, we are relatively familiar with.

I want to concentrate, today, on saying something about the role of the Ministry, in terms of working on its image, the branding of Guyana. The reason why I mention that, is because it is especially relevant to the overwhelming challenge that faces us today, namely the challenge of protecting our sovereignty. When I speak of image or establishing our image, I mean that in order for a country to be effective in getting support for its own agenda internationally, in order to get sympathy or the embrace of the policies that it is trying to pursue aboard, that country itself has to generate a brand that means something to the international partners with whom we relate and from whom we expect assistance. When I am speaking of branding, I am speaking of it in the broadest sense. That sense means, for example, that you cannot turn up to a meeting in Azerbaijan or in Washington out of the blue and simply explain to the international community that you like to have support in 'A' or 'B'. You have to establish in their minds, in the minds of our bilateral and international partners, an image of a country that, for example, stands for something. We have been working in the past on a number of areas that you may be familiar with, the issue of the protection of small countries, the struggle in decolonisation, freedom of Southern Africa and the question of the fight against apartheid. These are areas in which Guyana has made a name for itself over the decade since independence...

[Ms. Manickchand:
For decades?]

Yes. There have been a few decades since independence.

The issue today, however, is that we need to ensure that we are kept in the front of the minds of the international community by ensuring either that we develop or we work assiduously in other areas that are now in the forefront of the international agenda. In this regard, I am saying that we have been looking in recent years at a variety of areas that are relevant. Of course, most recently at the initiative of the President David Granger, we have been speaking of the green state. It is not merely the talk of the policy, but the issues. Of course, Guyana has and is very well endowed with forestry and water resources, and the like, which contribute not only to the development of a potential in the tourism sector, but also we could rank, for example, I think, six out a 183

countries, in terms of the pureness of the air around the areas that we live Georgetown and elsewhere.

There are also issues that the Ministry tries to raise awareness of at the international level whether they range from...These are areas that we now give new names, such as culinary tourism. There were issues pertaining to the promotion or projection of what is called soft power, for example, promoting and disseminating information on our performers, whether they be musicians, writers and authors. These are areas in which Guyana has excelled but, funny enough, very often, we are perhaps not terribly energetic, assiduous, in selling these areas. I am saying that part of the task of persuading others that we are a country whose causes are worthy if embrace, and it has to do with creating in their mind an image of a country with features and performance that is distinctive and desirable.

In that regard, the question of the territorial integrity and the means of protecting our territorial integrity looms very large. As you would know, in September of 2015, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, agreed that in response to a request, both from the Government in December, 2014 and again in August of 2015, he would call the Presidents of the two countries, Venezuela and Guyana, together to discuss problems arising from Venezuela's claim that the Arbitral Award, or the Paris Award, of 1899 is null and void and that means that the Secretary General discussed with these two Presidents means of dealing with that challenge. Of course, if you say that the award is null and void, it follows from it that there is some question over the validity of our borders. In that regard, he agreed with us and subsequently agreed in writing that this issue, I think, as we would all know, is essentially a legal issue. If a decision, by a court or a quasi-judicial body, is deemed to be null and void, then it is a matter for the court to decide and it cannot be that a beneficiary of an award cannot decide, having got the award... If you go to court, a decision is made by the court as regards to something, a dispute, whether it is a piece of land or a bicycle, one beneficiary cannot decide that the award is null and void and therefore the entire object of the decision belongs to that person. This is the challenge we face in relation to Venezuela.

The Secretary General agreed that it was a judicial matter and therefore it should go to a court at an appropriate point, but prior to that he called upon the two parties to have one last dialogue on that matter and, as you know, he decided that the dialogue would take a year. The year 2016 was

the year and we have indicated that to you before and that year came and went and the Secretary General together with the incoming Secretary General then wrote to us indicating that they had concluded, that enough had not happened primarily, because they were unable to appoint a personal representative to the Secretary General and therefore indicated that one last final effort would be made and that last final effort is supposed to be ending at the end of December, 2017. It is in order to ensure that we represent or we could represent ourselves effectively.

We have to remember that this process of image building and collaboration with other countries does not begin and end the negotiating rule, and that is why I really started off with the question of image. It has to do with working along with other countries that may have similar problems. Belize, for example, finds itself in circumstances where its territory is under threat from Guatemala. There are many other cases in Eastern Europe and the Indian Ocean also and therefore we need to work along with those countries to lend them support at an appropriate point in relation to issues specific to territorial challenges. I am saying that more than that you have to keep active in the international arena so that you are associated with general issues, principles that other countries would like to see be embraced.

I just want you to know that these are dimensions of our work and that they do not begin and end in the negotiating room. One needs to be able... For example, if you are involved in, let us say, trade which is something completely different from the issue of territorial integrity,...As we have managed the new embassy in Geneva, to be able to have the office work so effectively and in a manner where it is so highly respected that countries can call upon that ambassador and his team to represent a group interest, then we are on the stage under a limelight that puts us in a favourable position so that we can speak to those countries, we can speak to others, and they would have some respect for Guyana standing for something, competence, representation of the interest of other states, participation in areas such as the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and low lying coastal states.

4.59 p.m.

Therefore we have sought over the past year to be involved in an integral way in these areas, so effective we have been, that the Minister of Finance mentioned it. That is why my friend, the most Hon. Member Priya Manickchand, could never understand why some things are mentioned.

This is what it is about. It is about being in a position to having just opened an embassy in Geneva. I heard this question being asked, and being able to represent in one set of the meetings, that is the global meeting, the most important trade meeting within the last three or four years, that representative, the spokesman, for the African Caribbean Pacific Group of States (ACP) is a Minister from Guyana. The ACP group at the ambassadorial level is Guyana's ambassador who is based in Geneva. The coordinator for the Caribbean and for the ACP Group is also our representative or our ambassador. This is quite an achievement. It gives us a place from which the rest of the world can look up to our representatives as being able to represent not only themselves but other countries in the world. This is one of the things, Mr. Speaker, that I want to draw to your attention.

If you look at the programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that is, programmes 1 and 2, you will see these areas which perhaps are not as striking as the capital programmes. We are constructing an embassy which will include a residence in Brasilia. These are bricks and mortar which all other Ministries carry out. There are a set of other things. We would attend those meetings, we participate, we represent other regions, not only in pursuit of the interest in the team, but also in representing ourselves. In doing the world a favour, we would also do ourselves a great favour.

I just want to mention that and to go on to say that the question of territorial integrity, which I raised, that the new Secretary General, having identified for us the need for an additional year of dialogue, identified Mr. Doug Newlander from the country of Norway to be his personal representative. Mr. Newlander has been working with us. The first thing that happened... I am speaking to this because I have seen in the newspapers a lot of debates about resources. Let me say that negotiating in these circumstances is an expensive business.

In terms of the teams that worked on the areas, we have, at any one time, at least ten officers working within the department that deals with the frontiers or in the negotiating team. The negotiating team that has been working with Mr. Newlander has fluctuated between ten and 14 participants at any one time. Mr. Newlander made a number of visits to Guyana at which we discussed proposals, ideas, concerns and Guyana's aims. We indicated to him that our concern was primarily a concern to ensure that we work within a predictable framework. We do not wake up in the morning and find a neighbour doing something that we do not anticipate and which is

not normal and that neighbour is using as an excuse, the validity or invalidity of the Paris Award of 1899.

Those discussions have been going on for the last year. I am not permitted to say much more about the negotiations, but I just want you to know that teams have been travelled. Towards the end of the year, the United Nations (UN) decided that the process now requires teams from Venezuela and Guyana to travel. We have tried to configure those teams so that they would consist of a bundle of skills that would be relevant to the negotiations, whether they be maritime skills, maritime law or constitutional issues and which is relevant in some cases. A whole range of issues have been represented. We have also tried to ensure that the representation includes specifically legal skills, international lawyers who have specialised in the issue of territorial claims and of dealing with the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In order to represent ourselves and to get a reasonable balance of skills, there are a significant number of persons. So far, in the teams that have visited and participated in discussions in the United States (US) and in New York, there have been no less than ten persons at any one time.

I am saying this to you so that when you look at the budget and you see moneys spent on travel, it is my view, as it was the view of someone that I started working with within this year, that you cannot afford to be penny-pinching or say that you cannot afford to defend your territory. You have to be able to find the resources to do this work. We have tried to do that. The teams have also, in the preparatory state, included representatives of the civil society to some extent. We have not only had Members from the Government side but also from the Opposition side. At least, that has been the case prior to the visits and the negotiations in New York. We are happy, I think, to be able to say that we have had all the support we have requested, all that we could have expected, from the opposite benches. I think we should congratulate ourselves on that because the other side has not been able to take with it, and I think to represent in the same way, the national interest by being able to point to the Opposition and its participation in any of the meetings, either within the country or at the UN level. At those meeting we have been at pains to explain to the UN Secretary General that it is a costly exercise for Guyana and, therefore, we would like to be sure that he would adhere to the commitment he made in the letter of December, 2016 to take the decision that he undertook to take by the end of the year.

At this point in time I want just to make it clear, because it matters in relation to the international companies and it matters in relation to investors, that we are looking at a process which process is supposed to, at some point in time, resolve the question of the validity of the arbitral award. Sometimes in the public, you get the impression that a decision is being made as to where the border lies. The arbitral award is ultimately about those borders, but it is really a decision about whether the court somehow, in making this decision, had acted improperly in a manner that was not in keeping with the law. That process, we will finish soon.

The representative for the UN Secretary General, subsequent to 10th November deadline of his own mandate set out in the terms of reference, which you would have seen and people have been asking about, has asked us to have another meeting. In that meeting, which is to take place in Antigua in a day or two, we will be meeting with the representatives again, I assume, at a more informal level.

By the end of the year, we hope the Secretary General responds, because that is the process. It has been a very costly process. It is, of course, for the Government of Guyana, and any Government of Guyana, to decide, in relation to the revenues over which it controls, how and when it pays for its services. We have not, of course, gone to the ICJ, so that is a separate matter. That is another phase. At this point in time, I am just indicating that this is really what has been the prime focus of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

I perhaps would just like to say also in the area of image, that image matters, in relation to dealing with our multinational or transnational cooperations. I have said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has responsibility in relation to foreign investments and therefore investment policy. Image also matters in relation to investment. I have taken the trouble - I have seen that some people have not like it - to explain that in dealing with foreign investments, perceptions and consistency of policies also matter. [Ms. Manickchand: I was ... and the country...]

It would happen if you are chairing something that you understood, because I have not really said what I have to say yet. [Ms. Teixeira: You know you are supposed to do that.]

I am not speaking about my spartan. I am speaking about anticipation. You cannot anticipate what I say.

I am saying that the issue of the international investors also matters. One of the things that clearly is of concern to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during the course of last year, is that we have seen in the international press, especially the Latin American press, a series of attacks both against the Government and people of Guyana, on one hand, and some of the investors that have been involved in Guyana, a suggestion that these investors are leading Guyana by its nose. It does not know what it is doing. We are a country with a long experience of international investment. We have nationalised some of the most important subsidiaries of some of the most important in transnational cooperation. I am speaking here of the nationalisation of Aluminium Company of Canada (Alcan), for example, Reynolds and Booker, to name but a few.

The suggestion is that this is a country that is so backward that it does not know anything about public cooperation. I believe it was the PPP that actually signed an agreement with ExxonMobil. I believe so. Therefore the attacks that were being levelled against these entities were attacks against the people of Guyana. The argument that we do not know what we are doing is silly. It is self-serving, but it is understandable, because these are issues, misrepresentation, falsehood and falsification, which are normal when countries and national interests are involved. It is not unusual. What is more distressing is to see the same theme being taken up in Guyana. Sometimes the articles published in the Latin American press find themselves without attribution in our newspapers. I am not denying that they have a right to do it. I am simply drawing to the attention of the House that this is really what is being involved, and it is.

5.14 p.m.

From the point of view of image, it is important to know that there are a number of entities interested and operating in Guyana, for example in the petroleum sector, which entities can be found east, on the other side, operating in Suriname and operating elsewhere in the Caribbean. In Grenada, deposits of gas were recently discovered and it is just trying to see whether those deposits are in commercial quantities. Even before an entity gets into commercial production and even before it owes taxes, newspapers are attacking it for being a lawbreaker. It is our responsibility, if we believe that a company is likely to break the law, to make sure that the law enforcing bodies, the tax collecting bodies, are well enough managed and organised to protect us from those. Therefore it is inappropriate to be attacking these companies.

Let me say that in relation to petroleum - I know that I do not have responsibility for petroleum because there is a Minister who is responsible for that - it touches on this broader investment issue that it is wholly and appropriate for us to forget. In the case of the Liza -1, for example, there are three companies involved, a Chinese company, the China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC), the Hess Corporation as well as ExxonMobil. Some of those companies are operating elsewhere and you never hear about anybody else abusing or cursing them, even before they start production. It sends a message to other investors. Other investors ask themselves "Am I going to be committing funds in the billions of dollars range in Guyana and then find that, as I am operating, I am subjected to all sorts of vitriol in the newspapers?" That is really part of the challenge that we have to show that we are a mature people, not only the Government has responsibilities, but the press also has responsibilities.

When we were looking at the Broadcasting Act, there were a number of questions raised and I did point out, at that time, that other countries imposed certain obligations, in relation to the press, to ensure that people do not carry their personal vendettas or obsessions into the newspapers, selling misinformation as information to the public. That is all I want to say about this, that it reflects badly on our image if our stakeholders and entities, such as the press, engage or indulge themselves in these ways.

The work in relation to ensuring that our territorial integrity remains intact is very much on track. I hope, although I am not able as yet, to give you some positive news in this regard that you, at least, have an idea that this is a process that can take time. It takes a lot of resources and it also requires that we as people, we as citizens and we as the elected, pay careful attention to what is going on, what we say, what we say about others, what others say about us and how we represent ourselves.

I hope that in the use of the resources provided by the Government for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, you can see in our activities those measures that would help us to deal with this particular aspect of our responsibilities.

I thank you very much for your patience, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. Hon. First Vice-President and Prime Minister, you may move the adjournment.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the House until tomorrow, Thursday 7th December, 2017 at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, 7th December, 2017 at 10.a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 5.20 p.m.