

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2010) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

126TH Sitting

Thursday, 15TH July, 2010

The Assembly convened at 2.13 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Statement by Mrs. Volda Lawrence, MP in the Kaieteur Newspaper

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence published a statement, in the Kaieteur Newspaper of Monday 12th July, 2010 under the heading, “Delay in Issuing Treasury Memorandum Illustrates Minister’s Contempt”, in which the Hon. Member asserted that the Treasury Memorandum had not yet been laid by the Minister of Finance and he was guilty of contempt of the National Assembly.

I wish to state that the statement by the Hon. Member Mrs. Lawrence is not accurate. The Treasury Memorandum was lodged with the Clerk of the National Assembly on the 14th June, 2010. Today being the first sitting since that date the Treasury Memorandum could not have been laid before today. I wish to advise Members that The Clerk of the National Assembly and the Parliament Office are always available to clarify issues and inquiries relating to the business of the National Assembly. Members of Parliament are encouraged and advised to seek

clarification or information about such business before making public assertions or accusations. No doubt Hon. Member Mrs. Lawrence would consider this statement and act appropriately.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following were laid:

- (i) Treasury Memorandum pursuant to Resolution No. 114 dated 11th March, 2010 of the National Assembly adopting the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Public Accounts of Guyana for the years 2004 and 2005.
- (ii) The Petroleum (Exploration and Production)(Tax Laws)(YPF Guyana Ltd., formerly Maxus Guyana Ltd.) Order 2010 – Order no. I of 2010.
- (iii) The Petroleum (Exploration and Production)(Tax Laws)(CGX Resources Inc.) Order No. 10 of 2010.
- (iv) The Petroleum (Exploration and production)(Tax Laws)(Canacol Energy (Guyana) Inc., formerly Groundstar Resources Inc.) Order 2010 – Order no. 11 of 2010.
- (v) The Constitutional Office (Remuneration of Holders) Order 2010 – Order No. 16 of 2010
- (vi) Agreement on National Micro Credit Programme; Women of Worth (WOW) Facility.
- (vii) Revised Low Carbon Development Strategy May, 2010 – Transforming Guyana’s Economy while Combating Climate Change.

[Minister of Finance]

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following Reports were laid:

- (i) The Fifth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services.
- (ii) Report of the Committee of Appointments in Relation to Appointment of Members of the Indigenous People’s Commission.

[Ms. Gail Teixeira – Chairperson of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services and the Committee on Appointments]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Written Replies

1. PRIVITISATION OF GUYANA POWER AND LIGHT

Mrs. Holder: Can the Hon. Prime Minister state what efforts Government proposes to take to privatise Guyana Power Light and save the taxpayers the huge sums that are transferred each year to that utility?

Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communication [Mr. Hinds]: “The transfers to GPL are really transfers to the consumers, in that these transfers offsetting say increases in fuel prices, and the provision of financing at very concessionary rates, make for tariffs that are lower than they otherwise would have been. In addition, the Government has been foregoing any return on its equity in GPL which the typical private investor could not do.

Privatising the GPL at this time will either have to be at a give-away price or will be accompanied by a 25% to 50% increase in tariff with GPL in private ownership to provide a commercial return on the purchase price.

This Government has not approached privatisation from an ideological point of view but from the pragmatic question of whether privatisation in the given circumstances would from overall consideration be better for Guyanese than not privatising.

When the Electricity Utility was privatised in 1999, the objectives were to firstly bring GPL to an adequate condition, with a strategic core partner, then after 10 years, for both partners to sell down their shareholdings equally to the wide public in Guyana. It was considered very important, to get to the point where members of every customer household were in both positions, of owner, holding some amount of shares in GPL and as customer paying regular bills for electricity consumed. This I continue to see as a great learning experience for our people, an opportunity to grow and develop in many ways.

It may be recalled that on the departure of the core partner of GPL in 2003, local financial institutions were invited to step in without success. However, the subsequent successful invitation to local financial institutions to participate in the establishment of the Berbice River Bridge, has brought the hope that an invitation to take shares in GPL at an appropriate time in the future may be better received.”

2. SETTING UP OF SEVERAL RIGHTS COMMISSIONS

Mrs. Holder: Can the Hon. Prime Minister say why is there no provision in the 2010 Budget for the setting up of the secretariat to facilitate the work of the several Rights Commissions?

Mr. Hinds: Provision was made in 2009 for all of the Commissions to be housed together with the Ethnic Relations Commission in the former BIDCO building in Queenstown. To that end the Integrity Commission was removed and has been relocated elsewhere.

Government would seek supplementary provision(s) as required on the establishment of the Commissions, to meet the work programmes envisaged.

3. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL PROCUREMENT COMMISSION

Mrs. Holder: Will the Hon. Prime Minister provide a status report on the failure to establish the National Procurement Commission?

Mr. Hinds: Government has had the establishment of the National Procurement Commission on hold whilst seeking political consensus on its establishment.

4. VIDEO TAPING OF PROCEEDINGS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Mrs. Holder: The proceedings in the National Assembly are video-taped by the Government controlled NCN. Will the Hon. Prime Minister say why copies of the parliamentary proceedings are not being made available to the Alliance for Change parliamentary party upon request?

Mr. Hinds: The Prime Minister believes that copies of any of NCN programmes are available on usual commercial terms and arrangements.

5. NATIONAL SPORTS COMMISSION

Mrs. Holder: Will the Hon. Minister say why is money being voted for the National Sports Commission, a body that has been defunct for more than two years?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Dr. Anthony]: Monies are voted for the National Sports Commission to enable it to pay its staff and carry out programmes.

6. DIPLOMATIC PASSPORTS

Mr. Trotman: Could the Hon. Minister say what is the criteria used for the issuing of Diplomatic Passports by the Government of Guyana?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]: The criteria for the issuing of diplomatic Passports are State secret.

Oral Replies

7. PADDY DRYING FLOORS

Mr. Franklin: I beg to ask the Hon. Minister of Agriculture question number 7 on the Order Paper standing in my name:

- Can the Minister inform the National Assembly of the price paid for the paddy drying floor at Anna Regina?
- And could he further inform this Assembly what is the average cost per square metre of drying floor constructed so far, if all the floors have the same thickness. If not provide the average cubic meter cost.

Mr. Speaker: Is it one question?

Mr. Franklin: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: And I allowed that? That is by mistake. You should have only one question per question.

Mr. Franklin: They are totally related, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That does not matter. The first question you asked is about price and cost. What is the second part of that question?

Mr. Franklin: To give the average cost per cubic metre. *[Interruption]* That is how you calculate volume; you wouldn't know this.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. R. Persaud]: The cost for the Anna Regina drying floor is just about \$14.5 million. It is 12,000 square metres and the cost per cubic metre is in the region of

\$35,166 which falls within the Government's range in terms of engineering estimate for that type of construction.

Mr. Franklin: Thank you. The figures seem to be in the 'ball-park' that we checked. But when you use that figure it means that an additional \$5 to \$6 million was spent on everything else: preparation, transportation and so on. With the average cost being about \$6 to \$7 million you are spending an extra \$5 million, and for what.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the Hon. Gentleman is getting his numbers from but I can provide him subsequently with the total contract which outlines the bill of quantities and the scope of work which provides particular details as to the various expenditure for this project.

8. GRADE REPETITION/RETENTION AND AUTOMATIC PROMOTION (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Franklin: I beg to ask the Hon. Minister of Education question number 8 on the Order Paper standing in my name:

- Can the Hon. Minister explain to the House, the intention of Circular No. 8/2009 dated 29th September, 2009, from the Chief Education Officer, to all Primary, Nursery and Secondary Schools, among others, with the subject stated as "Grade Repetition/Retention and Automatic Promotion (Amendment)"?
- Is the policy now, as the circular suggests, in paragraph two that, "no repetition shall take place at the nursery, primary nor secondary levels", irrespective of the performance of students and that promotion to higher grades will be automatic.

Minister of Education [Mr. Baksh]: Mr. Speaker, questions 1 and 2 can be answered from the circular which was issued by the Chief Education Officer. It is therefore necessary for me to read that circular for the benefit of Members of the National Assembly.

"From the Chief Education Officer to the Deputy Chief Education Officers..."

Grade Repetition/Retention and Automatic Promotion (Amendment)

In its efforts to ensure that all students experience an acceptable level of success from Nursery to Secondary level the Ministry of Education has reviewed its policy on repetition/retention and automatic promotion. No repetition shall take place at the nursery, primary or secondary levels with effect from the new school year commencing September 2010.

The emphasis of every school must be on prevention and early intervention rather than waiting until chronic patterns of school failure and frustration become evident. In this regard the most competent teacher must be placed in the inception classes/grades - year one, Grades 1 and 7.

In addition the teaching staff must consciously teach students to master fluency in the language of instruction, particularly at the nursery level and the preparatory division.

The school reports which follow the national assessments for Grades 2, 4, 6 and 9 and the CSEC Report must be fully utilised to conduct corrective and remedial activities with intention of improving student performance at the respective grades.

It is therefore advised that all education departments must ensure that a strong remediation programme is implemented at each school or cluster of schools during the August vacation in reading, English and Mathematics to correct the relevant deficiencies. In the case of the pupils who would have completed the National Grade 6 Assessment such a remediation programme must commence during the August term.

It is also advised that all school administrators and officials of the respective departments of education must make full use of the guidelines which are attached to this circular.”

Mr. Speaker, it is clear from the circular that the repetition... and this will primarily refer to the secondary schools because repetition in the primary schools was discontinued several years ago. There is no repetition in the primary schools; very, very few in some of our outlying areas. [Mrs. Backer: None or a few?] Very few repetitions are taking place, so it is almost non-existent in the primary schools.

In the secondary schools where we do have repetition we have asked ourselves a simple question: is repetition a remedy for slow learners or learners who fail annual examinations? Our answer is no, because we have conducted a survey of selected secondary schools and our findings show, very clearly, that the dropout rate is very high. When students move from Grade 7

to Grade 8 they drop out. We know we have a big challenge in secondary education with the dropout rate between Grades 7 and 9. We know that; the figure is about seven per cent. Therefore for those who are repeating, most of them drop out from Grade 7, Grade 8 and Grade 9. What we have been doing overall in the education system, also at the primary level, is strengthening the grade assessment system at Grades 2 and 4. When we see problems at those levels as borne out from the analysis that is carried out after the assessments we are taking remedial action immediately. We don't wait until students reach Grade 6. We know some of the weaknesses we have in the primary school system. Therefore, workshops were held all over the country during this year sensitising the teachers on what to do and how to approach; the strategic approaches and interventions that are necessary having regard to the analysis that comes out of the grade assessment.

Equally or more importantly, we are introducing from next year a Grade 4 literacy certificate which will bring pressure to bear on the school system. So we capture all of the children at Grades 1, 2, 3 and 4. The children will have to have an acceptable standard of literacy, numeracy and reading. If they do not achieve that standard they will have two other attempts in Grade 5 of the primary school cycle so to do. This will put pressure on the school to ensure that continuous remediation takes place at the Grade 5 level, so that these children are properly prepared for the Grade 6 assessment. We are moving in that direction.

You asked the question about teachers. Additionally, we have continuous training programs in the new literacy methodology which was designed by an international consultant working with or local professionals. We also have the Literacy Hour. We have the Accelerated Reading Approach. We have the Interactive Radio Instruction program, and so on. We are hoping within the shortest time span, perhaps two or three years, when these interventions take hold that it will improve learning outcomes as a whole at the primary cycle.

At the secondary level, because of the weaknesses at the primary level, we have introduced the six-year program with a specially designed curriculum. So students will have to undergo that program and then go into the mainstream of secondary education. This is all because of the challenges we have at the primary level.

We have discontinued the repetition program because of the dropouts and the failure rates. When we look across the Caribbean, in Trinidad there is no repetition at the secondary level; in Jamaica there is no repetition at the primary or secondary level. **[Interruption]** This is in terms of a comparative analysis. I am just giving you did for your own information. I want to educate you. **[Mrs. Backer: You could educate me?]** I am the Minister of Education. Therefore, we have in place right now strong remediation programs. As I speak we have remediation programs for 10% of the primary schools, and 10% of the secondary schools. It is ongoing right now to prepare them for school in September. We also have continuous remediation during the school year. We have the Fast Track Literacy Initiative in place. We are also asking schools from September... already in many regions some schools have voluntarily started remediation programs for 1 or 1 1/2 hours, one day per week from Monday to Friday, to allow the slow learners to catch up. I am giving you all this information and interventions for you to see that children are not being promoted *willy-nilly*; we have continuous remediation in the school system. As a matter of fact, for that last term when the students would have written the Grad 6 assessment, for three months in all schools for those children who were performing below the 50% mark we started a remediation program. We are doing an analysis of the results. An evaluation is taking place as I speak. So these are all the measures taken, and to be put in place when the child moves from one grade to the other.

I want to quote from a UNESCO Education for all report about repetition.

"A review of the research on grade repetition provides no conclusive evidence to support the hypothesis that repetition is a more effective way of helping low achievers that automatic promotion."

That is what I was talking about just now.

"As repeaters use resources that could otherwise be used to expand enrolment or to improve the quality of educational services, countries with high levels of repetition should review their promotion policies with a view to a adopting more efficient measures to improve learning achievement and prevent failure."

That is precisely what the Ministry of Education is doing.

I will quote again from the UNESCO report.

"In formulating promotion policies, school authorities should be well advised to survey the research literature first. A significant body of research indicates that the negative effects of repetition largely out strip the expected benefits."

This is a very important report. Finally, the question is asked,

"Does repeating grades help pupils?"

I want to answer the question.

Contrary to popular beliefs, repeating a grade does not help students gain ground academically and has a negative impact on social adjustment and their self esteem. No matter how much parents and educators try to portray repetition in a constructive light pupils who do not progress to the next grade level with their peers invariably struggle with problems of self-esteem. Not surprisingly, researchers have found that repeaters tend to develop highly negative attitudes toward school. Repeating early grades frequently leads to further retention down the road which in turn can lead to dropping out entirely.

And this is our experience from our survey.

A report by the Carnegie Council on adolescent development, estimated that single grade retention increases the likelihood of drop out by 40% to 50%. A second one raises the risks to 90%.

We are experiencing that in Guyana, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: How long more is the answer expected to last Hon. Member? This is an answer to a question. How long more do you think you will go?

Mr. Baksh: Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, you are finished. I don't want you to accuse me of stopping you. I was just making an inquiry. Are you finished?

Mr. Baksh: I will wait on the other questions before I continue.

Mr. Franklin: Mr. Speaker, in light of that very elaborate answer I just want the Minister to answer this one question. Are we still promoting students irrespective of if they have reached the level of attainment of the other grade? Yes or no.

Mr. Baksh: Thank you very much. I will answer your question although I think from what I have said and what the circular is saying that is exactly it. Yes, we will be promoting students and having certain strategic interventions.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Everall Franklin, have you exhausted your questions?

Mr. Franklin: Thank you.

9. EXPORT OF ACTIVATED CARBON/CHARCOAL

Mr. Speaker: You have a question for the Hon. Prime Minister but he is not here. Do you want to defer that?

Mr. Franklin: Could we get the Prime Minister to offer the answer in writing.

Mr. Speaker: Discuss that with The Clerk please. You will have to convert it.

Mr. Franklin: Fine, thank you.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

(i) LOW CARBON DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GUYANA REDD+ INVESTMENT FUND (GRIF)

Minister of Finance [Dr. Singh]: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for affording me this opportunity to update this Hon. House on a matter of major importance for the long-term future of our country, and that it is to update members on recent progress of the Low Carbon Development Strategy and on the establishment of the Guyana REDD + Investment Fund or GRIF.

When I presented the 2010 National Budget I said we have budgeted to receive US\$30 million through GRIF which will enable the financing of critical transformative infrastructure, low-

carbon small business initiatives, the cost of land demarcation and land titling for indigenous communities, and the work of the office of climate change.

Mr. Speaker, two days ago in New York, His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo and the Prime Minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, announced that the GRIF will be operational within the coming months. I, therefore, wanted today to outline the background to the GRIF and to update Members of this House as to how it will be established in the coming weeks.

As Members of this House know, the Low Carbon Development Strategy has its genesis in a speech made by His Excellency President Jagdeo to Commonwealth Finance Ministers in October, 2007. The President proposed two ideas. Firstly, he said he believed that the people of Guyana would be willing to help the global battle against climate change by putting Guyana's forests under long term protection if the right economic incentives were created.

Secondly, he said he believed the people would be willing to invest the income Guyana received to forge a new low carbon economy.

This vision broke new ground, and has been recognised internationally for its pioneering nature. Building from the President's vision, the initial manifestation of the LCDS was in December, 2008 when the Office of the President published a paper on "Creating Incentives to Avoid Deforestation." In May, 2009 that paper evolved into the first draft of the LCDS, which was followed by one of the most comprehensive national consultations on climate change to take place anywhere in the world, including debate in this Hon. House. An updated LCDS was presented to the House in December, 2009. Further review and consultation took place in the ensuing months and today, just a few minutes ago, I had the honour of tabling the revised May, 2010 version in this House.

In parallel to the national consultation, the LCDS was informed by international processes, most importantly, those within the negotiations to create a new global climate agreement under the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, or UNFCCC as it is popularly known, and in particular on reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation or REDD+ mechanism.

Guyana wants to see a legally binding climate treaty agreed under the UNFCCC as soon as possible. However, pending the agreement of such a treaty the government supports a number of interim measures. I will mention the three most important here.

Firstly, Guyana has endorsed the Copenhagen Accord. Although the Accord falls short of what Guyana believes is necessary to stabilise global temperatures. It represents some significant steps forward. In particular, the Accord's commitments to the provision by the developed world of US\$30 billion of total climate finance during the period 2010 to 2012, and US \$100 billion annually by 2020, represents a level of commitment that was previously missing from the international community.

Secondly, Guyana supports the interim REDD+ partnership, which now consists of about 60 countries who have started to make progress in addressing global deforestation and forest degradation between now and 2015.

The third, and for Guyana the most significant interim measure, is our work with Norway. Norway intends to pay a total of US\$250 million by 2015 for Guyana's forest climate services. Brazil's Amazon Fund at US \$1 billion by 2015 is larger. However, relative to the size of the forests covered by the agreement, the Guyana/Norway agreement is by far the world's most valuable agreement of its kind.

Because of the agreement, the first of the two ideas the President outlined in October 2007 - the idea that Guyana will provide forest climate services in exchange for fair economic incentives - is becoming a reality. It is therefore time to make the second idea - investing to forge a new low carbon economy – is also a reality. The establishment of GRIF makes this possible.

The GRIF will support the implementation of priority LCDS investments from 2010 to 2015, unless it is superseded by an agreed UNFCCC or other international mechanism. GRIF will be established to meet two objectives.

2.43 p.m.

Firstly, it will be the fund management vehicle through which funds provided to Guyana for forest climate services will generate further investment income for Guyana pending use of the liquid assets for specific LCDS investments.

The Governments of Guyana and Norway have asked the World Bank to act as trustee of the GRIF, utilising the World Bank's treasury function to generate further investment income for the LCDS. The GRIF's second objective will be to act as financial intermediary mechanism through which the payments and any income earned on them will be invested in projects and activities that support the implementation of the LCDS. This presented a core challenge. We needed to ensure Guyanese sovereignty over LCDS decisions and specifically to make this decision within the framework of national systems, including budgetary oversight by this Honourable House. At the same time, we wanted to create a global model by ensuring that climate finance adheres to internationally accepted financial, social and environmental standards or safeguards. To help the international community by creating a globally replicable model for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) Plus payments.

The Government believes that the UNFCCC should establish the standards for safeguards but this issue remains unsolved in the UNFCCC negotiations. To develop a globally replicable model and, therefore, help to advance the negotiations the Governments of Guyana and Norway will invite a series of internationally reputable institutions to act as GRIF partner entities starting with the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, Conservation International, the World Wild Life Fund and all members of the United Nation's family. Others will be determined overtime pending the creation of a UNFCCC set of safeguards for climate finance the internationally accepted safeguards of any one of these organisations will be deemed acceptable.

Now that the GRIF is being established, investments can be made in the priority LCDS investments for the period 2010 to 2015 as set out in chapter nine of the LCDS. I will quickly mention six key highlights for 2010 and 2011 here.

Firstly in 2010 and 2011 between \$40 million U.S will be invested as equity in the Amaila Falls hydropower project. I am pleased to report to the House that about 9.00am Shanghai time today His Excellency President Jagdeo witnessed the signing of an agreement between the parties to the Amaila Falls project. The agreement was signed, as I indicated, in Shanghai, China and formalises the cooperation between the Guyana Power and Light Inc., Sithe Global Amaila Holdings Ltd., the China Railway First Group Company Ltd. and China Development Bank. It sets out the parties' intention to reach financial closure on the Amaila Falls project within twelve months or ideally sooner.

This is a truly historic moment. The Amaila falls project is the biggest infrastructure investment in our country's history. From the start of its operations it will provide value to Guyanese citizens and the wider economy through cheaper electricity while simultaneously enabling Guyana to switch from nearly one hundred percent dependence on fossil fuel sources for electricity generation to nearly one hundred percent clean renewable energy sources. Then, twenty years after it starts operating, the hydro-electricity plant will be transferred to the people of Guyana at zero additional cost, thereby bequeathing long term energy and dependence, national competitiveness and environmental sustainability to our children and future generations. The project will involve utilising less than 0.001(%) percent of the State forest area. The Government is firmly committed to ensuring that the project complies with national and international, social and environmental safeguards.

The second LCDS priority for 2010 and 2011 will be to accelerate the creation of new opportunities for Amerindians. It is aimed to complete the process of titling for all Amerindian villages that request this to be done by 2015. Over the same period all titled villages will have the option to opt into the forest payment mechanism at any time in accordance with the principle of free prior informed consent. Funds will be allocated to the Amerindian Development fund to provide grounds for low carbon energy and economic or social developments in those villages.

The third LCDS priority will be to further the work to enable access to high quality ICT infrastructure in all parts of Guyana.

The fourth priority will be to support the creation of new low carbon opportunities for small and micro enterprise sectors and vulnerable groups building on the small business development fund established under the Small Business Act 2004.

The fifth priority will be to enable a suite of investment in the education sector including the creation of an international centre for biodiversity research and Low Carbon development, enhancing the school curriculum to include Low Carbon Development and measures to improve ICT training for school children and prospective employees.

The sixth and final priority for 2010 and 2011 will be supporting the office of climate change, the Low Carbon Project Management Office, the Environmental Protection Agency and the

REDD Secretariat at the Guyana Forestry Commission. These agencies are all essential to the effective implementation of the LCDS.

Details of all six priorities as well as plans to address our immense adaptation challenges are set out in the outline of the LCDS. Individual Government agencies are now moving to translate these outlines into detailed project plans.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for affording me the time to update the House on the LCDS and the establishment of the GRIF. I am conscious that I have take some time, but Members of this House from all sides have recognised that the LCDS represents a transformational opportunity to create a new economy in Guyana and that this will long outlast any Government's term in office. I therefore, hope that the broad based support we have seen in this House to date will continue and that all Members will join with the Government as proud Guyanese, proud that we are capable of delivering such an ambitious programme of change and proud that the world is looking to Guyana for leadership on a matter of such profound importance for people everywhere. Thank you very much. [Applause]

(ii) WOW, A MICRO CREDIT SCHEME FOR WOMEN

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Ms. Manickchand]: Another chapter in the glorious story of women's empowerment in Guyana got started when his Excellency President Jagdeo launched the Women of Worth (WoW) microcredit scheme on June 4, 20210 at the International Convention Centre. The plot for this story was published in 2006 in the manifesto of the People's Progressive Party Civic as a promise to establish single parent assistance plan and a micro-credit scheme for single parent women. The prologue came in 2008 when the Government announced its intention to honour that promise and invited single parents across Guyana to become registered, so as to enable the data-base of a single parent register. We said at that time that the term single parent, for this exercise, would refer to any person who has primary responsibility for the care of a child or children even if that person is not the biological parent of the child. This included grandparents, aunts and uncles. In excess of 30,000 persons registered during that process and a data base was created. From then to now, hundreds of single parents benefitted from assistance under this scheme. In excess of 360 single parents were trained in skills that they chose. Those skills include dress making, garment construction, catering,

cosmetology, ICT and office procedure, child care and care for the elderly. Without exception every parent who was trained received grants from the Government of Guyana of \$65,000 to purchase equipment and materials to establish businesses in the areas in which they were trained, or to expand businesses that they had already established. Over 800 single parent women also received a grant to assist with the payment of day care for their children so that those parents could remain employed. In excess of \$60M has been spent in the last year on making the lives of single parents easier, particularly women, and in providing hope to this particular group of persons. By the end of this year the Government would have spent more than \$150 million directly catering to the needs of single parents. The WoW micro-credit financial facility is collaboration between the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry and the Government of Guyana. It is the epitome of the Government's desire to establish an environment where good public/private relations could thrive and prosper and underscores Government's appreciation for the benefits of the entire society moving in the same direction as it relates to the empowering of our people and the development of our country. We expect better value for our money to be only one of the good consequences of this programme.

WoW was born out of the Government's express desire to fight poverty. It reflects the Government's full appreciation for increasing women's participation in the labour force and for the benefits that will flow when women are encouraged and given a hand up in the production of goods and services in the country.

The single largest challenge for the small business enterprise sector and, particularly, for women is access to finance. There are hurdles in the conventional banking system that simple cannot be crossed by women across the world. Good governance, visionary governance requires providing the wherewithal to cross these hurdles. In May of this year the Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh piloted the Financial Fiscal Enactment Amendment Act which allows financial institutions to plod on in this public/private effort to alleviate poverty. It allows for the waiver of taxes on any income earned by a bank or other financial institution under a micro-credit scheme that is the subject of an agreement with the Government. The Government shall enter into any such agreement that seeks to allow persons from our most vulnerable populations, such as single parents to benefit. Indeed, a manifestation of this is in the agreement entered with the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry. This is Women of Worth a micro-credit financial facility. Under it

GBTI is making available half a billion dollars to the women of Guyana. Under this programme a single parent woman would have access to as much as \$250,000 to start up her business or continue or expand her business. All sums borrowed attract an interest rate of six percent per annum. On sums borrowed over \$200,000 there is a six month moratorium on repayments and on sums under \$200,000 there is a three month moratorium on repayments. The maximum period for repayment is 24 months. There is no limit on the type of small enterprise for which one can access facility to establish or strengthen businesses. No collateral is required to access WoW money.

The WoW facility meets head on the challenges faced by women in the establishment of small businesses. A woman need not have the resources that would amount to collateral before she can access money to start up, continue or expand her business and her source of income. The very small interest rate offered by GBTI through this facility allows even the most vulnerable amongst the single parent population to restore her hope in life. A woman who borrows \$100,000 would be required to repay an affordable \$4,495 per month. A woman who borrows \$200,000 will be required to repay \$8,990 per month over a two year period and a woman who borrows \$250,000 will be required to repay just \$11,337 per month over a two year period. This is bringing service to the people. This amounts to giving women hope where their personal circumstances offer hopelessness and it amounts to giving the wherewithal to retain their pride and reach their potential.

The response by the women of Guyana makes me sure that I am right about all that I have said. Ever since the launch, about one month ago, an excess of 3000 Guyanese women have visited us and sought to apply to be beneficiaries. These women come from all over this country. We have received applications from Georgetown and Linden, Pamaroon, Corentyne, Parika, Bath settlement, Mahdia, East Bank of Demerara, Bartica and the East Coast of Demerara. On just Tuesday last GBTI presented cheques to the first 13 beneficiaries under this programme to either start up various businesses or to expand on the enterprise in which those beneficiaries are already involved. Government would be happy to enter into this type of agreement with other financial institutions and encourage banks to explore their policies and resources with a view to working hand in hand with the Government of Guyana to alleviate poverty and to empower women and other vulnerable groups of this country.

This, Mr. Speaker, is a story of success. This is a story that will emancipate women from the shackles of poverty. This is a story of the empowerment of women; a story of the provision of resources to make women economic catalysts in our country. This is a story of giving hope to women whose personal circumstances encourage hopelessness. This is the story of yet another PPP/C manifesto promise fulfilled. This story is written by the PPP/C Government. I thank you.
[Applause]

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Presentation and First Readings

The following Bills were introduced and read for the first time:

1. PROCUREMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL 2010 - Bill No.6/2010

A Bill intituled AN ACT to amend the Procurement Act 2003.

2. NEW BUILDING SOCIETY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2010 - Bill No. 7/ 2010

A Bill intituled AN ACT to amend the New Building Society Act.

[Minister of Finance]

COMMITTEE'S BUSINESS

MOTIONS

(i) ADOPTION OF THE NINTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS IN RELATION TO THE APPOINTMENT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly adopts the Ninth Report of the Standing Committee to address matters relating to the appointment of the Members of the Commissions established under the Constitution, and signify to the President that the following persons:

Mr. Carvil Duncan

And

Mr. Cecil Seepersaud

Have been nominated in accordance with Article 200(1)(b) of the Constitution, be appointed Members of the Public Service Commission.

[Ms. Gail Teixeira - Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Appointments]

Ms. Teixeira: On behalf of the Committee on Appointments, as you know, I have the pleasure of presenting this report to the House. As the House may remember, in July of 2007 we came here to put forward the two nominations in accordance with the Constitution in relation to the Public Service Commission. We were advised, as a Committee, that the present Public Service Commission', as so appointed in 2007, term was coming to an end. The Committee met, deliberated on this and decided to go back and continue to consult with entities that we had agreed to by resolution in this House. We did and then went through a process of looking at the nominations of the four entities. By decision we came to the point that we are presently of nominating Mr. Carvil Duncan and Mr. Cecil Seepersaud. Just to remind the House they are other nominees that will be agreed to by the President and the Leader of the Opposition, again in accordance with the Constitution, Article 200. Thank you.

Mrs. Backer: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague has said, the Ninth Report of the Committee on Appointment in relation to the appointment of Members to the Public Service Commission is before you. I want to say, and I speak for the People's National Congress Reform-1G that we are coming to the conclusion more and more that the Committee on Appointments, I cannot speak of the other Committees, is to a large extent an exercise in futility. I am wondering if at the appropriate time it may not be appropriate for us to move a Motion stipulating that once we can come to a decision by a majority we need not have any meetings and only if a two-thirds majority is required e.g. with the Indigenous Commission that is coming up shortly that we meet. I say this, in all seriousness, because a review of the work of the Committee will show...

[Mr. Murray: You have your say and they have their way.] Exactly! Mr. Murray has said it beautifully "you have your say and we will have ours." On no occasion has the Government side of the House, on none, none, none, been willing to accept a nominee that does not come from themselves. It is a most ludicrous and farcical position and situation. **[A Member:** They

should have shame.] [Mr. Murray: Shame? They do not have that.] Shame is too mild a word. [Mr. Carberry: No they do not have shame.] On a serious note, why are we wasting time? What does the Committee say that after more than 40 meetings, not that we have always been looking at this matter but once it is a majority. They come they put their two names. We put our two names or Mrs. Sheila Holder may put another name and on no occasion have they said let us seriously examine, they have not even made a pretence of seriously examining a nominee who does not emanate from them.

The two names put by the main opposition, the PNCR-1G are Vera Norton and Vincent Bowman. I must say some about Vera Norton. When we put her name up saying that this is a good woman; do you know what we were told, and this is the Separation of Powers coming into work, the Office of the President has said that this lady...our information is that she has worked well because she is actually on the Commission but as a nominee..."three Members appointed by the President acting after meaningful consultation. She is there as a result of that. What they are really saying is that we know that she is going to go back there. I am saying that there is no Separation of Powers. They know who all five Members will be and they are not willing to be reasonable and say that one of our Members must have some merit. We will see it more glaringly when we come to the Police Service Commission where they have four nominees and not two.

I want to say that this process vis-a-vis the appointment of members to the Police Service Commission, in the opinion of the PNCR-1G, the Public Service Commission, is a waste of time. It is farcical and we have nothing else to say on it. It is an absolute waste of time. [Applause]

Minister of Health [Dr. Ramsammy]: Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of the report and the nominees that have been presented. I am convinced that the process that we were engaged in, in the Appointments Committee is not a waste of time. It is not a ludicrous effort. None of the nominees came from us. It is a consultation process. We write to organisation and they determine their nominees in this process. We are given a set of names from which we sometimes we must select a few. In this case a number of Trade Unions etc. nominate or recommends persons and we select from that list. So the impression that we come here or to the Committee with names that we generate is a misrepresentation. That is what is ludicrous that we come here and misrepresent what really happens. It is a consultative process. We ask organisations in Guyana to put up names. If in fact we prefer on or the other name in the list cannot make this process a

waste of time. Indeed, there are many names that we all agreed on. Many of the names that we have brought up, for whichever one of the Commissions whether it was the Rights Commissions or the Service Commissions, we do agree. There is consensus. They are one or two names that we do not have consensus on and, therefore, it is utter misrepresentation to come and say that we generate names.

We have spent much time discussing the nominees. The fact that we cannot always come to consensus does not make this process one that is not useful. So, I find the remarks by the Hon. Member Deborah Backer to be unfortunate. I do wish that we can work and find more consensus, but the fact that we do not have consensus all the time is not an indication that we have not honoured our responsibility of making our case in the Committee. We make our case; we honour the recommendations made by civil society and by organisations that spend a lot of time in proposing these names.

I believe that we have engaged, in the last several years, in a democratic process; in a process that advances our democratic governance. The fact that we have not been able to achieve consensus of the names all of the time, should not mean an abandonment of the process. Mr. Speaker I support the nominations before us and ask that we endorse these names. [Applause]

3.13 p.m.

Mrs. Holder: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I would like to put on the record that the Alliance For Change supports the Report before the House and to make what I consider to be brief comments, in relation to the perennial problem described by my colleague, the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer.

I would like to bring a different perspective and refer to what I have done before in this Hon. House by simply emphasising a crucial element in our Constitution that speaks to the independence of the Members appointed to all the Commissions, including the Service Commission, the Judicial Service Commission, the Police Service Commission and the Rights Commission. I would like to make the point that if you were to place greater emphasis on that element, perhaps the problem raised would be significantly resolved.

With those few words, Sir, I simply state that we support the exercise. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

Ms. Teixeira (replying): Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate Mrs. Holder's support for the work of the Committee. Mr. Speaker, you must forgive me for smiling very broadly when the Hon. Member Mrs. Backer was speaking because it reminded me of when we were children playing bat and ball and one of us lost the game, threw the bat down and said that one was not playing any more. I mean this a level of puerile behaviour as far as I am concerned in this House. I hope that is no un-parliamentary language.

I want to, for the whole House, note that on July 5th, 2007, Mr. Michael Desmond Hope, Ms. Merlin Udhu, Ms. Vera Naughton, Mr. Ganga Persaud, Mr. Carvil Duncan and Mr. Cecil Seepersaud were sworn in as members of the Public Service Commission. The first three names: Mr. Hope, Ms. Udhu and Ms. Naughton came about as a result of the agreement in concurrence with the Leader of the Opposition and the President. Mr. Ganga Persaud was the nominee of the President in his exclusive rights in accordance with the Constitution. Mr. Carvil Duncan and Mr. Seepersaud were also appointed, as we know, from the Parliament.

In this whole exercise, I think, it is important to know the four entities we approached - the Guyana Labour Union, the Federation of Unions of Government Employees, the Guyana Public Service Union, the National Union of Public Service Employees and the Public Service Senior Staff Association – all made their nominees. I must say..., with due respect to them, that sometimes, as a Committee, when we consult we have a kind of delaying process, it takes time for the bodies to get back to us, and... on this particular issue the bodies we approached for nominees for the Public Service Commission responded with a alacrity, and I want to congratulate them for being so responsive.

In relation to the comments made about the Committee being a waste of time, may I just enlighten you, Mr. Speaker, and the House about something. That is that on April 20th having received six nominees from the four entities we then began to look at proposals. There were two Members of the Opposition present. They were Mrs. Amna Ally and Mrs. Backer. Mrs. Ally made a nomination. Minister Robeson Benn made a nomination on behalf of the Government. We then deferred further discussion until May 18th. On May 18th there was one sole Member of

the Opposition there, Dr. George Norton, and if we look at the page of the Report, paragraph 19, it says:

“In the absence of the two Members of the PNCR the Member present refrained from making a proposal, the Member of the AFC was not present and the first two proposals therefore were put and by a majority vote the Committee nominated Mr. Seepersaud and Mr. Duncan.”

On June 1st we met again. Going through the Draft Report now, and, again, there were only two Members from the Opposition, Dr. George Norton and Mrs. Holder. Therefore the Report was amended and corrected at paragraph 19 as decided and proposed by Dr. Norton, and therefore agreed to be put to this House. Therefore at the June 1st meeting the Members of the Opposition could have said, “Could we reconsider, could we re-commit”, or they had wanted more time. That has always happened in Committees. It is nothing new. I cannot create bodies to vote. This side of the House does not rig. Therefore when the matter was put to a vote there were only two persons from the Opposition’s side, but there was no need to vote because the Hon. Member, Dr. Norton, said that he refrained. This is again a deliberate attempt on my colleague’s part to try and besmirch the work of the Committee. Surely there is a point in democracy where decisions are made. Everyone can have a voice, but at some point someone will have to decide something.

The Constitution is our Bible in terms of how we do things. If the other side does not like the Constitution then let it bring a Constitutional amendment. But we did not craft the Constitution. It is this House in its wisdom, under the Constitutional Reform Commission, made proposals for its reform, adopted by this House, drafted and brought back to this House, voted on, approved by, in many cases, a two thirds majority. So we cannot now play bat and ball, throw down the bat and walk away. This is how it works.

In relations to the human rights bodies, we will come to those. I was not part of that body of the Constitutional Reform Commission which decided that the Service Commissions would have the majority votes in terms of nominations. But I believe that there is wisdom in that, in that no Government should be stymied, as we are with the Ethnic Relations Commission, from implementing what are important constitutional bodies in order to execute and uphold the work of any Government and, in this case, the Government of the day, the PPP/C Government.

We also looked at all the nominees and felt that in performance Mr. Seepersaud and Mr. Duncan upheld the Constitution, upheld the work of the Service Commission and we had no information or anything otherwise that they had not served in their capacity well beforehand. The Committee, therefore, in its wisdom, continues to support their nominations and to bring these nominations to this House. We leave it to the Leader of the Opposition and His Excellency the President to determine the other members of the Commission so that they can be constituted and get on with their job. We have in the Parliament, as a Committee, done what is in accordance with the Constitution - bring two named nominees to the House for the President to appoint. He has no discretion to disagree with anyone we bring to him. We are calling on the House to support that. Therefore there is nothing indelicate, or there is not any kind of damage to the democratic functioning of the Committee. But I do say this that if persons are not in the meeting, and that goes for the Government too, we go ahead with our work. The Opposition is well aware that sometimes we have a minority on the Government side in the Committee and the work continues, and that a Member can ask for a deferment on the matter so as to give everyone time to study. That is how it is done in our Committee and if no one objects to that in the Committee I find that it is infra dig to use this House to elucidate on this point when one has not said so in the Committee.

If the Opposition, the PNCR, feels it is a waste of time in the Committee of Appointments it should have, I believe, the honesty and the integrity to say to the Committee, "Look, we think that we are wasting our time". Obviously, you have a right to say whatever you want in the House with the permission of the Speaker, and so it has been done. I have exercised my right to respond, not only on my behalf, but on behalf of the Committee, of all the Members on both sides of the House. We have done our work in accordance with the Constitution. We have done it fairly and we have done it with a fair hand. Therefore, I now move that the Report be adopted by this House. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Question put, and agreed to.

Report adopted

**(i) ADOPTION OF THE FIFTH PERIODIC REPORT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY
SECTORAL COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC SERVICES**

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly adopts the Fifth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services and refer the Report to the Government for consideration.

[Ms. Gail Teixeira - Chairperson of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services]

Ms. Teixeira: Again, it is a great honour to present the Fifth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services for the period between March 2009 and June 2010.

We had a very, I believe, productive period in the Committee and I know that there is concern about how some of these Committees work, but I do believe in the wisdom of the Constitution reformers for bringing about the Sectoral Committees in this House. From what I heard about what goes in the Parliamentary Sectoral Committees of Social Services, Natural Resources, Foreign Services, etc, is that they are all grappling at different levels with the Standing Orders and how to implement them.

In the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services there were a number of changes of the Members. I must say that the departure of Mr. Vieira left a little gap in our Committee. I believe he was a very active and responsible Member who always came with a challenge, but was certainly well prepared. So we will like to ask on behalf of the Committee that the Leader of the Opposition or his representative here to please convey to Mr. Vieira our appreciation for the work he did, both as the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson, in the Committee during his tenure. There were also some other changes. Mr. Irfaan Ali became a Minister and was replaced by Mr. Mohamed F. Khan, who was an alternate Member becoming a permanent Member and Rev. Gilbert being added to the Committee as an alternate Member. The PNCR also made changes in the Committee in the earlier part of this year by replacing Mr. Danny with Ms. Jennifer Wade and Mr. Vieira with Mr. Mervyn Williams. Ms. Wade is an alternate Member. These were new persons on board for the first half of the year.

We focused on Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and its Turnaround Plan, the Skeldon Estate, National Insurance Scheme (NIS) as well as we were given a mandate by the resolution of Parliament to monitor and report on the Colonial Life and General Insurance Company (CLICO) matters and on the Mid-Year Reports of the Minister of Finance. Those were what we had given priority to and those were what we did accomplish in addressing, examining, considering, and so forth.

We must acknowledge that the agencies did provide information to us. On the issue of CLICO we had discussion including writing to you, Sir, asking for guidance on dealing with a matter which, from the time the resolution was passed in Parliament and the Committee started working, was taken to Court. So you will find in the Report the Committee's view that it still wishes to honour and implement the resolution of this House, but that it will have to await the results or the conclusion of the matter which is before the Court. However, the Committee did get the Court documents and they were downloaded to CD – ROMs as they were each about a foot high. They were open for the Members to study and to bring back issues, if they had wished to, for further clarification. That did not happen.

On the GuySuCo issue, we were able to have it appear before us and asked many questions about the viability of the sector; the problems encountered in this sector; issues related to the Skeldon Factory, etc, including industrial relations. We have had discussions, after each presentation, to look at our own internal views and observations, which we did and we had put forward a few recommendations in relations to those.

We then visited the Skeldon Sugar Factory, our entire Committee, except for Mr. Ramjattan and Mr. Komal Chand as well as the press. I think we all left there, and including comments which were recorded by the press at Skeldon, impressed by the factory, impressed with its modernity, the way in which it was functioning, and with the management and technical staff who had been very open with us. We had full disclosure on issues and all the questions we asked.

The issue of the National Insurance Scheme falls under the portfolio of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committees on the Social Services and the Economic Services. The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services focuses more on polices of the NIS, viability of the entity, performance, efficiency, etc. So whilst we did not go into some of the more detailed areas

which the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services may go into or has gone into when it met with the NIS... We had two sessions with the NIS It came before us and we asked written questions as well as questions within the discussions. We were accorded by the NIS team, headed by Dr. Luncheon, the full opportunity to speak, to be heard and to have our issues answered. When we went through to the second round we raised ancillary issues as well as new issues with the NIS. Again, we were very impressed with the NIS's openness and willingness to speak to us and to disclose a number of issues.

We came out with proposed recommendations to the NIS which I will come to in a while. We then went to the Mid-Year Financial Reports for the period from which it was first instituted following the 2006 new Standing Orders and looked at the Mid-Year Financial Reports for the years 2007, 2008 and 2009. From the point of view that were Mid-Year Reports being submitted in conformity with the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, section 67, which very specifically requires the Minister of Finance to table these Reports annually, and specifically what the Reports should contain... As a Committee, we were of the view that the Mid-Year Reports were an important gauge of the way in which the projections were made in the annual budget speeches and the economy was performing. Again, we made recommendations in relation to that.

We noted that the Ministry of Finance, each year, submitted the Reports since this intervention has been made. We noted that they were late, coming in November instead of the end of July as required, and as a Committee, we made a recommendation in relations to that.

We had a number of issues too with absenteeism. We had seventeen meetings and a couple of them were postponed. As we said in our Report, we noticed one Member, in particular, had a high level of absenteeism. We also noted that the media and the public pay little attention to the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services. It does not have the high profile nature as the Public Accounts Committee with the media. Maybe, our discussions are not as juicy or, in some cases, as I read in the newspapers the avid coverage of the Public Accounts Committee and what everyone said, that maybe Public Accounts Committee discussions are a little bit sexier than those of ours in the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services. But I do appeal to the press to pay some attention to the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services. Whilst the Public Accounts Committee looks at the

expenditure and so forth of the Government and accountability, the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services looks at performance, policy, accountability and transparency. Therefore, there are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. It is a body which pays attention to the agencies and entities under the Government.

We made a number of observations and recommendations. If I can just quickly encapsulate them for the Members that under GuySuCo we noted the Turnaround Plan and the changes and projections it had given itself. One of the things which was very clear was that it is looking to attain a break-even in 2011 and expecting to be moving into financial profitability in 2012, which gladden our hearts as we were concerned about GuySuCo, as a Committee.

We recommended for it to consider using lighter machines for harvesting; this is to do with the mechanisation of harvesting in the sugar fields. We also recommended that the industrial relations of GuySuCo be revisited. We know that the management of GuySuCo had said that it was something it is working on. Basically, it was continuing to support the unions and the Corporation working on better industrial relations.

On the NIS issues, we made a couple of observations and recommendations. We were concerned as a Committee that the Courts appeared not to address NIS issues swiftly, so that where persons had been violating the NIS laws in not submitting employees' deduction..., as there are a number of cases, I understand, and I would not go into that detail because I do not want to be found in problems with the Courts. But that there are a number of employers who had been deducting the NIS contributions from workers but, then, not submitting them to the NIS office. A number of these cases appear to take quite a long time in the Courts and, therefore, this is, maybe, a rhetorical appeal, but certainly saying to the judiciary that we are concerned with the way in which NIS matters are being dealt with so slowly.

We also recommended that in order to protect the viability of the NIS as an important safety net and a social security net for our people it would have to continue to strategise on ways and means to broaden its contributors' base with special attention on the self-employed category. We had also studied the actuarial Committee Report, I think it was 2006, and the Reform Committee's recommendations, and noticed that there were some recommendations which the Reform Committee presented and we have also supported.

We also talked about the greater institutional collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the NIS to help to reduce some of the cost factors of it, were it, in the Ministry of Health, primary, secondary and tertiary health care system which, offers some the similar services. We were concerned and we asked questions to do with the issue of NIS not recognising persons for medical claims if they did not have a pre-existing disease or medical condition. For example, if before the age of retirement one did not have diabetes, but on retirement one is now found to be diabetic that is not covered by the NIS We went back to the Reform Committee's Report and, in fact, surprisingly it also discussed this issue and did not agree that the NIS should allow for medical conditions which are not pre-existing prior to retirement. This, as you know, is also a big issue which has been debated in the US Congress, and so on, in relation to health reform.

There were also issues to do with the changes in the NIS, in terms of persons' claims for medical supplies or services. We were advised that due to a number of factors in the NIS, including the breach of its rules and regulations, it had now made changes. Persons, who were able to, would have to acquire their pharmaceutical, etc. and then make a claim on NIS That was the concern which was raised by the Opposition and Members from our side as well lead to us, as a Committee, saying that we needed to have greater collaboration also between NIS and the Ministry of Health in order to ensure that persons who need medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, etc., would not find themselves denied of access to these services, even if they were not covered by the NIS

We were concerned about one issue, and we did reach unanimity on this, and that was that the NIS should remain a social security scheme and not be privatised. Therefore, this was an important policy issue that the Committee actually took.

We called on the NIS to improve its awareness programmes, because still there seems to be a lot of confusion by the public and workers on what were their rights; what were the things they could access under the NIS

Furthermore, we recommended that in addition to the NIS sending to every employer, annually, a statement on the employee's status with it, that annually, it should send to every contributor an aggregate status report of all his or her contributions, so that, as a worker, one would not wait until one is retired or is about to retire then to go to the NIS and find that there is a gap of

records for five or ten years and one did not know that and had been working and NIS contribution were being deducted from one's salary. So this was another recommendation of the Committee.

We also recommended that the NIS should update laws whenever necessary to address current and pressing issues as we saw that a number of new areas and new issues may confront it. We also asked questions on its investments and its returns. There is in the Report and in the verbatim report, which is available at the Parliament Office, details in relations to the discussion on the investment portfolio of the NIS, its choices of investors, in terms of CLICO and other investors such as commercial banks versus Treasury bills. So those who are interested in those issues can find greater details in the verbatim records.

We also encouraged the NIS to keep the practice that it has had: That where employers have not been submitting NIS contributions to the NIS office, that it continues to honour the employee's claim based on payslips, letters of appointment, etc., while the matters with the employers are being handled either by negotiation or in the Courts, so that no contributor to the NIS would lose as a result of whatever are the reasons of the employers not submitting.

We also, of course, raised issues to do, in the discussions, with the efficiency of the NIS, concerns of some of the bureaucratic hurdles which contributors faced - lost records, etc. The officers explained too problems they were having with persons with the same names, different identification numbers, same identification numbers - that is NIS numbers - different names, etc., and that in computerising records there were still issues of cleaning up and improving their databases, etc. So in a number of cases the paper records of earlier periods were causing some challenges to them.

I reported on Colonial Life and General Insurance Company, SA (CLICO) that efforts were made and that the conclusion of the Committee was that it will assure the House it would continue... We have not ignored, nor do we wish to not carry out our assignment given to us by resolution no. 82 and that we will continue to peruse the developments in the Courts and to bring a progress report to this House, hopefully, when the matters are concluded before the Courts.

3.43 p.m.

As I reported on the Mid-Year Financial Report, the recommendations we made are in relation to our understanding, as a Committee, that because the Report has to be up to the end of June and that there may be an issue in terms of getting access to all the Reports which the different agencies have to provide, in terms of economic projections, status of expenditures and also looking at growth trends and patterns, externally, in terms of world prices for the goods to be exported and what is happening within the global economy, we recommended, this was the unanimous recommendation, by the way, that we bring to the House the proposal that the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act be amended to allow for the deadline of the submission of the Mid-Year Financial Report, under section 67, to be extended to the 9th October, coinciding with the end of recess, and therefore allowing for the Ministry of Finance to bring them in a more timely fashion.

On closing these comments on the Report we want to recognise the staff who was with us. We have noticed the improvements - new staff. The staff went through training. In the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services, we believe that we are a fortunate Committee because we have a good team working with us, which works hard and the level of work, we believe, is of a high order. We have certainly seen improvement over the period 2007 to 2010. We must acknowledge the improvements which we have been able to benefit from, as a Committee. We have a researcher in the Committee who also has grown and improved, and is working very hard. We want to make a recommendation in the Report that we will encourage the Parliament Office to continue upgrading its website and concluding this project as we believe that the website is looking better but we want it to look even better - to be more user-friendly.

I have made the comment on the media and the public already. We are again reiterating the recommendations which we had made before about the public awareness programme be designed with the media and the public on the roles and functions of the Committee. We had, in an early report, proposed that, maybe, in a Sunday newspaper or something, depending on finances, obviously, to publish a page which will show all the Committees which will be meeting in the coming week, those, especially, which are open to the public, with given time and so on. So if anyone happens to be in the neighbourhood, he or she might want to pop in. I know that the Parliament Office advises the press on a weekly basis of the meetings of the Committees and so we are still looking forward to their presence.

As the outgoing Chairperson, I am awaiting the Opposition to advise on who its Deputy Chairperson is. We have been waiting for a while and, therefore, my term of office was extended beyond March when I was elected in 2009 to date because we do not have a Deputy Chairperson, as advised by the Opposition. We are still waiting and when that is done I can revert to Deputy Chairperson and the Opposition person will become Chairperson for the next year. So Mr. Speaker, I want to commend this report to you and to ask the House to adopt a Report. [Applause]

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion before the House recommending the adoption of the Fifth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services. I will deal with a couple of matters which, I believe, should be touched on if only because they were referred to by the Chairperson in her presentation.

The attendance at Committee meetings: It seems to be a recent trend. Maybe it is a good thing to identify attendances, meeting by meeting. What I can say in short measure is that all the persons who are Members of this Committee nominated by the People's National Congress Reform 1 Guyana attended, in all of the case, no less than seventy per cent of the meetings, and by any measure of participation I do not think that could be deemed to be unreasonable or not in keeping with adequate attendance. We may note, very strikingly, that the Chairperson of the Committee has attended every single meeting, but we should not be too carried away with that statistics, because the fact of the matter is that if the Chairperson cannot attend the meeting she calls it off. So there will be no record. [Ms. Teixeira: There is no Deputy Chairperson] Is this contentious? All I am saying is that we should not get too carry away with that fact of one hundred per cent attendance because when the Chairperson is not available for holding a meeting she calls the meeting off. So meeting is only held when the Chairperson is available. That is the only point I am making, Sir.

With regards to the Mid-Year Financial Reports of the Hon. Minister of Finance, Sir, I have expressed this view in the Committee, and still hold the view as I speak, that given the timing with which the Reports are done and the timing with which they reach the Committee that no very useful function is performed by the Committee to undertake a review of those Reports. It would be much more meaningful, in my respectful view, were there to be an opportunity for a debate of the Report in the National Assembly at the time it is presented. That remains the

respectful view of the People's National Congress Reform – One Guyana. We did subscribe to the view that in realistic terms it may be better to allow for more time for the preparation and the presentation of the Mid-Year Reports to the National Assembly. We do not walk away from the support of that recommendation. We have to be realistic and, in fact, I have always wondered why nobody thought to make such a proposal. We believe that it is more practical and achievable timeframe, and so we want it to be known that we publicly adhere to that position.

Sir, the Hon. Chairperson of the Committee made a rather fulsome, an excellent, I dear say, presentation on the National Insurance Scheme issues. I only have the few things which I would like to say. I will deal with that first before I come to the two main areas which I would like to address in terms of the Report which is before the National Assembly.

The fact of pre-existing conditions prior to the date of retirement not being allowed for the purposes of treatment – NIS meeting the cost of treatment thereof – is something that we sincerely believe needs to be kept under review and we note, slightly variant, with what the Hon. Chairperson said that this matter was settled in the United States of America by recent health care reform legislation which determined that no one shall be denied insurance on the basis of pre-existing conditions. There was one aspect of the NIS which I thought we had discussed, which I did not hear mentioned of, and which I would like to use this opportunity, Sir, to mention, and that is the recent policy change by the NIS in which it does not allow pensioners to fill their prescriptions up front and have it to pick up the tab in relation to those prescriptions but has been requiring pensioners to finance the purchase of their prescriptions, pay for them up front, and subsequently to claim reimbursement of the moneys they have expended.

We, Members on both sides of the Committee, have received numerous complaints from poor pensioners, who having outlay the sums of money, have great difficulty in recouping same but very soon requires another prescription and once again have to find the money up front. Since, in any case, it is not a dis-acknowledgment of payment but simply a timing of the payment, I believe that we should solve this problem in the interest of the convenience of the poor pensioner who has a torrid time getting around, and then to be going once and twice, and, perhaps, many more times to obtain a reimbursement which may be long, if ever in coming. So I believe that that is a matter which needs to be highlighted, which needs to be kept under review and the NIS

should, as soon as possible we recommend, seek to revert to the position that existed prior to the policy change.

I noted that the Hon. Chairperson of the Committee in presenting the Report pointed out that we had made the policy. I just want to say that the Committee has no authority to make any policy. What the Committee did was to make a recommendation. I simply want to correct that, what may have been an unintentional misstatement, Sir.

Now, I wish to speak more substantively, Sir, on the issue of GuySuCo and subsequently on the issue of CLICO. As regards GuySuCo, the first observation I wish to make is that certainly we on the PNCR side feel stymied in the approach been taken by the Minister that we can only communicate on matters having to do with GuySuCo through him. We believe that is against both the spirit and the letter of the intention of the creation of these Sectoral Committees. But he is so insistent. Now, I feel obliged to return to the resolution that brought us into being - resolution no. 19 of this August body. It says, at 3 thereof, that, "The Committees shall, in the discharge of their scrutinising role, in examine all policies and administrations, for each sector..." Policies, Sir, are undoubtedly the remit of the Minister and no one can deny him his right to be the relevant person to address matters pertaining to policy. However, if one wants to deal with matters of administration, I would respectfully suggest that it is wholly unnecessary, simple over-bureaucratic to have the hand of the Minister in the process of seeking to get information with respect to the administration of an organisation. Why cannot we, if we require production statistics for a particular period, get that as a matter of course? We fail to appreciate the need for the involvement of the Minister in every conceivable item of information that we may need from GuySuCo and we want to say that we maintain this position.

The Public Accounts Committee, which has a very long history of existence, is a Committee which calls only officials. We do not have to seek the permission of the Minister to call officials here and, in fact, the same law that is available to the Public Accounts Committee, under the Evidence Act, which allows us to summon officials, I believe could be used to summon officials of GuySuCo. We do not want to go on a collision course with anybody. I, simply, am pointing out the fact, Sir, which even looks at strictly, technically, we should be able to upon officialdom for a lot of the information that we may require to do our work.

I, therefore, want to reiterate the position of the People's National Congress Reform – One Guyana that we are strongly wedded to the view that we do not need to go through Ministers – in this case, because it is GuySuCo, it is Minister of Agriculture - for every item. We accept that in matters of policy, we must. But in matters of administration and simply information, there is no need to have their direct involvement, because at the end of the day, even if we make a request to an official in GuySuCo, the Minister can have mechanisms in place which require his officials to consult with him before releasing information of a particular type or of a particular category. But that then becomes an internal mechanism, not one that is held out to the public as a required procedure for the involvement of the Minister. I say, Sir, that is too heavy-handed of politics where it ought not to be.

Sir, I now want to turn to the question of the Turnaround Plan. First of all I want to say this: We had very good, good in the sense of being frank and open, conversation with the Minister and his team when they visited the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services to talk about GuySuCo. At last, we were able to get the Turnaround Plan which, in fact, we know is a document in limited circulation and we respected the confidentiality with which it ought to be treated and have treated it as such.

Now, I want to, however, turn to...

Mr. Speaker: Before you move on Mr. Murray, we are now at the time where we should suspend and this is the last item on the agenda. We have one more speaker and then Ms. Teixeira will have to respond. Is it the view of Members that we should continue until we end or we should break now?

Mr. Persaud: Let us continue.

Mr. Speaker: It is to continue. That is the consensus.

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much. The GuySuCo Turnaround Plan... Just before I go there I want to, in fact, simple make passing reference to one matter which is stated in our Report. I think it is at page 8, which I just want us to note and maybe somebody will respond. At page 8 of our Report, we listed at paragraph 29 some of the areas of concerns highlighted by the Members of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Economic Services during their engagement with

GuySuCo. One of which was the lost by Guyana of access to €6 million which was money that was, in fact, made available to the Government to enable it to undertake programmes aimed at diversification within the industry. We did not get access to this money Sir, for the simple reason as far as we are aware, and if there is another reason we would like to be told, that we did not make the deadline by which the information was to have been submitted. I understand that there is some disputation over this matter and we stand ready to be enlightened. But simply that note whatever the enlightenment we may receive today, or subsequently, the fact is that Guyana lost €6 million which was available to it because of failure on its part – our part, Guyana’s part – to have done what it suppose to do.

The other thing that I wish to make reference to, Sir, is that during our engagement with the Hon. Minister and his team he insisted at every opportunity he got to inform us that there is not going to be any employment reduction in this industry. Now, that is not borne out by the statistics which have been used in the Turnaround Plan. In fact, the objective situation is that whereas in 1992 this industry employed more than 20,000 persons. In the report itself, by 2008, that number was 18,541. Now, it is just over 14,000 and by 2015, the number is projected to be reduced to 12,600. I do not know how that can be dressed up to prove to me that that means there is no reduction in employment. I do not know what logic will be used. I heard the saying that a lot of this comes about because of attrition. That is the standard response – “comes about because of attrition.”

Now, let me tell you – in an appendix 4 of this document – what my reading is of the situation. While we could hold that out... This arose when we visited the Skeldon Sugar Factory, and without an attempt to be immodest, I was the person who raised this matter, but it is mentioned in the Report “a member of the delegation” posited, that possibly:

“GuySuCo’s management handling of wage negotiations, annual production incentive arrangements, handing over of medical services outside of the industry can all be contributory factors that created disincentives for the workers to remain in the industry”

Because, as you see Sir, the reality is that the industry... and I want to say this up front: I have absolutely no problem with mechanisation but I do not think that we must, while we are arguing

vociferously for mechanisation and we are implementing it, try to say that it will have no effect on employment. I mean we are not talking to little children because when we look at the amount of cane that a mechanical harvester would mow in a day it would be many sugar cane workers over a protracted period will have to do that. So how could one say that there would not be a negative impact on employment?

The one among these things, that to my mind is really a laughable one when GuySuCo officials tried to make the point in defence of what they are doing, is this issue of handing over of medical services. The argument has been made to us that that the State has been providing increasingly high qualities of care for the nation as a whole and there is absolutely no reason why GuySuCo workers should not be integrated into the State's system and be provided for. But that really is misleading us on the point. It was never intended that GuySuCo's medical services to its employees was to replace or be an adjunct to what the State was doing or a replication of what the State was doing. GuySuCo had a vested interest in ensuring its workers for things which were small and minor could be adequately and quickly repaired to get back to the job. That basically was the whole intention of having this programme managed and operated by GuySuCo.

The truth is that they saw this as a cost factor which is now going to be a possible impediment to GuySuCo being profitable. So let us remove this, but we are not looking at the consequences for the worker, because now that worker is sent off to join a queue at some place other than his workplace where he would have his medical facility. He has to go and join a queue there. We do not know if he will get look after today or he will have to go back tomorrow; he loses his time and his job; he is not going to be paid by GuySuCo. Now, the fact of the matter is, Sir, hat does not think this is as simple as it looks. So when we are saying that there is not going to be reduced employment and attrition is going to take care of it, there may be subtle things which are at play here which are a disincentive to worker commitment to the industry and which indeed will act as a push to them leaving. So I do not think we should take this purely on the surface and adopt it.

Lastly, on this particular matter, Sir, I wish to speak about the visit to the Skeldon Factory. I wish to speak on it because I did make some comments on that visit immediately after the visit was done. One of the things I had said was that, and which I continue to hold to, I was very impressed with this Factory. It is a high technology factory. It clearly has a good crop of

committed workers and it has the potential, all things being equal, to make a major contribution to the development of our country. I said that then and I maintain it now. I also said, Sir, then and I maintain it now that the level of frankness with which the employees spoke about the problems which the factory was experiencing was refreshing and to me pointed to the need to why politicians should stay far from economic projects if one wants to get integrity in information that is given to one. They pointed out, quite honestly, what the problems were, but not only did they do that, they explained what innovations they were adopting to cope with those problems. We know that one of the problems which continues to exist - notwithstanding what is being said in some corner over there - is that the molasses output is disproportionate compared with the sugar output and there is still a lot of work to be done to minimise the amount of molasses being produced and increase, significantly, the amount of sugar being produced. That is a real problem which is being faced. There are still problems there. I do not want to be diverted but I just thought I should mention that to my friend as I go.

4.13 p.m.

The third thing which I said, which is equally relevant today, is that I was very disappointed with the ethnic make-up of the employment in that factory. 99.9% of the employees were of one particular ethnic group. My comments on that occupation were that this belies the image the Government seeks to create in forums, in Guyana and abroad, about inclusivity. Here is an industry, a factory, started from scratch by this Government. It is not a case that it inherited a particular orientation and, therefore, had no option in the short-term but to have received it. The point is that it initiated this project. I continue to maintain, that notwithstanding all the other good things, this is something that has to be a microcosm of the bigger Guyana. I said so then, but the Government Information Agency (GINA) press which was present only took the part about my speaking about the contribution that the factory could make, which I have no problem with. I thought I should complete the whole picture by saying for myself, in this National Assembly, what I said on that occasion because that continues to be a major concern.

Before I take my seat, I want to turn to this matter of CLICO. I want to take as my starting point..., because the Hon. Chairperson of the Committee, when she made her presentation of the Report, said, in respect of CLICO, that we have to await the conclusion of the matters before the Court before we could proceed in the Committee with what we were tasked to do. I respectfully

want to suggest that the resolution that this National Assembly passed is about much more than the Court matters. This resolution which I have in my hand, resolution no. 82, talks about the money - \$1.5 billion; talks about \$5.19 billion, NIS money being invested; and talks about the assurance by the President of Guyana that the Government of Guyana would take steps to protect pensioners and policyholders of CLICO. The context of this resolution is that the National Assembly endorses this statement by the Government guaranteeing the savings, pensions, investments and insurances of all investors, depositors, policyholders and contributors of CLICO, and we are asked to monitor the developments at CLICO to keep the National Assembly updated on developments.

Certainly, for us, who represented the PNCR-1G in the Committee, this was not simply a matter of what was before the Court. This was a question of how do we activate a public commitment given by the President and repeated by the Minister in this National Assembly about guaranteeing payments to certain depositors of their investments in CLICO. I say that we, in the Committee, would have had a right to ask for the Minister of Finance to come and brief us on what was happening in this regard. The statement having been made, we having passed a resolution on this matter, we heard nothing else. What did we do, Sir, which I believe was wholly proper. On the 16th June, 2009, after the Assembly passed this resolution in March 2009, the Chairperson of our Committee, the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, on behalf of the Committee, wrote the Hon. Minister of Finance quoting the various WHEREAS clauses, some of which I referred to, reminding of the President's commitment. We asked for the Hon. Minister to come before the Committee and we even said, "The Committee is prepared, knowing of your busy schedule, to facilitate your appearance with a date and time convenient to you. Thanking you, in anticipation, of your kind cooperation." This was written on 16th June, 2009. We heard nothing. We heard nothing from the Hon. Minister. So on the 4th November, 2009, at the direction of the Committee, the Chairperson wrote again, repeating the invitation to appear because we are mandated by a resolution of the National Assembly. To date, we have not had the courtesy of an acknowledgement of this letter, much more an identification of a date by which the Hon. Minister would appear.

I say that if this is the way in which the Committee is going to be treated, if this is an example of what is going to take place, then with the grandest of schemes about the potential of the

Committees to make a significant contribution...I agree with the Hon. Chairperson that there is great scope and we have done meaningful work. I dare say that in our engagements we have had a lot of crosstalk and even have been strenuously opposing each other, but all in the interest of moving forward and making an advance in the work of the Committee. I think these Committees, in particular, I know of this one because I am it, have the potential to achieve great things, but they have to be shown the courtesy and the respect which they deserve.

Mr. Speaker: Your time is up Hon. Member.

Mr. Murray: Sir, I have nothing further to say, except to say thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Since I became a Member of this Committee, I think it was in December, 2006, I must say, on my own behalf, that I thoroughly enjoy working in this Committee. I think Members on both sides have the necessary skills to complement one another to pursue the objectives of this Committee. I serve also on the Public Accounts Committee and I have a similar experience on that Committee. I believe that these two Committees are well placed, and I want to join with the Hon. Chairperson in supporting her position that the work of these Committees can enhance the work of this country, itself.

On the visit to Skeldon Sugar Factory, we did not only observe the work of the factory itself, but on our way up we also saw evidence of other economic activities in the Region, one pertaining, in particular, to the question which was raised by the Hon. Member Mr. Franklin, which had to do with drying floors, and where we saw a number of farmers, rice farmers that is, who were using these floors to dry their paddy. This is also a very good sign of the economic activities which are taking place in the country. It is essential, I think, my own personal view, that we have a Parliament Sectoral Committee which looks at these major economic activities which are taken place.

I fully support the Committee's Fifth Periodic Report and the recommendations enshrined in it. I want to express my personal gratitude, thanks and appreciation for the guidance provided by senior Members of the Committee, the Chairpersons in particular, for the way the meetings were conducted, and the environment, itself, which prevailed in those meetings.

On that visit to Skeldon Sugar Factory, a number of issues were raised and I want to, in particular, make mention of one of the points raised by Mr. Murray which had to do with the composition of the workforce at the Skeldon Sugar Factory and him quoting a “99.9%”. I have not reached the stage where I have to wear spectacles and I was rather thinking whether we were on the same visit, because I did not see a composition of one particular ethnic group comprising 99.9% of the workforce of the Skeldon Sugar Factory. It might be instrumental for us to actually get the information as it relates to the workforce at Skeldon Sugar Factory, lest we be misguided by the observation in the subjective. That information should be shared, not only with the National Assembly, but also with the country at large, because one would fully well appreciate that in different sectors of the economy, in different parts of the country, there will be the composition of the workforce and, by extension, the composition of the population, itself, not being reflective of the overall general composition of the country. We can easily identify different areas. The farming sector has traditionally been overwhelmingly of one ethnic group. We need to do proper analysis and research before we seek to make such a statement which, in my opinion, is very irresponsible of a senior Member of the Opposition to say, without conducting any study at all, that 99.9% of the factory comprises one ethnic group.

There is also the issue of workforce. I think the Hon. Member, Mr. Murray, conveniently quoted sections of appendix 4. I also want to, in addressing the issue raised, refer to appendix 4 of the Report, page 4 and in particular chapters 9, 10 and 11. I will not quote, because of the time factor, the complete paragraph but just to point out the General Manager, in chapter 9, said that “the mechanisation will have to be accelerated because of the difficulty with acquiring adequate labour force.” Then a Member of our team asked, “Will the labour force suffer because of mechanisation?” In chapter 10, the General Manager explained that, “We have been trying to get workers to work on these factories and we have not been successful.” In chapter 11, he said, “Out of the registered list of 1,097 harvesters only 500 report for work daily and this is an unacceptable position if we need to have the factory supply 8,400 tons of cane per a day.”

We can talk about all things, whether it is reduced servicing being provided, as the Hon. Member Mr. Murray pointed out, but we also have to take into consideration that over the past one and a half decades we have seen substantial investment by this administration in the area of education in particular, in technical training, and in general *upliftment* of the workforce. While some of us

envy the earnings of a sugar worker per a day, none of us want to leave our beds at 3 a.m., raining or not, to get down to the work ground and engage in hard physical labour, in sometimes adverse conditions, to cut canes, then load them on our heads and dump them in a punt. As far as we go towards educating, equipping and training the general workforce of this country, one will find people generally expressing the desire to move away from these tedious kinds of operations. It is not a situation whereby people are not turning out to cut cane because they do not have alternative employment. I wish to say that it is an indication of the general workforce of this country pursuing high end jobs. That is why GuySuCo, as an entity, if it has to survive, also has to take that into consideration, become more mechanised and utilise existing labour force, and, if I say, to also bring in more people and to position them in high end jobs. I do not think what the Member said is truly reflective of the position on the station, itself. I just wanted to make those couple of points, and to close my presentation by saying that I wholeheartedly support the adoption of this Report by the general Assembly and encourage all my colleagues to do the same. Thank you Sir. [Applause]

Ms. Teixeira (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, for responding to a number of issues raised by Mr. Murray. There were a number of issues raised by the Hon. Member which require... **[Inaudible]**. Some of those were dealt with in the Committee and there were decisions made not to raise these issues. The issue that Mr. Murray raised about ethnicity..., and I wish to add to what the Hon. Member said. After the Skeldon Sugar Factory visit, Mr. Murray, in a wrapped up meeting with GuySuCo, felt that there should be greater sensitive to the issue of ethnic balance in the estate. It came back to the Committee and it had a discussion on this issue. Then the Committee said - and Members participated in the discussion - that one, it is a demographics factor. If a factory is in Corentyne, most likely the majority of the workforce will be of one ethnic group; if it is in Linden, it is a majority of one ethnic group; if it is in Rupununi, it is another ethnic group. Therefore, this was a rather obtuse argument.

The second issue had to deal with the fact that the Opposition side was only looking at GuySuCo when the Committee had been looking at the NIS. Therefore, why was there not a concern about the ethnic imbalance in the NIS. The Committee discussed this issue. It is not that it swept it under the carpet and pretended that it did not exist. It is not that we ignored what Mr. Murray

said, but we discussed it. We said, “This issue of just looking at this pictorially at the couple people you may or may not see can be misinforming and, therefore, the Committee will not include this issue in its Report.” [A Member: I was not at that meeting.] No. You were not at the meeting, but your representatives defended you well and we came to an agreement with your other Members. Your other Members conceded to this issue. My problem, Mr. Speaker, is not when Members on one side do not talk to each other. I can say to you and this House that I talk to the Members on my side. We coordinate and share information so that we know what we are doing. The issue, I just want to add, is where Mr. Murray had really asked, in the Committee: What is the ethnic balance in GuySuCo? How many of one as against another group? He could have asked factually. We could have called back GuySuCo and said, “please give us that information.” One hundred and ninety persons work at the factory, of which seventy are Afro-Guyanese and the rest are of another ethnic group. I do not know where Mr. Murray got this 99.9%. Had Mr. Murray raised the issue and really wanted to know facts rather than scoring political points...

The second issue has to do with the number of people and the issue of the numbers decreasing with GuySuCo. The Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj answered Mr. Murray very well in terms of the whole discussion, both at Skeldon and in the Committee meeting, about the issue of labour, i.e. consequences of the labour force in what were some of the changes. And secondly, that in fact, what GuySuCo said to us was that it was suffering from a labour shortage for the very reasons that Mr. Seeraj pointed out. The fact that, maybe, someone like me had those comments to make may not have been persuasive to the Hon. Member because he sees everything I say, maybe, tainted and, therefore, refuse to give me the credit of having a brain. Paragraphs 9, 10 and 11 speak to the issue that the Skeldon Sugar Factory was suffering from a labour shortage. In fact - just for those who are listening - he said, “that of a registered list of 1,097 harvesters only about 500 of them report for work daily, and with the factory running at full capacity in excess of 3,000 harvesters would be needed to supply the factory with 8,400 tons of cane per a day.” He, the General Manager of GuySuCo, then accounted that this amount of harvesters were not available if one took in all the Berbice estates. There were not 3,000 workers in all the Berbice estates. Again the figures for GuySuCo, as far as I know, are 19 000 employees in the Corporation, not all, of course, are harvesters. But the employment of the last crop would have been around 19,000. I am not quite sure what is going on with the figures which Mr. Murray was speaking

about. [Mr. Murray: You did not take them from your document.] Yes. There are figures for Skeldon Sugar Factory and for the whole Corporation.

We did also ask the Corporation, subsequently, for the data on gender employment. Mr. Murray raised ethnic and I am raising gender. It was one of the few Corporations, private or public, which showed major increase in female enrolment in employment in the last year over males being employed in technical and administrative areas. So the intake of women at a high level and being highly qualified was something of note for GuySuCo.

The issue which was raised which has to do with CLICO, again, let me just sum up what were some of the discussions in the Committee. The Government side in the Committee reaffirmed the commitment of the President that was gaping in this House and other places. Also I want to say in this House what was the issue which the President did speak about, because he was referred to in Mr. Murray's speech. It was that the President continues to give his commitment and awaits the final resolution on the matters concerning CLICO which are all still *sub judice*. We understand that a public statement was made by the Hon. Chief Justice who has indicated that he is ready with the ruling on the original petition by the Commission of Insurance, but he has to wait the resolution of what are other frivolous and vexatious matters which were subsequently made on behalf of CLICO. That is why the Committee, in its Report, says that, "We are bound to await the Court's ruling and that we commit ourselves to this House to bring a report and to fulfil our assignment as done by the resolution."

My friend, on the other side, Mr. Murray, I enjoy him being a Member of my Committee. When he talked about the prerogative of the Chairperson... It is the prerogative of the Chairperson! If the Chairperson is not available, there is no meeting. However, there is the Deputy Chairperson. Unfortunately, since Mr. Vieira's departure, the Opposition has not put any Deputy Chairperson. I am willing to hand over. It has been months now, if the Minutes of the Committee meetings is checked. For Mr. Murray, I agree with his little snipe that it is the prerogative of my Chair. Yes, it is. When he is the Deputy Chairperson, he will know that it will be at his prerogative. Mr. Murray is trying to score a few points here today. Well let him continue to try.

An important point was raised by Mr. Murray which needs to be answered and was not in the Report, but it is a concern that keeps coming up with the Opposition and keeps being answered,

but we may have to ask the Speaker to give a ruling on it because the Government's opinion and the Opposition's opinion are diametrical opposite. This is the issue of going to the Ministers. The Government's side...and this as I have said was not in the Report, and I am answering Mr. Murray, because he raised it on the floor, that Standing Order 86 (5) says:

“Sectoral Committees shall have the authority to:

(b) request the Minister assigned responsibility for the sector to submit written or oral information, including government documents and records about any specific area of government policy and administration;”

What are the Sectoral Committees about? They are about accountability of Government in terms of transparency, accountability, policies, performances, etc. Who is Government? The Government has to be the Members of the House and those who are Ministers are more accountable than the backbenches like me, but we all have something that is called solidarity. That is the position which the Opposition has as well. But the ministerial responsibility in all Parliaments - I challenge you - is to be accountable for the Government. It is not a head of a department, not the head of an agency, but it is a Minister. The Sectoral Committees are designed so that the Ministers can come before them. So whether they have ten corporations underneath them or just a Ministry and several things, it is the Ministers who answer the Sectoral Committee - not the agencies. It is not as the Public Accounts Committee where the Regional Executive Officers and the Permanent Secretary (PS), as Chief Accounting Officers, report to that Committee.

4.43 p.m.

In this case, the Sectoral Committees can only go through the Minister as the political authority of the sector for which he/she is responsible. If Members of the other side do not like the idea and do not agree with it, then we may have to ask the Speaker for a ruling on this at some point in the future.

I will caution my friend, Mr. Murray to take some time to look at other Parliaments in the Commonwealth which have similar such Committees although they may not be called Sectoral Committees. However, they oversight Government in its policies and performances and make it

very clear that they can only go through a Minister. Check the British Parliament; I challenge you to check the House of Commons- it is there. More so, the British Parliament and Cabinet go so far that they have something called a code for all civil servants appearing before any Parliamentary Committee. Read it well.

Firstly, it says that a civil servant being called before a Parliamentary Committee can only do so through the Minister. Secondly, it is only with the approval of the Minister. Go to the website and check on the United Kingdom's Parliament. We hold the UK's Parliament as some great eon that we are all fighting to reach in terms of Parliamentary democracy. However, the British Parliament, the British Cabinet and the American system is the same. Once they can call all sorts of people, do not ever fool yourselves, those who are in public service are accountable through the Minister. Worse yet, in some cases, some take oaths that swear them to be able to account and to be loyal to the Government of the day. In fact, there are areas of the public service and not only in Guyana but all over the world where there are oaths and instruments that make people be circumspect in how they deal with issues.

As Mr. Murray said, it is an issue that we have a very strong difference on. My position is always that the Ministers are accountable and that they should come before the Committee. If we want deal with any particular issue, the Minister calls the department head, agency and corporations under his/her purview. We cannot call GuySuCo to come before us alone. It has to be the Minister.

Today, I believe that Mr. Murray used the opportunity to champion his cause. I think it is an interesting debate and one which I am certain I am going to win because I have the precedence of other Parliaments, not because of me.

Mr. Speaker, on the National Insurance Scheme issue, maybe Mr. Murray missed my point. If he checks paragraph 51, pages 14-17 in the Report, the NIS issue is raised there. It has to do with pre-existing conditions and the reimbursement issue. However, when we came to our conclusions in the Committee, maybe we missed Mr. Murray's presence and, therefore, no one made a recommendation on how to address this issue.

This is why I believe that the attendance of Members in Committees is critical. Mr. Murray was very faithful to the Committee and when he could not make it, he was always polite and let

people know. Normally it was because of a court case and so please note that I am not criticising Mr. Murray for attendance. When people are not present, someone else has to pick up the cudgel. It cannot be Mr. Murray being the main spokesperson for the Opposition. He has other soldiers around him.

Mr. Speaker, we table this and we ask in the Motion that the recommendations and the consideration of the Report go to the Government, also, for its attention. [Applause]

Question put, and agreed to.

Motion is carried

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: That brings us to the end of our business for today.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House stand adjourned until 22nd July, 2010.

Adjourned accordingly at 4.48 p.m.