

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2018) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

101ST Sitting

Monday, 3RD December, 2018

Assembly convened at 10.04 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave to Member

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted to the Hon. Raphael Trotman from 3rd December, 2018 to 6th December, 2018.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2019 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2019

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2019 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2018-11-26.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2019, of a total sum of two hundred and seventy seven billion, four hundred and thirty one million, nine hundred and sixty eight thousand dollars (**\$277,431,968,000**), **excluding twenty three billion, two hundred and eighty seven million, and forty three thousand dollars (\$23,287,043,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.”
[Minister of Finance]

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the debate on the budget speech for 2019. Before I call on the first speaker for today, I would remind Members of the request that I made at the end of our sitting before the recess, and which I now repeat, that Members can differ without being less than polite, that Members can express themselves in whatever way they wish, bearing in mind always that we work within rules. When Members indulge their penchant to heckle – I understand that that is the word - Members must bear in mind that whatever they do ought not to unduly interfere with the Speaker’s conduct of the business of this House.

Mr. Ali: First of all, Mr. Speaker, please allow me to thank the Hon. Minister and the staff of the Ministry of Finance for their work in bringing Budget 2019 to the National Assembly.

If I am to describe the close to five hours spent by the Hon. Minister of Finance, one song comes to mind and that song is a Beres Hammond's song, "*Sweet Lies*". It is no secret that this budget was presented at a time when the coalition was faced with a reality check of more than 63% of the Guyanese population expressed no confidence in the Government and the way that Guyana is being governed. A national budget should outline the fiscal strategies that Government intends to implement to address the existing economic and social problems, including the economic decay, unemployment and poverty facing our Guyanese people. The budget should be able to present strategies that would take our country forward, Budget 2019 fails badly in terms of offering solutions.

Budget 2019, as prepared by the Minister, is riddled with unrealistic and questionable forecasts, swamped with wasteful spending and fiscal measures that will erode the well-being of our people since it takes away more from the people in the form of taxes than it gives by way of relief. It contains inadequate measures to rescue our ailing economy and continues to be grounded in the elusive and highly classified "Green State Strategy" that is best suited for the fiction section of bookstores and libraries, rather than this august House that is responsible for dealing with the people's business, which is serious business.

We expected the Minister to exercise due care when generating figures and statistics, having numbers which are realistic and consistent with the budget speech. We do not expect the Minister to assume the role of an illusionist when gathering the forecasts. We do not expect the Minister to present forecasts that are flawed that they glaringly contradict his speech, rather than support it. In the Budget 2019, the only conclusion that can draw in the forecast is that they are consistently inconsistent with the budget speech. We heard of measures to reduce taxes, but tax revenue in 2019 is expected to go to \$21.5 billion, higher than the estimate for 2018 and \$93.6 billion than the actual tax revenue for 2014.

Our balance of payments accounts reported by the Bank of Guyana revealed deficits of \$11.2 billion for 2016 and \$14.6 billion for 2017. The revised balance of payments, by the Minister, the deficit is projected to be more than two times the forecast at 200 % mistake by the Hon. Minister of Finance. Based on the examples, the Hon. Minister has a proclivity of providing this honourable House with inflated estimates. The inflated estimates are intended to create the imaginary "good life" that Guyanese have been waiting for three and a half years. I am convinced

that the inflated estimates are intended to conceal the difficulties faced by the ailing sectors that were punished with high taxes.

Please allow me to present some hard facts that are conveniently ignored by the Hon. Minister of Finance. According to the official statistics of the Bank of Guyana, sugar production for 2017 was approximately 57 percent, less than the level reported for 2014. Export revenue from sugar was US\$39.5 million or \$8.3 billion, it was less than the level reported for 2014. The export revenue for rice and bauxite also contracted by US\$48.5 million or \$10.2 billion and US\$17.6 million, or \$3.7 billion, respectively when compared 2014 and 2017. Timber production fell by 30.9 % between 2014 and 2017, causing the export revenue from timber products to reduce by US \$20.2 million or Guy\$4.2 billion. Meanwhile, diamond production contracted by 47.9% thereby causing the export revenue to decline. These are the realities of the economy that the Hon. Minister of Finance skilfully manoeuvre on double speech.

Due to the underperformance of the major traditional sector since 2015, Guyana, by the end of 2018, is projected to lose in excess of US\$463 million in foreign exchange. In 2018, alone, more than US\$120 million has been lost due to severe underperformance of sugar, rice and forestry sector. In 2019, total export of these four major sectors are expected to come in at US\$84.5 million less than compared to 2014. What is the impact of this? Net foreign reserve is expected to reduce to US\$388 million by the end of 2018, US\$260 million, or 40% less than what this Government inherited in 2014.

Let us look at the international assessment on past performance. Let us look at the various budgets and let us examine what has been the reality. Budget speech 2016, the Minister said that the Government will review and expand out physical infrastructure. What happened? According to the *International Assessment and the Global Competitiveness Report*, this is what it had to say: “the overall quality of infrastructure in Guyana has deteriorated from a global position of 85 in 2018 to 94 in 2016.” After the announcement of this policy, we had a decline from 84 to 94. The Hon. Minister of Finance said that they will strengthen governance, and this will remain on the front burner. What is the reality according to the international report? In 2016, Guyana was ranked 119 out of 140 countries in the world for irregular payments and bribes.

Interestingly, in 2014, Guyana was able to improve its global position by ten when compared to

2012. Here, again, the Hon. Minister had good governance on the front burner and we have declined when it comes to payment of bribes and corruption, and this is the clean Government.

In 2016, the country has slipped by two positions globally when compared to 2014 for wastefulness of Government's spending. Under the People Progressive Party (PPP) Government, in 2014, the country improved its position globally by 14 when compared to 2012.

10.19 a.m.

The Minister said that several initiatives will be advanced within each level of the education sector. In 2016, the Minister allocated \$40.3 billion to the education sector. What is the reality? The country slipped by five positions in 2016 when compared to 2014, with respect to the quality of the education system.

Assessments based on the 2017 global human index. The Minister said in his speech that over 6,000 jobs will be created in various sectors, including 1,327 in agriculture, 1,366 in energy, 1,500 in information and communications technology (ICT) and 1,483 in tourism. What is the reality? According to international assessment, between 2016 and 2017, Guyana slipped by more than four positions in unemployment rate for age group 25 to 54, seven positions, from 55 to 64, and nine positions for the employment of youths. We now have 32,000 persons unemployed in this country and the Government claps itself on doing an excellent job in job creation.

The Government said that it would prioritise the delivery of education across all levels which is integral to the achievement of a diversified and green economy. What is the reality? Between 2015 and 2017, the country's global ranking fell by another seven positions, in relation to the quality of primary education of children aged 0 to 15. In 2017, the country slipped by eight positions in its global ranking, with respect to the quality of education service provided for children 15 and 24. With respect to youth literacy, the country fell in its global position by five positions. This is the reality. This is the progress under this Government, and yet they can applaud themselves.

Let us look at the targets set by the Hon. Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance said there will be growth of the manufacturing sector. What is the reality? Loans and advances to the manufacturing sector is projected to contract by \$23.6 billion. The Government failed. What is another target? Let us go through the targets. Balance of payments deficit in 2018, this is what the

Minister said, that balance of payments deficit in 2018 is expected to increase by 49% or US\$26 billion to US\$79.7 million. What is the reality? Balance of payments deficit is now projected to increase not by US\$26 million. Balance of payments is now projected to increase by US\$180 million, a 239% error by the Minister of Finance in forecasting. This is the reality.

The Minister said that current account deficit is expected to increase by 24% to US\$57 million. What is the reality? Current account deficit is projected to increase, not by US\$57 million, but by US\$463 million. The Minister said that the Government of Guyana is to use US\$6.5 million to fund the 2018 balance of payments - US\$6.5 million, he said. In reality, the Minister announced that he will be using US\$104 million from the reserve. This is the reality; this is what we are faced with.

We have fiscal deficit that is now projected at \$45.3 billion. Guess what is going on for the ordinary man. Prices for food, clothing, medical and personal care are expected to increase by 4.6%, 4.3% and 4%. What is the percentage increase for public servants on medical care, personal care, food and clothing? They are expected to find another 14% out of their earnings to meet these basic expenditures. This is the reality that we are faced with. Non-performing loans have increased by more than \$11 billion, 58% more than what it was in 2014.

What is happening in the commercial banks? On an average, return on equity for the six major commercial banks has declined from 22.3% in 2014 to 3.5% in 2018. This is the reality. These are the facts when it comes to the performance of our economy.

When we come to the whole issue of corruption, look at the Auditor General's report. Our country is now riddled with overpayment and an accounting system that has missing vouchers, missing documents, breach of procurement laws and guidelines and massive contract splitting.

Let me return to this issue here. Then we have the waste in the budget, national and other events. Since this Government came to office, we have spent \$4.7 billion, dietary - \$18.4 billion, refreshment and meals, local travel, subsidies and personal security - \$35 billion. This is where the money is being spent. Hear about the waste. For a matter of fact, we are spending 2.6 times more on dietary than we spend on the maintenance of roads, bridges, drainage, irrigation and sea and river defences.

Do you want to hear the mother of all corruption? According to the Public Procurement Commission, this Government expended \$150 million on a 58-page feasibility study that was awarded to a handpicked contractor in clear breach of the procurement laws. Guess what: After spending \$150 million on this feasibility study, the Government is now saying that we will discard it; it is not needed. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I did a research, and this is the most expensive feasibility study in the world. Listen to this: this feasibility study cost us \$2.5 million per page. This Government speaks about corruption. This Government has the audacity to speak about corruption. *[Interruption from Members of the Government.]* It is hurting them hard. This corruption has taken so much root in this Government that even the schoolchildren they are robbing now. Corruption in textbooks, corruption at book distribution, corruption in the feeding programme for poor children, and you are talking about corruption. In one region, alone, the Government cannot account for more than \$138 million in fuel. This is the Government that speaks about corruption and mismanagement.

Let us now go to another issue. Where is the money going? Where is the 2019 money going? Central Government expenditure is projected to increase by \$30 billion in 2019. Guess what: When you check the numbers, \$16.5 billion or 55% is going to the following category of expenditure. Field material - \$709 million more. Do you know what the field material is? It is umbrella, long boots and raincoats for the Ministers and these people. Print and non-print, 53% increase – \$614 million, and that includes the purchase of magazines, and you are talking about law books. Fuel and lubricant, 25% increase. Rental of building, increased by 101% since 2014. Now, in 2019, we are going to spend \$828 million. Here is where the money is going: local travel and subsistence, 71% increase. Guess what the local travel and subsistence is. It is airfare, hotels and meals. Other transport, 60% increase. Guess what the other transport is. It is chartered flights. Telephone charges is projected to increase by 51%. The security, they are very afraid of themselves. the Government of the people is going to spend another \$278 million on personal security. This is where the money is going.

What do we draw from this? Recurrent expenditure is going to go up to \$19 billion or 64%. 55% or \$16.5 billion of the \$30 billion is going nowhere but in wastage.

Let us now turn to the combined increase in the 15 items. Since 2014 to 2019, the items I just called had whopping increase of \$47.7 billion. If we had not spent this money, what could we have

done? We would have been able to increase the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Education 2019 capital budget by 685% each - 685% each is the mis-prioritising of investments.

Let us look at some of the bluff in the budget. The Kurupukari River Bridge feasibility study – this one is a fluff - the project was first introduced in 2017. According to the Minister in his Budget 2017 speech, he said that work will commence on a permanent fixed bridge across the Essequibo River at Kurupukari and then the Government went in fanfare, and they told the people we are going to build a bridge over the Kurupukari River and that is in the budget speech. What is the reality? Nothing was done. Then the Minister of Finance came back in 2018 and this is what he had to say. The Minister said that the terms of reference for the design of the bridge has been approved. Then, nothing happened again.

10.34 a.m.

The Minister of Finance now comes in 2019 and this is what he had to say, “We have learnt that the feasibility will commence”. What kind of...? I do not want to use that word, but what is going on in this country, Mr. Speaker? He said, “We have learnt that the feasibility will commence”. I want us to stay on course. Let us not forget the Waterfront Development Programme that was introduced in 2017, and, subsequently, vanished without a single dollar expended. What is this Government going to tell the people? What are these *sweet lies* about?

Let us look at the Linden to Mabura Road dilemma. All of this have one thing in common, there is a certain man in the leadership. In Budget Speech 2017, the Minister said, “Government will commence the first phase of the Linden to Lethem Road Project, which spans Linden to Mabura”. Do you remember that? Then the Minister came, in Budget 2018, and said, “Our development partners have already approved the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the bridge and feasibility of the Linden/Mabura Road Upgrade. That is what the Minister said in 2018.

What happened in 2019? The Minister, in his 2019 Budget Speech said that the Government will commence the feasibility study for the next 125 kilometres from Linden to Mabura. Two years have elapsed, and the feasibility study is yet to commence. This is the *bluff and fluff* of this Government. Do you know what? This Government has been exposed.

The Minister of Finance further said that Government was in discussion with the Brazilian Government on the development of the road from Mabura to Lethem. Then he said that the feasibility study for the upgrade of the Lethem Airport, and this is the 2019 Budget, “The feasibility study is for the upgrade of Lethem Airport”. Note, the study is for an upgrade, it is not for an expansion. We have be careful with words when it comes to this Government.

This is the Government that said it would build a new sophisticated, international airport at Lethem. Listen to the words, it is “the study”, it is not the project. The Guyanese people must understand these *sweet lies*. The “study,” is for an upgrade and not an expansion. Note, this very Government might take in one computer and call that an upgrade.

More studies - the Government, in this budget, said that there will be studies and designs for the Soesdyke Linden Highway. Again, there is no guarantee that the project will materialise. For example, a case of study is for the Waterfront Development Project. The East Bank/East Coast Road Linkage Project, this was a People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C’s) initiative. But guess what? The project was estimated at US\$50 million under the PPP/C Government. It is now projected to cost a US\$120 million under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. It is only our guess as to where the US\$70 million is going. The Hon. Minister Ramjattan knows exactly where it is going.

Let us not forget that the Government said that there will be the modernisation of Port Georgetown. The project was first introduced in 2017. According to the 2017 Budget Speech...

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

Mr. Ali: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to the 2017 Budget Speech, the Government will commence discussion to construct, refurbish and upgrade Port Georgetown. Since then, nothing has been said or done. In Budget Speech 2019, however, the project resurfaced and now the Hon. Minister is making claims that the Government will conduct a feasibility study in 2019, more *fluff and bluff*. This is the reality that the Guyanese people are faced with. These are the fact and figures.

Production level is on the decline for a matter of fact. The Hon. Members always want to ask, “What did you all do when you were in Government?” It is reasonable, that is why I will tell you now. When this Government came into office, and I want to salute every single functionary under

the PPP/C Government, when we went into office, Net International Reserves were - \$27.90. When we left office, we left you with US\$680 million. When we went into office, inflation was 70.30%, when we left, we reduced it by 69% to 1.23%.

They love to talk about public sector wages. When we came into Government, the minimum wage for the public sector was \$2546. When we left Government, we had increased it by 1577%. On an average, that works out to 60% every year under the PPP/Civic Government. We forgot that there was a time in this country when, for every 1000 birth, close to 50 babies would die. We reduced that by almost 50% by the time we left Government.

Education, as a percentage of the National Budget, when we went into Government, it was 1.90%. When we left, it was 14.80%. When we left Government, we had reduced our public debt by almost US\$900 million. The number of physicians, the number of doctors for every one... [Ms.

Charles-Broomes: You are in denial.] Is this denial? Some of this was written by the Hon. Prime Minister. The number of physicians for every 10,000 persons in this country, when we went into Government, was two. When we left Government, we left 15. The number of nurses - when we came into Government was six per 10,000 persons. When we left Government, it was 10. These are the realities.

In concluding, we cannot support Budget 2019 because of the following reasons. [Ms.

Charles-Broomes: We do not care.] That is the problem in this country, The Government does not care. It does not care about any of this. But guess what? The 63% of persons told them that 'we do care'. We cannot support Budget 2019 for the following reasons: The forecasts presented are unrealistic and questionable, it is padded with wasteful spending that will not benefit the ordinary Guyanese, the tax measure proposed...

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

Mr. Ali: One more...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 35 minutes and 12 seconds, your time is up.

Mr. Ali: Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would say two things. The time which Members are allowed to speak was agreed between the Chief Whips. If a Member is advised that he has five minutes remaining, then the Member must make a decision about whether he wishes to adjust what he is saying or whether he wishes to proceed in whatever way he wishes. That is all I am prepared to say about that.

There is one other matter that I bring to the attention of Members. I noticed that one Member had a device which appeared to be recording the statement or recording events in the Chamber, I am not sure which one it was. What I am saying to Members is, that is not the practice. If a Member wishes a recording of anything, I am sure the Clerk of the National Assembly would issue the necessary instructions for such a recording to be available. What I would say to all Members is, we should avoid the use of recording devices in the Chamber. The next Speaker is the Hon. Dominic Gaskin. You have the floor, Sir.

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, I am glad that you are shining light on this issue. We have noted that the Government information Agency (GINA), which is the Department of Public Information (DPI), and is funded by the people of this country, is not carrying the views of the Members of the Opposition, which amounts to not carrying the views of the people of this country.

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Ms. Manickchand: In effect, Sir, we are failing...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand...

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, may if I finish?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand, whatever represents a departure from the norm within this Chamber, it would have been a polite approach to bring that to the attention of the Speaker, other than acting in the manner in which you are saying you acted.

Ms. Manickchand: I did not say that. Your Honour

Mr. Speaker: All I am saying to Members here is that, if there is a difficulty, it should be brought to the attention of the Speaker.

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, we would have missed...

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker ought not to ...Hon. Member...

Ms. Manickchand: I am hearing you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Please take your seat. What I am saying is that we must conduct ourselves in the way we know we should. If the Speaker is to always tell an Hon. Member that he/she should or should not, then we are not acting as if we are the people in charge here. We know what the rules are. Let us try to do them. If there is going to be a departure or if there is a problem, it should be brought to the attention of the Speaker, before we arrive here. That is what should happen. The Speaker must not be faced with *fait accompli* from the conduct of Members. Let us be clear about that. All I say is, Ms. Manickchand, let us leave whatever else you wish to say for another time. We have dates and times for speakers. Let us proceed with the speeches.

Ms. Manickchand: I think it is important. I do not speak here on my own behalf.

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Manickchand....

Ms. Manickchand: If every member of this country could come into the public gallery and hear what Members have to say, why can they not hear that...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must take your seat.

[*Interruption*]

10.49 a.m.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Ms. Manickchand: ... [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are Out of Order. Take your seat, please. Now, let us be clear about this. We are not only dealing with the Standing Orders when they suit us, we observe the Standing Orders at all times. That is what we must do.

The next speaker is the Hon. Dominic Gaskin, you have the floor Sir.

Minister of Business [Mr. Gaskin]: Mr. Speaker, if I could make an observation. This entire debate is being livestreamed and can be access on the Parliament's website, as can all the previous debates in this House, going back for a number of years. This practice was started under the Speakership of the Hon. Minister Trotman, I believe. So, I do not think there is a challenge if anyone wants to follow the debates of either the Opposition Members or this side of the House. But I do not want to digress... *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will keep to the debate and not be diverted by any other matter.

Mr. Gaskin: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The first speaker gave quite a performance and I too...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order. The Hon. Minister referred to the livestream. We wish to put on record that the Minister erred in that there has been no livestreaming of the opening speech this morning by the Opposition, led by Mr. Irfaan Ali. It is only now that a Minister is speaking that the livestreaming has started. This is the point we are talking about, discrimination in this place. Total discrimination. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been advised that livestreaming has been taking place from the time we began here. The source of the advice given to me is the source on which I rely, and which has had no reason to tell me differently today what he has confirmed in previous times. If the information that was given to Hon. Members or some Hon. Members is that there was no livestreaming, there seem to be a conflict of what was informed to me a few minutes ago and what has been put here. Let me make clear that the advice I have received is that livestreaming was taking place from the moment this House began its business. It would follow from that and, if an

Hon. Member has something else that can prove otherwise, then, of course, the Speaker would be very interested in it. Please proceed Minister.

Mr. Gaskin: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Having listened to the first speaker, I too am reminded of a song, one by Lord Nelson, in which one of the characters that stood out was ‘*Will the Outrageous*’, ‘outrageous’ being the operative word. But, I did not come here to perform, I came here to speak on my Ministry’s performance and plans. I am not the performer.

I would like to yet again express my appreciation to the hardworking staff of the Ministry of Finance for yet again preparing the annual budget estimates and doing so on time at the new time, when we present our budget. It is not April, but November of the year preceding that which we are budgeting for, so, I would like to express my thanks to the Ministry of Finance.

The Ministry of Business has been allocated the sum of \$2.65 billion for the year 2019, and I would like to use my presentation to this House to explain what we are planning to achieve with this money. The work that we do at the Ministry of Business and all our agencies is ultimately geared towards the creation of jobs by private enterprises, large, medium and small. Whether it is through tourism or industrial estates, or the promotion of exports or investment facilitation, or small business support, at the end of the day, what we want to see is private sector development and growth because this is where the bulk of the jobs, needed by the tens of thousands of young people leaving school and other tertiary education and training institutions every year, is going to come from.

I would like to divide my presentation into four main areas: Business Support and Development; Business Facilitation; Tourism; and Consumer Affairs. For each area, I will summarise the work done in 2018, and then give highlights of what is planned for 2019.

Starting with business support and development, the Ministry’s Department of Industry, which is primarily responsible for the development and management of industrial estates in Guyana, has been working on the development of two industrial estates, one in Lethem and one in Berbice, for the last five and three years, respectively.

The works on the Lethem Industrial Estate have been completed on time and additional works, such as a few access roads will be completed next year. The total amount spent on that estate is

expected to be around \$1.3 billion by the end of this year, with an additional amount of around \$213 million to be spent in 2019.

The estate occupies 28 hectares and there is a total of 68 plots available for industrial use. An operation and business plan for the estate is being developed and a prospectus, including investor guidelines, is currently being finalised so that applications can be received, starting sometime in January, 2019, and leases can be granted before mid-year.

It should be noted that, while we would love to, we do not anticipate having the estate fully occupied anytime soon. GO-Invest will be examining proposals from applicants because we are targeting mostly value-added businesses for the estate or businesses that support such activities. Those types of businesses will generally require investment agreements with the Government of Guyana, which are normally processed by GO-Invest. A single due-diligence process will be carried out to ensure that companies have the financial resources to fund their proposed activities.

In addition to the available plots, there is also a business incubator being constructed on that estate and this is anticipated to be completed by the middle of 2019. The estimated cost of this business incubator, which was started in 2017 is \$272 million and we project that, by the end of this year, \$159 million would have been spend, leaving another \$113 million to be spent in 2019.

The incubator will have 10 pods available for temporary use by the *incubatees* for the purpose of starting up businesses from scratch. The rest of space will be used to create a supporting environment in which those businesses can have access to various services and training opportunities. The pods themselves will be fitted with basic equipment depending on the nature of the business activities to be pursued.

The industrial estate and the incubator are a small, but important, part of a bigger picture that depicts the new township of Lethem as a hub of business activity in Guyana's south, and a gateway to Northern Brazil. With the long-awaited road to Brazil now clearly in sight, there is a renewed interest in Lethem, which must be harnessed and translated into investments and economic opportunities that can benefit the entire region.

A similar project, but on a much smaller scale, is taking place in Belvedere, in East Berbice. A small area had been earmarked for an industrial estate and some internal roads were laid down

under the previous administration. Nothing was done for a number of years. This was brought to my attention by members of the Berbice business community and upon examination, the Ministry of Business took a decision to complete this estate. In 2016, we commenced works to provide concrete bases for electricity transformers, fire hydrants, and to build a security fence.

It is a small estate with only 12 available plots. The only outstanding work now is to dig some internal drains and put some infrastructure in place for telephone service. This is catered for in Budget 2019 and will be completed early in the new year.

The decision to include the business incubator at Lethem was actually a policy decision taken to include a business incubator on every new industrial estate in Guyana, so that these large capital outlays will also create opportunities for young entrepreneurs and start-up businesses.

We, therefore, included a business incubator on the Belvedere Industrial Estate which was started in 2017, and which was completed on the 31st October, of this year. It has six incubator pods which will be operated similarly to the one in Lethem. A retention payment of \$11.7 million is budgeted for 2019 and will bring the total cost of the Belvedere business incubator to \$117,477,115, which is the original sum contracted. Both the estate and the incubator will be ready for occupation by the middle of 2019.

Continuing on business support, I would like to move to the National Quality Infrastructure Project, which has a total cost of \$1.95 billion, of which we project that \$88 million will be spent by the end of this year, and which has a budgetary allocation in 2019 of \$360 million. The objective of this programme is to support economic diversification and exports through the enhancement of the National Quality Infrastructure and the creation of a National Export and Investment Promotion Strategy.

This project is implemented in three sub-components: the first sub-component is institutional modernisation and involves the accreditation of existing laboratories; the creation and operation of a network of laboratories, public and private; capacity building for small and medium enterprises; and the institutional strengthening of the Guyana National Bureau of Standards.

The second sub-component is improving laboratory facilities and equipment and involves the construction of a new laboratory for the Guyana National Bureau of Standards at the National

Exhibition Centre in Sophia, as well as filling some specific gaps in the capacity of some of the existing Government laboratories.

The third sub-component involves the design and implementation of a national export strategy and a national investment strategy, as well as the redesign of GO-Invest's Trade and Investment Framework. This is a multi-year project and is expected to run until the end of 2022, by which time Guyanese manufacturers and exporters will be benefitting significantly from the enhanced quality assurance, testing and certification capabilities of an expanded network of internationally accredited testing facilities.

Manufacturers and exporters will also benefit from the implementation of the national export and investment strategies which form part of the last component of the project.

11.04 a.m.

The Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) continues to play a key role in supporting businesses, not just by developing and promoting standards, but also through a variety of services that it provides, such as calibration of measuring devices used in the rice, sugar, gold, fuel, electricity and retail sectors; training and consultancy services for businesses seeking International Standards (ISO) certification, and laboratories seeking ISO accreditation; as well as product testing and certification services.

In 2018, the Bureau itself received (ISO) 9001:2015 Quality Management Systems certification, a demonstration of its own commitment to the standards it seeks to promote.

In 2018, the main thrust of the Bureau's standards development programme was to support the construction sector which remains unregulated and without a coherent set of enforceable building codes and adequate testing facilities to verify the quality of materials used in the sector. Local standards were developed for a number of electrical and other building materials, complementing the work done in this very critical sector in the previous year.

In 2019, the Bureau will procure a consultant to conduct a situational analysis and action plan for the construction sector. Billions of dollars are lost annually due to the poor quality of products and services provided and this study will identify the areas of weakness and make recommendations for correcting these. An action plan will also be drafted and a framework, providing for regulating

the sector through the use of updated and revised building codes and the certification and accreditation of testing facilities for construction materials. It is anticipated that, with the establishment of a framework for the certification of practitioners, there will be a significant improvement in the delivery of construction services in the medium-term, as well as substantial savings, both by public and private builders. The sum of \$14 million has been budgeted in 2019 for this exercise.

Also, in 2019, the Guyana National Bureau of Standards will continue to build its own capacity to provide testing and calibration services to a variety of industries. Through a capital allocation of \$71 million, the Bureau will acquire a test bench for testing electricity metres; test masses in various denominations for calibrating scales and weight stations in multiple regions of our country; an impact tester for testing polyvinyl chloride (PVC); a hydrostatic pressure pump for the testing of PVC pipes; temperature calibrators for use in the food preparation and food processing industries; and scale and tape measure verification systems. All of this combine to support businesses in delivering products and services of the required quality and standards to local and international buyers, while ensuring that imported items also conform to local standards.

Still on business support and development, the Small Business Bureau is committed to small business development through training, access to finance and improved opportunities for small businesses. These are the three main challenges facing small businesses in Guyana and are the main focus of the work of the Small Business Bureau. As of November, 2018, 948 businesses benefitted from training in the areas such as soap manufacturing, sustainable mining, forestry and cosmetology. The Bureau has also supported 387 former Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) workers with training in plumbing, transitioning to farming, preparing loan and grant applications, catering and sewing.

Training will continue in 2019, with the Small Business Bureau playing a leading role in the Business Incubator Programme. A total of \$40 million has been allocated in Budget 2019 for furniture and equipment for the two business incubators to be operationalised next year.

The Bureau will also be responsible for capacity building for small businesses interested in Government procurement. This will include basic training for managing and operating a business, as well as sector specific training, including green agro-processing, green agricultural practices

and the use of green technologies. A total of \$18 million has been allocated for training in 2019 and a target of 660 trainees has been set.

As of 31st October, 2018, the Small Business Bureau supported over 200 businesses with access to finance by providing guarantees for 45 loans totalling US\$618,000 and disbursing 158 grants, amounting to US\$237,000. This support is estimated to have created 535 jobs.

While the disbursement of loans and grants under the Micro and Small Enterprise Development Programme came to an end on 31st October of this year, the allocation of \$100 million to the Small Business Development Fund in the 2018 Budget allows for the continued guarantee of loans and disbursement of grants to small businesses.

An additional transfer of \$100 million to the Small Business Development Fund in 2019 will ensure that loan guarantees and grants can continue uninterrupted, until a second phase of the Micro and Small Enterprise Development Programme comes on stream.

Additionally, the Bureau's In-School Entrepreneurship Programme was expanded in 2018 and saw 104 secondary school students, in the business stream, receiving grants of up to \$30,000 each to pursue real projects related to their academic studies. Five million dollars was spent on this programme in 2018, and a further \$5 million will be spent in 2019, targeting a similar amount of students.

In 2018, the Small Business Bureau also set up a \$12 million Green Innovation Fund to provide the sum of \$1 million each to 12 small businesses with green innovative projects. Six of these have already been disbursed with another six currently remaining. The sum of \$10 million has been allocated for the continuation of this programme in 2019, with ten businesses expected to receive these grants.

The Small Business Procurement Programme, aimed at creating more procurement opportunities for small businesses, has been completed and will be implemented in January, 2019. It will begin with a set-aside of all procurements under \$30 million for approved small businesses subject to the capacity existing within the sector.

I wish to pre-empt any unwarranted attack on this very important programme by making it very clear, from the onset, that Government is aware that there are many areas in which this set-aside

will have to be waived because there are no small business suppliers in certain fields. Government is also aware that, even if all the procurements under \$30 million were to go to small businesses, it may not amount to 20% of total procurement.

This programme is so important that it must begin, and we must start collecting the data to show what percentage of Government procurement is going to small businesses, so that we can make the annual adjustments going forward until we hit the 20% target provided for in the Small Business Act of 2004. Capacity building is a very important component of this programme and the Small Business Bureau will be supporting small businesses in this regard.

The creation of a framework for sub-contracting to small businesses by the prime contractor is also being worked on and, if this can be achieved without clashing with our procurement laws and other best practices, this is something that will also be considered to improve procurement opportunities for small businesses.

In 2018, the Business Policy and Strategy Unit of the Ministry of Business, in partnership with the Ministry of Legal Affairs and with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), has been instrumental in the development of the Moveable Property Security Bill, which, when passed, will improve access to credit in Guyana by facilitating the use of moveable property, both tangible and intangible, as collateral for loans and credit under a new system which protects both the lender and the borrower. The new system will involve the establishment of an electronic asset registry in 2019 by the Commercial Registry, which will allow a creditor to register an interest in one or more moveable assets pledged by a borrower.

The Business Strategy and Policy Unit in 2018 has also been actively involved in the development of a Green Business Framework for Guyana. This Framework is intended to provide guidance on ways to incentivise and encourage the adoption of green business practices by Guyanese businesses, as well as to encourage investments in clean technologies, renewable energy, water services, clean transport, waste management and green buildings. The framework is expected to be completed by the end of this year. The Unit will continue to support the work of the Ministry in 2019.

I now move to the area of business facilitation. As of 31st October, 2018, GO-Invest facilitated \$43 billion in investment proposals, through 30 executed investment agreements between investors

and the Government of Guyana. It is expected that these investments will create 770 jobs across various sectors, once they are completed. Additionally, GO-Invest facilitated land applications, paving the way for nine projects valued at \$1.2 billion during the same period. It is estimated that these projects will create 337 new jobs once completed.

Also, during 2018, 47 local businesses were matched with international companies seeking to import products from Guyana. These local businesses have already shipped sample orders to various destinations around the world.

In 2018, GO-Invest also spearheaded the first ever Guyana Trade and Investment Exhibition (GuyTIE), which was attended by over 100 international buyers and 56 exhibitors. Over 200 business to business meetings took place during the event, resulting in deals being reached by three Guyanese companies to date, while others are still in active negotiations.

In 2019, GO-Invest will continue to pursue trade and investment opportunities for local businesses and has budgeted \$18.5 million for participation in trade shows and facilitating the promotion of local export-ready products and investment opportunities to international buyers and investors at such events. Additionally, the agency has budgeted \$6.5 million for facilitating inward and outward missions aimed at exploring market and investment opportunities.

In 2019, GO-Invest will also provide training for 100 exporters to prepare them for international trading. Exporters are expected to learn things like costing, pricing, tradeshow readiness, B2B strategies, cluster and joint venture development. The sum of \$620,000 is allocated for this in the agency's 2019 budget. The GO-Invest will also develop and print an export manual for distribution and online placement in order to help local businesses overcome export challenges. The sum of \$350,000 is allocated for this in 2019.

Additionally, the agency's website will be updated and made more user-friendly and interactive. An updated version of Guyana's Investment Guide will also be available on-line. The sum of \$3.3 million is allocated for this in 2019.

The agency continues to be an important port of call for foreign investors seeking information on various aspects of doing business in Guyana and as stated earlier, its work is expected to benefit immensely from the national export and import strategies, as well the institutional strengthening

to be carried out under the National Quality Infrastructure Project implemented through the Guyana National Bureau of Standards.

The Electronic Single Window System is a project which I mentioned numerous times in this House before. It is a trade facilitation initiative that is expected to drastically alter and improve the way in which import and export transactions are handled, by allowing users to access an online portal, called the 'single window', and submit their information for processing. Information is submitted once and is routed to all the relevant agencies for the necessary processing, resulting in a significantly faster, more secure, less vulnerable interference and more efficient transaction.

Loan funding for the development of the Electronic Single Window System has recently been approved by the Inter-American Development Bank. This project is expected to cost US\$6 million. Preparatory work has been ongoing for some time now, with draft legislation already prepared and institutional arrangements established for the oversight of the project. A National Steering Committee, as well as a Cabinet Sub-Committee are in place and a Project Coordinator has been hired as of 15th November, 2018. Additionally, a few of the agencies that will be part of the Electronic Single Window System recently participated in a study tour to Trinidad and Tobago to have first-hand interaction with that country's single window system.

11.19 a.m.

The sum of \$100 million has been allocated, in Budget 2019, for this project and a number of technical areas are to be addressed over the next 12 months, clearing the way for the software and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure to be built and installed. This project is expected to conclude and be fully up and running in 2022.

The Department of Commerce of the Ministry of Business is primarily responsible for the processing of import and export licences. However, the Department also plays a facilitative role in other areas. For the last two years, the Department has been establishing business registration hubs in some of the regions of our country where, due to archaic administrative arrangements, businesses were forced to spend an inordinate amount of time and money in order to complete their annual business registration process.

In 2018, three additional business registration hubs are being established in Mabaruma, Central Corentyne and Bartica. This is expected to result in savings of over \$50 million a year, mostly to small businesses in hinterland locations. However, the greater value created when businesses that would not otherwise have been registered are now integrated into formal economy, cannot be that easily quantified.

With the goal of equipping smaller enterprises with the technical skills necessary to operate sustainable businesses, the Department of Commerce has also facilitated training for small businesses in the area of record keeping, in Regions 9 and 2, in collaboration with the Rupununi Chamber of Commerce and the Essequibo Chamber of Commerce, respectively.

In addition, 38 persons were trained in Berbice on marketing and sales strategies. This training will continue, in 2019, with a target of 120 businesses. Training would also be provided to 100 businesses on the adoption and utilisation of green technologies and sustainable business practices. The Department has allocated a budget of \$1.2 million for this in 2019.

In 2018, the Department also conducted baseline surveys in all 10 regions to collect information on business confidence in our country for the development of a business confidence index, the first of which is expected to be completed in 2019. Such an index could be used to forecast the likelihood of recessions or expansions and could form the basis for early policy intervention to avoid undesirable economic outcomes. In its area of core responsibility, the Department of Commerce, in 2018, was able to issue 97% of its import and export licences within a 24-hour period.

I would like to turn to tourism. In Guyana, responsibility for tourism development is carried out by the Department of Tourism and the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) of the Ministry of Business, with the Department being responsible for policy and strategic direction and the Authority being responsible for implementation in the areas of marketing, product development, licensing and regulation.

Visitor arrivals to Guyana have been rising steadily over the years with the figures, up to September of this year, showing an increase of 17% over the same period last year. This is good news for Guyana because visitors bring money into our economy. Visitors have to eat, sleep and travel around town or the country and each of these activities costs money and employs Guyanese

people. Tourists also shop and enjoy local entertainment. So, an additional 30,000 visitors arriving in Guyana this year means that an additional US\$15 million is circulating in Guyana this year more than last year. If we are to assume an average visitor spend of US\$500 per visitor, which is extremely conservative, and if we look at the figures in their totality, tourism is expected to bring in around US\$150 million this year to be spent in our economy. This does not include airfares or the taxes applied to airfares. Those taxes alone will bring in around US\$15 million this year. So, what I am saying is that, apart from gold and rice, tourism brings the highest amount of foreign earnings into Guyana's economy and this amount is growing every year at a handsome rate. Tourism is providing opportunities for Guyanese, in particular, young Guyanese, and would continue to do so in 2019.

Our Government realises the importance of this sector and its capacity to create and sustain employment. We also recognise the need to develop Guyana's tourism product, to keep up with increasing visitor arrivals and, most of all, we recognise the economic opportunities that tourism could create in traditionally disadvantaged areas, such as the hinterland where our indigenous population lives. This is why there has been a steady increase in the budgetary appropriation for the Guyana Tourism Authority from \$123 million, in 2014, to over \$300 million, in 2019. Just as an aside, when I inherited responsibility for this agency, it had never, I repeat never, since its inception in 2002, presented to this Assembly its audited financial statements. It did not even have audited financial statements for the years 2002 to 2014. We have had to spend an inordinate amount of time and effort putting this in order, but we anticipate that, sometime in 2019, we would finally be up-to-date with the annual reports for all the agencies of the Ministry of Business.

The former Minister, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, who spoke before me, who heads the Public Accounts Committee, and who regularly interrogates our senior public servants, was the minister in the previous Administration who was the Minister responsible for the Guyana Tourism Authority and the other delinquent agencies which were neglected during his tenure. The Hon. Member spoke eloquently about missing vouchers and missing documentation. Yet, he presided over missing financial statements, which are required by law to be tabled in this House every year.

I raise this to illustrate the scant regard that the previous Administration gave to accountability and transparency while in Government, and to say to that political party that its record speaks volumes, lest they forget. But also, to reassure this House that, while we may be spending more money on

tourism than the previous government, we are also ensuring that there is accountability and transparency in the spending of that money.

For 2019, the GTA and the Department of Tourism would receive budgetary allocations of \$305 million and \$93 million, respectively. I would like to highlight the work of both the Authority and the Department in 2018 and 2019, so that this House could better understand how that money is to be being spent.

The main thrust of our tourism drive is to develop sustainable tourism in each of our 10 regions, starting with areas identified by local stakeholders as their tourism hotspots. What we are seeking to achieve is to make tourism a means of improving lives in the communities where tourism takes place by making the communities the main beneficiaries of the visitor flows that they attract.

To this end, the Department of Tourism has been engaging regional stakeholders, in 2017 and 2018, in order to identify regional tourism hotspots. To date, almost every region has identified flagship national tourism projects and formed tourism committees, and the GTA would be working with these committees to support them in developing their projects.

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

Mr. Gaskin: Thank you. I wish to commend this budget for passage in this House.

Mr. Hamilton: Let me first begin by congratulating the Hon. Minister, Mr. Bulkan, who, some weeks ago, erected a monument in the centre of Mahdia. I am told that the monument is a symbol of the Coalition's stewardship in Government. Further, I am told that there is an invisible inscription at the base of the monument that goes like this, "This is what we have been doing you Guyanese people for the last three years and this is what we would continue to do to you". I am further informed, about this monument that is a symbol of the Coalition's stewardship of governance, that the Minister's intentions, when he erected the monument, was to give it a Patamona name because he erected the monument in the land of the Patamona people. [Ms.

Ally: Speak to the Budget.] I have started, since I have started speaking. I am speaking to your monument, which is the Budget. I am told that he was distraught when he was learnt that the Patamona people have no set of words to describe that erectile monstrosity that is the symbol of the Coalition Government. When one goes to Mahdia and sees the monument and comes back

to Georgetown and sees the Government in power, one would recognise why I started by congratulating the Hon. Minister, Mr. Bulkan, for his foresight of the Government's position.

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

The Budget which was presented by the Hon. Minister a couple days ago was \$300 billion, which is a number. The \$300 billion means nothing if the people of this country have not received adequate services. The \$300 billion means nothing if the vulnerable, the poor and the people who need to be developed, economically and otherwise in this country, are not getting that benefit. The Hon. Minister, last year, presented a budget of \$250 billion. It means nothing when billions of that money goes back to the Consolidated Fund. So, a big number means nothing because, at the end of the day, the people are not getting the necessary services.

The Hon. Minister, in the Budget, passed over the issue of the inefficiencies and the inadequate performance of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). While he highlighted the inefficiencies, he did not indicate to us what practical measures the Government would put in place to ensure that those inadequacies and deficiencies are remedied, so that the people of this country could get proper service.

The second issue in the Budget and the procurement that follows is the corruption, fraud and wastage that the Auditor General (AG) has identified in his report.

11.34 a.m.

The Minister, in his presentation - 99 pages and four and a half hours long – avoided, like the plague, dealing with the corruption, mismanagement of public funds, fraud identified, and wastage identified by the AG in his report. I would hope that someone from that side will speak to the report when he or she stands up.

The other issue the Minister neglected to speak about was the issue of reliable and cheap power supply. The speaker before me regaled us with what he expects businesses to do. Minister, businesses would not be able to perform, and they would not be able to produce, adequately, unless your Government is able to deal with the issue of irregular power supply, the issue of inadequate power supply and the issue of expensive power supply.

The Minister of Business spoke about our businesses being able to compete. We will not be able to compete, Mr. Minister, at the rate we are paying for power supply. And that is the reason a man can bottle a bottle of water in Suriname, bring it to Guyana, and it can be sold cheaper in this country that is the land of many waters. So, when you talk about what you expect businesses to do, they would not be able to achieve those noble things unless and until we are able to deal with that fundamental issue. Mr. Patterson, when he speaks, I hope will tell us, without bluff, what he intends to do regarding that matter.

The Budget lacks lubricant, and if there is no lubricant, there can be no stimulation. Therefore, the stimulation that is necessary and needed to stimulate businesses and to stimulate the economy so that we can progress, those measures are not in the Budget. It follows that without stimulation, there will be no pleasure. That is the reason the people of this country, on 12th November, 2018, sent a clear message to the Government, by the score of 6338, that they are displeased with the performance of the Government. The only set of people who believe that they are performing well are the 35 persons that sit on the Government; not the people of this country. The people of this country said that they are displeased, and they voted, overwhelmingly, for the People's Progressive Party (PPP) at those elections.

The Hon. Prime Minister, *Chinapen*, has left the corridors. I am told that, since that election, he has been distraught and that he has a broken heart. I am told that he walks around and that he mutters about Bharrat taking his girl, Whim, away. The people of this country showed how displeased they were with the Government. If you walk through the length and breadth of this country - whether among PPP supporters, People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) supporters and Alliance for Change (AFC) supporters, and if there are any left - the citizens of this country tell you how displeased and dissatisfied they are. Therefore, if the Government wants to be tone deaf and not listen to the people of Guyana, and not adhere to what the people of Guyana are saying about how they feel...So, \$300 billion, without adequate service to the citizens, means nothing. It is just a number. **[Ms. Ally: You said that already.]** I am repeating it for emphasis.

The speaker who spoke before me, the Minister of Business, when he stood up, said that he did not come to perform. That is the problem. That is why businesses are in this state in this country. It is because the Minister, since he acceded to office, has failed to perform. So, I have no expectations, Sir. I have no expectations of the Minister performing, in the House or out of the

House, because the Minister has shown us, over the last three and a half years, that he is incapable, apparently, of performing. I spoke to someone, not so long ago, and they indicated to me that the Minister is still finding his way. Three and a half years, and the Minister is still finding his way.

The Minister of Business, over the last period, has tied his success to three policy issues. Number one is the Small Businesses Bureau and the small business enterprise. Number two is the Electronic Single Window (ESW) system. Number three is the 20% procurement for small businesses.

Let me start at number three. Since 2015, the Minister of Business came to this House and, in some measure in his presentation, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, spoke to this issue. Just a couple of weeks ago, it took a non-lawyer to rebuke the Minister, the Attorney General, and the Cabinet, with four lawyers, by saying that they could not apply the 20% procurement for small businesses unless and until the Procurement Act is amended. The Minister indicated that it would happen in 2016, and it did not happen. The Minister of Business indicated that it would happen in 2017, and it did not happen. He indicated that it would happen in 2018, and it did not happen. So, the Chairman of the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) was so horrified by the fact that the distinguished Senior Counsel, the Attorney General, misadvised and misdirected the Minister of Business by saying to him that he could have effected the 20% procurement, when, in fact, the Small Businesses Act, as the Chairman of the PPC stated, is a junior legislation that cannot supersede the Procurement Act.

Now, I heard that the Minister of Finance has stuck it in somewhere. He said, “We will amend the Procurement Act to facilitate the 20% procurement in 2019.” The whole Cabinet has been sleeping for nearly four years, misinforming the Guyanese people and having the people believing that something would happen, when, indeed, they were incapable of doing it because they were misinformed and misdirected by the Attorney General.

The other issue is the Electronic Single Window system. That is the other issue on which the Minister ties his success. But listen to what the *Stabroek News* reported, on 1st November, 2018, on the World Bank Report about doing business in Guyana. Listen to what it stated:

“Guyana has dropped eight places in the World Bank’s latest rankings for the ease of doing business.”

Where is the single window? There is no window, and we have dropped eight spaces. Guyana has moved to a ranking of 134/190 from a rank of 126 last year. That is your stewardship, Sir. When you speak about what you will do in 2019, the people take it *with a grain of salt*. It is because, whilst you are saying that, in your period, 10 points - eight plus two - the ease of doing business ... And if you go through the report, you will see that, at the top of the list, is the inefficiencies and inadequacies of the Minister of Public Infrastructure in relation to the issue of power and the issue of getting power to do business in this country. So, you have failed there.

The other issue which the Minister likes to speak about is the Small Businesses Bureau. Let me inform you, Hon. Member, that, as you speak, the Small Businesses Bureau is a cesspool of corruption, discrimination and favouritism. As you speak here today, and as I speak to you, at the moment, there are middlemen and brokers who are brokering loans for commissions for business people at the Small Businesses Bureau. So, Minister, I would ask you to urgently seek to appoint a Commission of Inquiry (COI) so you can *see the skeletons*. Minister, when you check the list of the names of persons listed - 2,000 plus people - some of those persons are there for years, and persons who have just applied, because of the corruption, discrimination and the favouritism, have already gotten their loans; it is because they have brokers and middlemen to facilitate their loans. [Mr. Gaskin: The banks issue the loans. Did you not know that?] Oh, you are like Pontius Pilate; you are washing your hands. Like Pontius Pilate, the Minister washes his hands.

11.49 a.m.

He is saying that it is the banks that give the loans. The nation must know that it is the Small Business Bureau which makes recommendation for the people to get the loan *via* the bank.

As I said, there is failure in the three policy objectives the Minister of Business and Ministry of Business set itself. One is, as I said, the 20% procurement. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition Government will be kicked out of power in 2020 without having the 20% procurement.

Secondly, as I indicated, there are the goings-on and the 'runnings' at the Small Business Bureau.

In all of the Minister's budget presentation since 2015, I noticed he veers off because he, apparently, recognises that he failed in all three of these objectives.

The Minister of Business spoke about the incubators and he spoke about the industrial estates, giving the impression, for those who do not know, that this was conceptualised under him and his Government. It is a People's Progressive Party (PPP) initiative. That is the point and those are the facts.

Last year, when I spoke, one of the Hon. Minister of Business's Colleague in the Cabinet, whom I will not name, asked me why I 'rough up' the Minister. I cannot give a pass mark for failure. How could I give a pass mark for failure? [An. Hon. Member: ...the judge for that.] The judge? There is the World Bank, which is independent of the PPP, which said that since the Ministry of Business was conceptualised and put in place with a Minister, Guyana has slipped 10 points in the ranking on the ease of doing business in Guyana index.

Apparently, some persons on the other side of the House are not grasping what I am saying. Listen to what was stated in the *Stabroek News*:

“The lower the numerical ranking the better the business climate. In 2016, the country stood at a rank of 124 but dropped two places the following year.”

So, between that period, the Minister of Business along with his Ministry, where people, I suppose, are being paid properly, have seen Guyana slip 10 places on the World Bank ranking on the ease of doing business in Guyana. [Mr. Gaskin: Is it 10 or 12?] Eight plus two equals 10. That is the problem. Apparently, you do not know how to count.

The Hon. Minister is prone to gaffe. One of the early gaffe the Minister gave us was that the leadership and the Ministers of the AFC are incorruptible. If the Minister repeats that statement sitting there, lightning would strike him today, 3rd December, 2018. He cannot repeat that because we have seen the evidence.

The other gaffe: The Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) had a confab at the Pegasus International Hotel to deal with the business environment and the issue of local content. I was a member who sat in the audience. There was great excitement from the people from far and near and near and far. Across the country business people came. They wanted to hear, specifically, about the Government's business plan and programme, the Government's direction for business and local content in the oil and gas industry. The Hon. Minister spoke for about half of an hour.

The only memorable statement, which was reported by the media, was that the Minister told the business people that they must only pay attention to politics during election time. That was the only memorable line. There was nothing to inform business people as to how Guyanese businesses would participate in the oil and gas industry and where the Government is regarding the issue of local content, which is a burning issue.

The other memorable gaffe: the Minister went to Berbice and he spoke to former Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) workers. He told them that they must forget about sugar and prepare for the oil and gas industry. I mean, could you imagine that? What he did not understand is that many of the...

Mr. Gaskin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order. Could the Hon. Gentleman say where in Berbice he heard me say forget about sugar and wait for the oil and gas industry? Could he identify where and when that statement was made please? Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, on Points of Order, a particular issue is made known to the Speaker and then the Hon. Member would resume his seat. So, if the Hon. Member is questioning something, perhaps he should do that, rather than ask a question of the Hon. Member. If he disagrees with what was said, then the Hon. Member should make that known to the House.

Mr. Gaskin: I am disagreeing with what was said, and I am saying to this House that what is being reported by the Hon. Member as having being said by me in Berbice was not said by me and I would like him to either withdraw it or to show the source of that information he is bringing to this House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Hamilton, you have heard the Minister. The Hon. Minister is saying that something which you stated and alluded to him he did not say. He is asking that it be withdrawn.

Mr. Hamilton: I do not plan to withdraw it because the Minister was addressing the Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce where there were several persons who had just lost their jobs in the audience. It was reported by the press that the Minister indicated that statement to those gathered.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker is working hard to attract your attention. I do not know why that should be so. Now, what we are dealing with is: The Hon. Minister has said, on Point of Order, that something you attributed to him is inaccurate and he is asking that it be withdrawn, or, I dare say, substantiated. Do one or the other but do not...

Mr. Hamilton: Could we ask for an adjournment so that I could look at my phone and bring it up? To substantiate it, Sir, I would have to go to the media. It was a media report.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, you have seven minutes remaining. If you wish to use those minutes to look at your phone, then you will do it and when the time is up I will call your time.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, the fact is the Hon. Minister of Business, in speaking to the Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce, indicated to those gathered that they must be prepared for oil and gas. What the Minister failed to understand...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The Speaker has pointed out to you what the Hon. Minister has said. Now, what I would expect you to do is treat with that, either by withdrawing it or substantiating it. Either of those is open to you. What is not open to you is to do what you are doing.

Mr. Hamilton: My conclusion, from what the Minister stated at the forum in Berbice at the Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce, was that the people of Berbice should forget about the sugar industry and focus on the oil and gas industry.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are withdrawing what you alluded to the Minister and you are drawing a conclusion.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, I am drawing a conclusion.

Mr. Speaker: Well, then perhaps, that should be made clear to the House.

Mr. Hamilton: Okay. I have drawn a conclusion, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Have you withdrawn the statement you alluded to the Minister? That is the question.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, to move on, I have withdrawn the statement and I am saying that the Minister...

Mr. Speaker: Then, please proceed.

Mr. Hamilton: The fact is what the Minister failed to understand is that there were many persons in the audience who already had a lot of gas from hunger that this Government had put them through. It is because they were unable, even up until this moment, to feed their children because of the policies of the Government and because of the way the Government went about shutting down the sugar estates.

Those were notable gaffes of the Hon. Minister of Business. Again, the Minister comes, and there is another set of gaffes about the green economy. Where is it? Firstly, what is it?

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

Mr. Hamilton: The *Stabroek News*, dated 26th August, 2017, stated:

“Gaskin urges look beyond sugar industry at Berbice Expo Launch”

I am taking back my statement because the evidence is there.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Hamilton: To look beyond sugar is to forget about sugar.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us try to keep it...Please proceed, Hon. Member.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much, Sir. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

12.04 p.m.

There is a guy, you must know his name. The name is Jared Kushner. He is permanently placed and highly favoured in the White House. The media's representation is that Jared dresses, travels and gaffs. We have our Jared here: permanently places, highly favoured in the green house. He also dresses, travels and gaffs. Nothing substantial, nothing to shout about, no progress, no development, everything is an incubator - nothing to shout about. They have made no progress, no development. Whilst we are an incubator, we have slipped ten points on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business, waiting.

We have a situation where with a Ministry of Business, for the first time in this country, one would want to think that business would strive and do better, but instead of doing better businesses with the Ministry of Business, it is doing worse.

One of the other thing, before I close, is, when the Minister speaks he never speaks about big businesses. The Minister always speaks about small businesses. There is no conversation about big businesses direct foreign investment, whether local or foreign, coming to this country. He is incapable of articulating that vision, that dream, and, therefore, he stays with small businesses where he is comfortable to speak, and even speak but do not act. The business Ministry deliverables and delivery to this country has been a total failure under Jared Kushner.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think this is a good time for us to take the suspension. The sitting is suspended for one hour. We will resume at ten minutes past one o' clock.

Sitting suspended at 12.07 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.14 p.m.

Mr. Rutherford: Mr. Speaker, with your leave I rise to make my contribution to Budget 2019. As it is customary at this time of the year, I offer congratulations and say thank you to team Region 10 for being, once again, successful at the Ministry of Education's Guyana Teachers' Union National Track and Field Championship last week. This is victory after hard work and dedication from the athletes being well coached by our coaching team who are mainly teachers, supported by parents and guardians, the regional administration and all residents of Region 10. The teachers, as a group, and some in their individual capacity, deserve national recognition.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to make some brief remarks on the previous speaker Hon. Member Joseph Hamilton. I care not to dwell on the issues of the monument at Mahdia which he was fond of and also to give us a round-up of elections. What this administration is concentrating on is to repeat and better our performance in the 2015 Elections.

Economic order, social order, democracy and good governance which all lead to the “good life” have been the pillar of our administration. The “good life” that we continue to provide while at steadfastly making it better is what we promised while campaigning in 2015, and with time, with clear signs of a long reigning Government, the life of Guyanese will only get better as this budget suggests. We have indeed upped our game realising that timely budget, early, legal and adequate availability of funds is critical to our administrators executing their plans, hence, we have now presented our third budget to this House before the start of the financial year - what a proactive, caring and orderly Government.

It is clear that this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government have been transforming our economy. We have been empowering our people and we continue to build sustainable communities as we deliver the “good life” to all Guyanese. Testimony to this is to empower our people. In fact, in 2018, we give more than 80% of the work in subregion 2 and riverine areas of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo of Region 10 to our village council and to our lone Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC), Kwakwani. This represents thirty-one projects and over \$50 million of which over 75% have been completed and on examination, I am proud of the work done.

The year 2019 will see our “good life” mantra continues with the apt theme, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for Good Life*. Building sustainable communities is not restricted to what presently is happening a few blocks from where I reside in Amelias Ward. That is, the Government partnering contractors as potential home owners partnered financial lending institution to provide high quality homes in communities which have a number of modern facilities. We have moved away from giving house lot without basic infrastructure to giving home in communities and, hence, I have seen potential home owners with brilliant smile, teachers, nurses and labours, visiting and examining, with satisfaction, the good service of a caring Government.

What should be noted with this project is the fact that we had almost an exclusive Linden workforce with local contractors. I was reliably informed that more than 90% of the building materials were purchased from businesses in Linden. Yes, we are empowering our people as we build communities.

Before I get further into matters of my region, it would be remiss of me not to congratulate the Minister of Finance Hon. Winston Jordan and his team for facilitating and further enhancing the life of Guyanese with this “good life” \$300.7 billion budget. Noted in our measures is the 7% to the most vulnerable group of public servants coupled with the no-tax back pay to all - the work of a caring Government.

We have seen a number of ICT transformation in Region 10. Twelve such hubs have been developed, and I was reliably informed that three more will be put in place before the end of the year - the work of a caring Government.

An initiative to help the elderly and youths have been progressing well in Region 10. It is our intention to further this work in the subregion 2.

I was impressed, and so should all patriotic Guyanese, with the development of the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS), vision 20/40, which will guide national development policy for the next 20 years. Supporting this strategy at the regional level is the plan of action for regional development part. Region 10’s plan was completed over two years ago, and I look forward to its implementation. The only town, my region, has benefited from the better mix of councillors due to the law-abiding attitude of having the local government elections on time. Kwakwani’s NDC has similarly benefited where four different parties now have councillors. Even the Opposition should be proud of this. I look forward to the giant step to constitutional reform.

In 2005/2006 when I started by active political journey after being dissatisfied with both national and regional administration failures, I was downfolded when I realised that all the talk about agriculture in Region 10, no programme existed, no direct budgetary provision was made. The intention, I was told, was to have support through the national programme and support through the administration and infrastructure budget in the region. This has not worked, and I am excited that with Budget 2019 we will see an agriculture programme in Region 10. The \$51 million, despite not adequate, is a commendable start and with the necessary structure, inclusive of human

resources being put in place with alacrity, the agriculture programme will be a successful one. This new programme will particularly benefit the residents of subregion 2 and aid in the regional and national food security mandate. Region 10 is blessed with vast quantity of arable land and the necessary basic infrastructure for crops and livestock production with this budgetary intervention.

Notwithstanding, support for agriculture in Region 10 will continue to benefit from national programme as the Intermediate Savannah of subregion 2, Region 10, we would see the construction of a modern agriculture research facility costing \$220 million at Ebini. This facility will focus on orchards, nursery seed production and the breeding of cattle. Additionally, a vehicle generator with a generator shed with a biogas digester will be provided at Ebini. Further expansion of the shade house project will continue in my region.

Investors and entrepreneurs are showing interest in aquaculture in Region 10 and with the development of technical capacity in the fishing department, the necessary support will be added. Our new agriculture programme in Region 10 will see capital works of \$22 million catering for the purchase of furniture and equipment, setting up of trade house and, importantly, the upgrading of the fair-weather road at Millie's Hideout where our farmers are struggling for ingress and egress. I do believe that before the end of our next cycling Government, in 2025, Region 10 will be food secured.

The forestry sector is an all-important sector to Region 10, particularly subregion 2. Forestry is the life of our citizen in Ituni and Kwakwani and other areas in Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo rivers. I know the projections of our forestry sector to grow by 1.9% in 2019. The contribution of foresters in Region 10 will depend on the condition of the roads. The condition of trail adversely affected the production in early months of 2018, this has since been resolved with contracts that now include continuous maintenance. Contracts to the tune of \$11.3 million and \$13.8 million were giving out in the middle of the year.

Our national budget of \$3.9 billion, an increase of 12% over 2018, has been allocated to Region 10. In addition to the new programme of agriculture mentioned earlier, this sum will be used in the traditional programmes, administration and finance, public infrastructure, education delivery and health service.

Administration and finance, three hundred and forty-one point six million dollars, or 87% increase of the region budget for administration in 2018, was allocated to our region. One hundred and twelve million is allocated for expenditure under capital items. Eight million dollars will be used for the purchase of vehicle and I am told that a vehicle will be made available to the important area of subregion 2, computer desks and other items will be purchased from additional sum on the capital budget.

Under the Region 10 public infrastructure capital works, \$116.2 million is allocated to supplement the work of national public infrastructure programme. Our public infrastructure projects are intended to improve access, drainage and transportation. Works to be undertaken include bridges at Karakara, costing \$10.8 million, upgrading of roads at Wisroc, Silver City, Christiansburg and Block 22, costing a sum of \$69 million.

1.26 p.m.

This is a continuation of our selective road upgrading in 2018 where part of Amelias Ward, Icy Road in Block 22, Christianburg, Wismar Housing Scheme, Watooka/Richmond Hill internal roads, Blueberry Hill and new scheme Amelias Ward were all done. Further, \$29 million is budgeted for upgrading of drainage systems at One Mile Extension and Silver Town Wismar. It is because of our undulating topography and soil type, flash floods and erosion are a constant threat and, thus, much relief will be brought to these to our residents with the work undertaken.

Residents are particularly pleased that potential will be placed at the national level on the Linden Soesdyke Highway, the Linden/Kwakwani fair-weather road and the Linden to Mabaruma road. Particularly, the upgrade of a road of six kilometres at the latter. This will not only bring relief to motorists but also to residents of Wisroc and Jasburg Schemes, since dust in the dry season is unbearable and is a health hazard. Residents of Andiville and Blueberry Hill back road look forward to similar intervention for the back road, Amelias Ward and the back road of Blueberry Hill area.

Finally, under public infrastructure, for capital budget, under land and transport, \$7.4 million is budgeted to purchase all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) which are essential considering our terrain. The total of \$16.2 million capital budget for 2019 is distributed under bridges - \$10.8 million, roads -

\$69 million and a structural development - 29 million. Noted is the absence of the agriculture budget which was \$15 million in 2018 since agriculture is now an independent programme.

Under education delivery in 2018, region administration made tremendous strides in the maintenance and repairs to our schools and provision of modern and better teaching-learning programmes and equipment. The Howell Wilson Primary School in Ituni, Kwakwani Secondary School, some of the riverine schools, Wisburg Secondary, Harmony Secondary and Christiansburg Secondary were some of the schools to have benefited. Much needed rehabilitation work continued on the proposed annex to the Kwakwani Primary School, courtesy of the Kwakwani National Resources Organisation. Budget 2018 provided \$2, 131 million for the education delivery in Region 1. This has since been revised to \$ 2,154 million. This allocation has caused improved delivery in our region. I look forward to work being done in a timely manner in Kwakwani and the Berbice River.

There is the continuous presence of the District Education Officer since the accommodation has been refurbished and it is now ready. With support from the Office of the Prime Minister and the forestry sector, an award ceremony for the first time would have been held for outstanding students of subregion 2 for the Secondary School Entrance Examination (SSEE). Students from Howell Wilson Primary School in Ituni dominated this prize-giving exercise.

Two point four billion dollars is allocated for the region under capital items for education. The capital sum will see \$197 million under buildings used to build a primary school, a nursery school at Bamia, upper Amelias Ward, which will provide relief to residents of the fast growing Amelias Ward New Scheme and it will be for better accommodation for students cramped in the primary school at Bamia under a community centre. Construction of outdoor play areas at Children Garden, Kwakwani waterfront, and Weroni Nursery School will all come from this sum, while much needed insulators will be built at the hostels in Kwakwani and Amelias Ward. Similarly, education delivery, \$3 million is captured for land and water transport which will provide much needed relief for District Education Officers as they patrol the region.

Finally, under furniture equipment, at education delivery, \$50 million is proposed for the provision of school furniture and equipment, including equipment for smart class rooms and technical and

vocational (TechVoc) which is a very important programme in Region 10. For a holistic curriculum, music and sport equipment will also be purchased.

I am convinced that with the allotted \$3.9 billion for Region 10, our residents will be well served and there is every intention to have timely tendering, effective monitoring and evaluation, all which will result in greater impact and outcomes to our people.

I have no reservation in commending this \$300.7 billion Budget 20129 to the honourable House for a save passage.

Thank you. [*Applaud*]

Mr. Neendkumar: I must inform the Hon. Minister Gaskin that for ten years, as he referred, the Auditor General was not allowed to function. There was no function of the public accounts. As for Mr. Rutherford, I would like to remind him that Region 10 had most and best development during the good days of the PPP Government. Do not forget that the first call centre that was built in this country was built in Region 10 and you the people, APNU/AFC closed it down, taking away more than 200 jobs from youths and parents. That is the benefit in Region 10.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to make my contribution to the discussions on this Budget 2019 proposed by Hon. Minister Winston Jordon. I commence by stating that the core aspects include nothing but gaff, fluff and bluff. It is nothing but an 'abortion budget', without real developmental purpose, which came over as erratic and unsound, even as it was read by the Hon. Minister. It will do nothing to unburden the significant loads placed on the backs of citizens, with which the coalition Government's budgets and policies have impregnated our country.

This is the fifth budget of sequel series on the hopeful “good life”, which is now bordering on comedy and entertainment. By now, we are all aware that this coalition Government will not achieve any good life for citizens in general during its tenure of office - none. In 2015, the Government began with a budget, which had the theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. In Budget 2016, it was *Stimulating growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beacons*. With Budget 2017, the target was *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. For Budget 2018, the Government was *Continuing the Journey to*

a Good Life, and this Budget 2019, the Hon. Minister will be *Transforming the Economy Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*.

With each budget, the Government collected more taxes and borrowed more to fill the budget deficits. At the same time, Unemployment has increased, and the majority of citizens are now worse off than they were in May, 2015. This budget advocates increasing the aggregate tax collections by close to 10%, while anticipating growth of 4.6%. It simply means that the Government will extract much of the difference from the people one way or another, by more taxes. The Hon. Minister should not use the term “good life”. No. He has failed in four and he is bound to fail the fifth time.

This budget came out immediately after this APNU and the disappearing AFC suffered two humiliating defeats at the polls in two consecutive local government elections. You and my colleagues on the other side of this honourable House are aware that the Leader of the Opposition moved a no-confidence motion against the coalition Government. This was after his party swept the local government polls, further, given the serious allegations of corruption by this APNU/AFC Government.

We, on this side of the House, with 61% majority at the local government polls, call on the APNU/AFC to bring on the no-confidence motion and it can choose to debate. Further, we call on them to bring forward the People’s Progressive Party (PPP/C) election petition now. We wish to know where the thirty-three false statements of poll came from – bring it on.

Regarding the transforming of the economy addressed in this budget's theme, I wish to state that this Government has destroyed the sugar industry; it is killing the rice industry; bauxite is on a serious decline; forestry and mining also are sliding, it is because of the APNU/AFC inability to manage these sectors, along with the nasty political interference that we are getting from some bullying people.

What is this transformation of our economy that the Hon Minister and his Government are to be held responsible for? The only visible transformations we are seeing include the return of the dark days for our democracy, dark days of economic mismanagement, dark days of procurement, particularly in the health sector, dark days for good governance, dark days for electoral tendencies towards rigging, dark days of hiding US\$8 million oil revenues along with other oil blocks, dark

days of increased taxes more than 200 imposed, dark days for killing public officials, removal of many subsidies, including the one off incentive payment to the police and military, dark days of political persecution of public professionals and degradation of top Opposition officials.

“Empowering People” and “Building Sustainable Communities” are the dreams which will become a reality only under the PPP/C returns to Government in 2020. It has become increasingly harder for persons to own their own homes under this administration. The Hon. Members on the other side of this House cannot deny that prior to 1992, very few citizens got affordable land for residential purposes.

Consequently, many persons were the subject of unusually hard degrading and non-empowering rental conditions. The People’s National Congress (PNC) oversaw these conditions for decades with comfort, so much so that it has become akin to the rental syndrome. The Government continues to pay hundreds of millions in rent for drugs bond and hotel rooms to store goods, the value of which is less than one hundredth the value of the rent. I am ashamed of this. This cannot work.

The Government has moved to persecute former Minister of Housing, Hon. Member Irfaan Ali for the sale of 19 house lots. The PPP/C Government under the Hon. Member Ali's watch allocated to citizens of all ethnic persuasions over 40,000 of the 100,000-plus Government subsidised house lots to build homes. These citizens-built thousands of homes across our country annually. Compared to the 250 units this administration has been constructing since the Budget 2018. This must be a joke. With all of the moneys allocated, the Hon Minister spoke about 163 complete units and the Ministry handing over keys to a mere 43 persons. This is another joke. We all know that this is insufficient. We challenge them because of the recent statement by the top Member of that party. We want to see the names of those 43 persons and then you will know where the racists are. Bring it on, let us see.

1.41 p.m.

The lack of job opportunities has forced many of our youths into a culture of crime, and Minister Ramjattan has accepted this. He said that he does not know what to do. No wonder the Government is expending billions of taxpayers’ dollars to build prisons. Realistically, it is a non-win situation and a remedy, and others in the lockup, has to be the long-term strategy addressed in our budget.

As for sports and recreational facilities, we are fortunate that the PPP/C built some world class facilities. It is disappointing today that these facilities are becoming white elephants. The Guyana National Stadium at Providence, the National Aquatic Centre, the synthetic track and field facility at Leonora, the National Racquet Centre, along with the prestigious National Sports Resource Centre and so many facilities that the PPP built are today virtually becoming white elephants. Gone are the days of the Inter-Guianas Games (IGG). Those games were reintroduced by the PPP/C Government, to give our very young athletes and students, valuable exposure in competitive sport at the international level. APNU/AFC destroyed the IGG and today's sport is dying in our country. Look at my colleague here, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks, her cousin was humiliated. He was elected, won the position to come to the National School Athletics Championship and because he is the son of Indigenous people he was denied the opportunity. She made calls to the two Ministers and the Vice-President and they continued this discrimination. It was so surprising when I heard what the Hon. Minister said about how they will become discriminatory. This must stop in our country, Comrades. We must not discriminate. Guyana belongs to all of us. We were not discriminatory when we were in Government.

As for the community centres and playing fields around the country, all we can see now is high grass and bushes and the facilities are now a haven for snakes and insects. I challenge this Government to tell us how many new industries and jobs it has created over the last four years. It is clear that the main goal of the APNU/AFC coalition Government is to fool our people and promote paramountcy of the PNC party. The PPP/C will return to Government to build a better Guyana where all of our people will enjoy and live a genuinely good life.

As the geographical Member of Parliament in Region 4, I am seriously concerned with lack of development in this region regarding the capital city of Georgetown. The PNC has been in control of the municipal council for decades. Fair-minded persons will not deny that the only period that showed a bit of real accountability and genuine development was the period when the PPP/C had an interim council with men and women of substance. Today, all the people could talk about Georgetown is *choke and rob*, the thieving and the bandits in the city.

The now famous drug bond matter, which was seduced by a PNC supporter, reflects the treatment of health matters by the coalition. Unfortunately, my villager and good friend Dr. George Norton was a victim and he was removed as the Minister of Public Health to make way for sadder state of

affairs. However, the residents are really suffering and there are often no drugs reported in the operating locations. The health care system in Region 4 is all in shambles and becoming liabilities to the communities. Further, this coalition Government is building a health centre at Eccles with moneys that was made available by the PPP/C since 2014. Four years or more and the health centre at Eccles is incomplete and virtually functioning in a dump yard for garbage and animals to feed. As for the health centre at Supply, it is going green with a humongous tree root still growing in the building.

There are but a few goodies being offered in this budget, as the Government is jerked into realisation that the citizens really matter. I will recognise that the Commissioner General, Mr. Statia, from the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), has moved to reduce the burdensome \$5,000 for the taxpayer identification number (TIN) certificate replacement fee that was objected to since 2017. Many great initiatives like this will help to improve the way we do business. The burdensome fee should have never been there in the first place. There is need for change in the whole trajectory of the Government's business and try to abort some of its brutally imposed policies. It may find that the load created by them is already too great.

Among the many serious varieties of prominence is the additional hiding of the non-payment of the US\$18 million ExxonMobil signing bonus into the Consolidated Fund, the still to be finalised accounts of the D'Urban Park fiasco at the dissipation of the country's gold and foreign reserves, coupled with the loss of thousands of jobs with the decimation of the sugar sector, masses increases in the cost of living, the imposition of real hardship on the Guyanese people via Government policies, such as the \$60 billion increase in tax measures. The abuse of power in the eyes of the threatened and hungry has no colour.

Guyanese cannot support this budget which has nothing for our young people, but more and more taxes.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Ms. Garrido-Lowe]: I rise to make my contribution to the debate on Budget 2019 under the theme, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for Good Life*. Once again, Hon. Member Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance, and his hardworking team, have managed to craft a budget

that would touch the lives of all Guyanese in a positive way. It is most definitely a people's budget and I would like to thank and compliment them for that. I would also like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs who worked patiently and tirelessly with the Ministers to ensure that the Indigenous and hinterland people across the ten regions of this country were equitably represented in this budget. Indeed, Budget 2019 theme is quite apt.

I am very proud to say that the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs has been transforming the economy, empowering people and building sustainable communities for the "good life" in Guyana's heartland since 2015, when the APNU/AFC Government came into office. Poverty limits one's right and freedom to realise one's full potential to almost non-existent and our Indigenous people have been living in poverty for too long.

According to Amartya Sen, the United Nations (UN) Nobel laureate, "Poverty is not just a lack of money, it is not having the capability to realize one's full potential as a human being." For the past three years since this Government took office, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs has been focusing on building the capacity of our Indigenous and hinterland people. Your Government does not believe in handouts. We believe in empowering people and giving them the economic support required that they can create successful and meaningful lives for themselves. To this end, the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) has provided one year of training to 3,795 youths in 220 villages over the last two years.

This training allows for capacity building, strengthening of life skills, bolstering literacy and numeracy skills, creating self-awareness and building esteem, strengthening individual vocational interest and entrepreneurial aptitude with agriculture and eco-tourism being mandatory. So far, 2,054 small businesses, some individually and some in groups were established by these youths in villages as far as Karasabai, Tipiru, Achiwuib in Region 9, Monkey Mountain and Red Creek in Region 8 and in also Region 7. Businesses range from cattle rearing, poultry rearing, broilers, layers and ducks, crop and vegetable farming, nursery, grafting of fruit trees, fishing, fish farming, sheep, goat and pig rearing, cassava bread, *quiches*, cassareep production, honey production, hardware stores, floating grocery stores and list goes on and on. You name it and the HEYS is doing it.

To date, Government has invested \$2.3 billion for the development of hinterland youth, and in the Budget 2019, in order to ensure that these businesses grow in strength and flourish, a further \$171.1 million is allocated for monitoring and mentoring along with additional monetary support.

Other than producing young entrepreneurs, HEYS is really a stepping stone for many of the youths. The training they received has allowed them to acquire the confidence in themselves to reach for their stars. Hence, some have moved on to attend the Government Technical Institute (GTI), Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA), Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and the teaching profession. Recently, we have received a request to provide 12 youth from the HEYS programme from Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 to be trained as peer educators and Directly Observed Treatment, Short Course (DOTS) supporters to provide care and support under the national tuberculosis programme.

I am proud to say that village elections during the May to June, 2018 period saw a number of HEYS youth and facilitators being elected to serve on the new village councils. In keeping with the principles of the Green State Development Strategy, in developing green and sustainable economic sectors and in line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is leading in the projection and implementation of these national and international goals.

Sustainable environmentally friendly and income generating project: The Monkey Mountain lapidary for instance, this year, \$10 million was allocated for the workshop. I am happy to say that seven persons are at this very moment being employed in the construction of this workshop which will be completed before year end and will be commissioned in the new year. The women are extremely excited about this and have asked to design the front of the building with semi-precious stones that they have gathered. The first training of youths and other villagers from four villages have been completed and tools to mine the semi-precious stones, when the need arises, have been provided.

The second training is being done, as we speak, in Kurukabaru, where five youths each from another four villages are gathered for two weeks. For 2019, an additional sum of \$3 million has been allocated in this budget to support this project, to purchase jewel boxes and bags crafted by the Indigenous people themselves and the provision of internet connectivity. The marketing of these semi-precious stones, jewellery and ornaments and other craft will be done via the internet,

thus utilising modern technology to generate income for hundreds of residents in Monkey Mountain and the surrounding villages.

This project speaks directly to the theme of Budget 2019 and it is a definite solution to the poverty the people of Region 8 have been forced to endure for years because of the conscious neglect by the previous administration. Twenty-two plus years was enough to implement innovative and sustainable measures to reduce poverty in this region, but the will was not there. Whatever was done is minuscule when compared to this Government and what it is doing in a matter of a little over three years.

1.56 p.m.

The Santa Rosa Ground Coffee: This year, this project received a sum of \$10 million. So far, 15 acres of land have been cleared. The National Agricultural Research & Extension Institute (NAREI) has tested the soil. The Santa Rosa farmers are building the shade house nursery to accommodate the arrival of over 13,000 in-vitro disease free sterile stage one Robusta coffee plantlets from Nature Source Improved Plants (NSIP) in Tapachula, Mexico. These coffee plantlets will be in the nursery for a little over two months before they are ready to be planted in the farms.

A coffee expert from Jamaica, will be on the ground with the farmers to ensure that everything is in order. This is a multi-year project, hence, an additional \$15 million has been budgeted for the construction of the processing facility and furnishing of the said facility next year. This collaborative effort between the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and the Santa Rosa Village Council, has seen the Council donating one acre of land as the site for this project.

With the assistance of the Co-operative Department of the Ministry of Social Protection, the Santa Rosa Coffee Co-operative has already been established. This is another transformative and sustainable project that the almost 10,000 residents of Santa Rosa will benefit from in the next two years and until the next 90 to 100 years. Coffee will become part of their Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). This Government cares for the people. We are not only looking after their present, but the future of their grandchildren, great grandchildren and great great grandchildren.

Smith Creek Crab and Fish Processing Facility - when I visited Smith Creek two years ago, it made me sad to see how our Indigenous brothers and sisters were living in that community. The lands where they built their houses were not filled properly so the yards were mostly muddy and most of their houses had no walls. Many of them cannot read and write either; and it not as if they are living far into the hinterland where access is difficult. They are just beside the river. The residents of Smith Creek were living in that location for several years now, and the powers that be then could have done much to see that they enjoy a better standard of living, but nothing was done.

This Government, because we care for the welfare of our people, in 2018, provided \$10 million for the establishment for a Crab and Fish Processing Facility. As we speak, residents of this community are making the blocks that will be used to build the facility. Approximately 50 workers have been employed to clear one acre of land, dig the drainage around that acre of land and build a koker and a dam. They have already done so and received have their payments. They have now proceeded to making concrete blocks. With construction commencing during this month, the facility is expected to be commissioned early February next year.

This is also a multi-year project and Budget 2019 has an allocation of a further \$6 million for the installation of a solar farm and the marketing aspect of the business. With assistance from Global Seafoods Distributors, residents who will be working in the facility will undergo strict training in the processing of fish and crab at the highest hygienic standard. This project will also impact two nearby communities - Morawhanna and Imbotero and later other riverain communities, transforming their communities, thus raising their standard of living. This is no hand out, this is your Government investing in the ordinary people. Whether they voted for us or not. We are building their capacity and providing the economic support so that they can have the opportunity to live a good life.

Cassava Flour Processing Factory - \$10 million dollars was allocated for this project in 2018 to construct a Cassava Flour Processing Factory; clearing and preparing of 30 acres of land and the purchasing of the cassava sticks for planting. Construction of the facility would commence during this month and should be completed within two and a half months. This will create employment for many in the villages that will be providing most of the materials being used with added persons working on the actual construction.

In the Budget 2019, I am pleased to see that an additional \$16 million will be invested in this project for equipping the factory and operation start up. Training in the processing of cassava flour will also be conducted for persons who will be working in the factory by the Ministry of Social Protection, Board of Industrial Training Department. For training in packaging, we will engage the Ministry of Business.

This is a fantastic project. Not only will the factory produce cassava flour for use in the region and further afield, but it will be producing cassareep, starch and other by products of the cassava. This project will generate sustainable income for the 30 farmers and their families, the entire population of 900 persons in Kwebanna and hundreds of farmers from neighbouring villages. Again, with the assistance of the Co-operative Department of the Ministry of Social Protection, the Kwebanna Farmers' Co-operative has already been established.

The Indigenous people are ready, willing and happy to do what they know best, which is to farm, fish and to do arts and craft. They are excited about the value-added element. This is the opportunity that they have been waiting on for so long. It is an opportunity for them to carve out a good life for themselves with adequate support from their Government. A caring Government and that is who we are.

Sun-dried tomato - it would be remiss of me not to make mention of the Sun-drying Tomato Processing Facility in Paramakatoi. With careful monitoring and nourishing Dr. Suresh Narine and his team from the Institute of Applied Science and Technology (IAST), the Paramakatoi Sun-drying Tomato Facility, continues to grow into a strong cottage industry producing quality tomato ketch-up and salad dressings. Last year, this project started with 51 farmers, now it has grown to 135 farmers, many of whom are women. The one solar dryer, a donation from the Canadian High Commission, is now not adequate to dry all the tomatoes being produced, hence, they have invested \$45 million for another solar dryer this year. Government's investment of \$59 million, plus the Canadian High Commission's grant, is reaping benefits for the hardworking farmers of Paramakatoi.

Budget 2019 supports by the way of almost \$60 million for greener innovative and sustainable income generating projects in Paruima, Region 7; Santa Cruz and Tobago Hill in Region 1 and Morawhanna and Bina Hill in Region 9. These projects will directly impact the poor and the

vulnerable by creating employment and generating income in these communities, thus, raising the standard of living and providing the opportunity for our Indigenous brothers and sisters to live a good life.

Budget 2019, continues to touch the ordinary people's lives in a very special way. The students of Chenapau in Region 8, for instance, walk for two and half days to attend secondary school in Paramakatoi. This has been going on for years. They would sleep the first night in the jungle and continue to walk the next day. As I have said, this has been going on for years. In this day and age, this is unacceptable, even in the hinterland. Hence, the sum of \$2 million has been allocated to build a rest shelter for these students and their parents who visit them periodically. Another \$2 million has been allocated to build another rest shelter to accommodate the students who walk from Karisparu to Paramakatoi. These shelters will bring some form of comfort, while Government will be looking into building proper roads and bridges, so that vehicles will be able to traverse these roads.

Education and Hinterland Development - we cannot underestimate the value of hinterland development through education. Education is still considered one of the most significant steps towards empowering Indigenous peoples to participate and mainstream more fully in their communities and in our beautiful country. It is certainly an indispensable asset to attain freedom and social justice.

The Government of Guyana, through the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Communities, would have delivered a comprehensive support and access programme, which includes the President's Five B's that saw increased attendance and improved performance at the nursery and primary levels in the hinterland. Additionally, the School Uniform Programme, for which \$89.4 million is included in the Budget 2019 Estimates of Expenditures and continues to bring relief to more than 33,000 hinterland students in 67 schools at every level of the school system. All leading to the positive impact, resulting in exceptional performances in students who enjoy quality education through the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs Secondary Scholarship Programme, for which \$108.4 million is in the Budget 2019 Estimates of Expenditures.

We do not seek to change what is working, we add to that, and improve and implement new things. Over the period 2017 to 2018, more than 186 students were enrolled in the programme, while a significant 87% or 89% out of 95 students matriculated with five or more subjects, inclusive of English Language and Mathematics, with grades one to three.

Through quality administration by this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government (APNU/AFC) Government, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is pleased to announce that, because of this programme, more than 67 students would have gone on to register as students at the University of Guyana (UG) and other tertiary institutions.

Government recognising this going need for support for Indigenous and hinterland students in pursuing tertiary education, Budget 2018 provided for \$186 million to construct a dormitory to accommodate 120 students. This dormitory would be completed and outfitted in the first quarter of 2019. This is a demonstration of the APNU/AFC Government's commitment, that Guyanese citizenship, inclusive of our Indigenous peoples are guaranteed equal rights and equal opportunities toward elimination of inequality, particularly between residents of the coastland and the hinterland. To quote His Excellency, this:

“...is essential to ensuring first-class citizenship for everyone.”

Indigenous residents - this Government has also recognised the need for an improved quality of service and accommodation for Indigenous people, who are required to travel to Georgetown for medical treatment and other necessary social services. For example, first time mothers who are referred to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) will be monitored by experienced doctors and Toshaos who need to transact business on behalf of the village. At least three rooms will be provided for them in the extension. The previous facility was designed to accommodate 120 persons, and, at times, there is as much as 193 persons needing accommodation, hence the reason for the construction of the new extension at a cost of \$27 million provided for in Budget 2018.

Budget 2019 has provided \$28 million to furnish this extension, including the new dormitory and the extension of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs Head Office. I must mention that, in partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank and the Ministry of Public Health, a new maternity waiting room was constructed to the tune of \$10.7 million to accommodate 15 beds,

which will add to the 22 beds that existed previously. This will strengthen health delivery and bring comfort to our Indigenous women.

The Year of Indigenous Languages - the sum of \$36 million dollars has been provided for activities to mark the year of Indigenous languages in 2019, which will see villages taking part in various activities to promote the nine languages spoken in Guyana.

2.11 p.m.

Sports - the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs has adopted an all sport policy that sees a facilitator travelling to the various indigenous villages and establishing clubs with their own constitutions. Also, teaching them the game of chess, as I said before in last year's budget speech and promoting football. For the first time ever this year, a football tournament was catered for in the 2018 Budget for the sum of \$1million for the Region 8 football tournament that was carried out in August of this year. This saw also, for the first time ever a Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Director attending this occasion. There are so many things that this budget has to offer, but I cannot, we are two Ministers and Minister Allicock will adequately represent the rest of it.

I would like to thank this Government that I am proud to be a part of, for giving the Indigenous people of this country a chance that they have never had before to transform their lives by empowering them and providing the financial support they need. I have no hesitation in endorsing the 2019 Budget of \$300.7 billion to this august House.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: As I stand to make my contribution to Budget 2019 under the theme "*Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*", first of all, I wish to respond to the Hon. Minister Valerie Garrido-Lowe. After listening to the Hon. Minister, I wonder if we are living in the same country – Guyana. I wonder where all this money was spent, particularly when we talk about the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) programme. From 2016-2018, it is recorded, \$2.3 billion was spent on this programme. The Hon. Minister also said that the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs have been transforming the life of the indigenous peoples. That is why I am wondering if we are living

in the same country because, as I walk this land, as I visit villages and communities, I have not seen this transformation.

The Hon. Minister said that 3795 youths were trained; the Hon. Minister further said that 2054 small businesses. I would really like, and I am asking the Hon. Minister to lay over to this House the information, the name of the villages and the names of the persons who establish these businesses. This is because I have visited, and I would make a point when I go out there, to ask about this project and to ask about the businesses that were established. So, I find it very inaccurate. It is not accurate that 2054 businesses were established by those persons who were trained under the HEYS project. It makes me wonder if this is part of the \$865 million that cannot be really accounted for? Sir, to put our minds at ease and for us to know, we would like the Hon. Minister to lay over to the House the information. There must be records there to show which villages and who are those youths. We would like to know.

The Minister also mentioned that the youths were part of the Toshaos and Councillors elections that was held earlier this year. I am happy to know that, maybe yes, some of the youths are on board in the village council. But, what I know happened at the election is that there was political interference from Members on the other side of the House. That is what I know. Political interference by Ministers and others from the other side of the House and that should not be. We do not want interference in our village elections and it happened. That is for sure what happened. I am not sure how many of the youths who participate in the HEYS are on board in the village council. If they are on board I am happy, but, I am quite sure that political interference happened in our last election.

Sir, I have listened to the Monkey Mountain Project and I have heard that before. Now, I would like to purchase something that is made from precious stones. Could I have a ring, an earring or could I have something that was made from precious stones, please? Let us have the evidence of what is happening, we want to see. We have been hearing about the tomato ketchup and the salad dressing. I am happy to know that we could produce these items in our villages, but we want the evidence. We want to know if the people are now being paid more than \$20 per pound for their tomatoes. We want to know how much the farmers are receiving. This is because, last year, I know that they were getting \$20 a pound. We would like to know how much they are now being paid per pound for their tomatoes. We want to see the evidence because, when we listen to all these

figures of money that is being spent, money is being spent here, there and everywhere and when we go out there the evidence is not there. So, bring the evidence and let us know that, in Santa Rosa, from two years' time unto 100 years, coffee will be the thing, coffee will be in your blood. Coffee was always in the blood of the Santa Rosa people and so we happy.

The Hon. Minister mentioned Smith Creek. Of course, the people in those areas live over the water and we know this. I born and grow in the Pomeroon, where it is known that when a house is built near to the river, water will come under your house. What could be done? I do not know. Hon. Minister, and I would like to know how did you change the situation of the people of Smith Creek.

I am happy to hear that something is being done, so that the children walking from Chenapau to PK would no longer sleep in the forest or they would still sleep in the forest, but under better conditions. Which one? I am not quite sure.

Hon. Minister, while I listened to you on all the bits and pieces of development, I would want to say that the indigenous peoples must have a planned programme. We do not want piece-meal development, we want a plan. Let us see what the plan is for the development of indigenous peoples in this country.

I now turn my attention to the matter that is under discussion, Budget 2019, under the caption "*Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*". Again, we are hearing about this 'good life'. From this side of the House, Budget 2019, lacks the ingredients for the 'good life'. If you do not have the ingredients as a housewife, who knows how to cook, then you cannot produce a proper meal. What will you produce? You will produce a tasteless meal. So, I would like to say that this budget that lacks the ingredients is tasteless – it is a tasteless budget.

In 2018, we heard about the *Journey to the Good Life*. We were on a journey to the good life. Walking towards the good life, searching for the good life or something, but we were on a journey. Today, we are now *Transforming the Economy*. Budget 2019, fails to meet the expectations of the Guyanese people. As I look at Budget 2019, permit me to look at this budget from an indigenous point of view.

Agriculture - in 2017, \$20.6 billion was allocated for agriculture; 2018 - \$19.4 billion and in 2019 - \$17.1 billion. My question is: Could the Hon. Minister tell us what percentage/part of this budget was spent in Amerindian villages and communities? In 2019, I would like to know the same thing and in 2017, where we saw a decrease in the budget. My point is, if nothing substantial was done in 2017 and 2019, what are we going to have now in 2017, when the budget is much smaller... Sorry in 2019. I am saying 2017, because the allocation is \$17.1 billion and that is why I said 2017...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

We would like to know because we are always involved in agriculture. Agriculture is our life. We live on what we produce and now, in all the talks about development and about the 'good life', I would like to know what percentage of this budget has been identified to be spent in Amerindian villages and communities, so that we could expand in the area of agriculture. So that we can be part of this 'good life' with our contribution in agriculture. I would like that question to be answered. I would like to know where is the plan and are the projects that would help the Amerindian peoples of this country to expand in the field of agriculture.

With regards to economic development, it is our right, and the Government has an obligation to promote and to ensure our social economic and cultural development. There is no doubt about that. There is an obligation by Government to ensure that we also develop with the rest of the country.

2.25 p.m.

As I looked ... **[Ms. Broomes: She is wondering.]** I am not wondering, I know what I have to say or what I want to say.

Let me look at 'Destination Guyana'. When we talk about 'Destination Guyana'; when we talk about tourism; when we talk about visitors coming to Guyana, none of them is coming to see Georgetown. They are coming excited to go out there in our hinterland and rural areas. They are coming to see us – the first people of this country. They are coming to see where we live and what we have to offer.

With regards to building sustainable communities for the 'good life', funds must be set aside for our Indigenous peoples to enhance our eco and agro-tourism and tourism in all other forms in our

rural and hinterland areas. To educate us, to build our capacity and to build structures, special funds must be set aside or else do not talk about tourism. Nobody is coming to see Georgetown. When you look at those brochures, when you look at the tourism guides, who do you see - our Indigenous peoples. We are in the forefront and, as such, I am calling on the Government, we are calling on the Government, to make funds available for us to develop tourism in this country. 'Destination Guyana' is the hinterland and not Georgetown. Therefore, special attention must be paid to the hinterland areas. We are not going to stay at the back and you are saying 'Destination Guyana', no, Sir.

I would like to raise a matter here – social cohesion: I see a lot of moneys here being allocated - \$480 million...

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

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: I would like to say that social cohesion, I think, is a mockery. We as Indigenous peoples have been discriminated against. I just want to say, as recent as last week, an eight-year old child from the Mainstay Primary School, who earned his spot at the national level, was discriminated against. It is unacceptable. We have seen, earlier this year, I think it was, when a little boy Joshua Small was humiliated because of his cultural wear. What do we expect when officials on the other side can stand boldly and say that they will give work to their people – the People's National Congress (PNC) and they will do this and that. What do we expect at the bottom? Social cohesion? I am thinking, if Members on the other side understand the meaning of cohesion. Therefore, I call on the Hon. Minister Norton. Sir, you have a big job and you need to start on that side of the House first, before you step out. It is unacceptable what we have to go through. What our children... I am strong. I can take anything. It does not matter to me. I could fight back, but our children, the rights of the child, our children are being humiliated. Our children are being discriminated against. Our children are denied their rights and it is unacceptable.

We talked about education. I would like to see that the Ministry of Education have a special package to address our hinterland teachers. They need training. We need more qualified Teachers. If that special package is not there, when our teachers come out they have difficulties. Where are they going to live? What is going to happen to their families? We need to address that, if we are going to upgrade education in our schools in the hinterland areas. We need better education and

yes, we need more trained teachers, but some special assistance must be given to our hinterland teachers.

I would like to say that the Amerindian Act - it was said, in this presentation, that consultation was done in many regions, including Region 2. I wish to speak for Region 2. One day's notice and a team arriving could not be consultation. I spoke with the Toshaos of Region 2 and they said that they refused to discuss things at short notice. What happened to Free, Prior and Informed Consent? I wish to remind Hon. Minister Allicock....

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

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you, Sir. I wish to remind you, Sir, please make yourself acquainted with the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

In closing, I wish to remind Minister Allicock, who failed miserably to deliver within the three years on the Amerindian Land Titling Project. You have failed miserably Minister. I wish to remind him that on the third day – 29th April, 1999, at a conference, when we were all Toshaos, when he said that the Government should look at land issues with Indigenous eyes and not political eyes and that if they listen to us, we know what lands are ours.

These are things that were said that I wish to remind the Minister of and ask him with which eye he is looking with at our land issues. Is it the political eye or the Indigenous eye because I read recently that he is now eyeing five years' extension. I could eye many things, but what would become a reality? I call on the Minister, therefore, be active and remember that land is important to the Indigenous peoples of this country. Look at it not through your political eyes now, look at it through your Indigenous eyes.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister within the Ministry of Communities [Ms. Patterson-Yearwood]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of the Hon. Minister Jordan and his team for once again delivering a budget that speaks to the progress that Guyana has made and is making under the astute leadership of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) administration.

As I sit here, and I listened to my Comrade just now and some of the others, I am convinced that there is need for mass surgery for Glaucoma cases because the blind cannot see, but the Good Book says “Those who have eyes let them see and those who have ears let them hear”. As you move around this country and you see all the developments and then come here and say to this nation that nothing was done by the APNU/AFC Government, then something is wrong. I have two words for you “Seek help”.

Budget 2018 was aptly titled *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. A journey is not an event, it is a process with many stages. The year 2018 has seen us complete another stage of this journey. I am, therefore, delighted to describe what that stage looks like, from the perspective of the housing sector. I trust that my throat gives me justice today. **[Bishop Edghill: You got throat problem too.]** I would not ask you to lay hands on me.

As at 31st October, no infrastructural development works were completed in Lust En Rust, Zeelugt Phase 3, Recht Door Zee, Zeeburg in Region 3; Sections B and D Non-Pariel; La-Penitence, Perseverance, Covent Garden and Farm Phase II in Region 4; Amelia’s Ward in Region 10; while works are on-going in Providence, Peter’s Hall, Little Diamond and Great Diamond in Region 4.

Consolidation of existing housing areas: – upgrading of road works and other infrastructure development works were completed in a number of areas. We have things to report on, so I cannot spend too much time on what was said over the other side.

Parfaite Harmonie, Westminster and Tuschen in Region 3, Perseverance, Phase 2 Herstelling, Section EE Non-Pariel in Region 4, Block D Bath Region 5, No. 76 Village and Ordinance Fort Lands in Region 6, Amelia’s Ward Phase IB and 2 in Region 10. This component of the programme experienced this level of success because the procurement stage was completed very early.

Upgrading of recreational facilities – we are pleased to say to the House that we have completed upgrading in Tabatinga, Lethem and work-in-progress in Amelia’s Ward, Linden. Works for installation networks were completed in the following areas: Zeelugt Phases 2 and 3, Covent Garden, Peter’s Hall, Barnwell, Eccles Industrial, Perseverance in Region 4, Hope, Experiment in Region 5 and Kilcoy/Chesney in Region 6.

Housing Solutions - the Government continues to move forward with its effort to provide adequate, affordable housing for the Guyanese people by focusing on building complete housing units of a high standard. During the period under review, 202 units were completed and 52 are in progress to be completed by mid-December of this year. One hundred and forty-nine units were completed in Perseverance in Region 4. Of that, 76 two-bedroom duplexes; 42 two-bedroom elevated units; two-bedroom flat units, three-bedroom flat units in Perseverance; 17 units were completed at Experiment in Region 5; and 10 two-bedroom in Onderneeming in Region 3. I must say that this is just the testing ground in Regions 3 and 5 because they were never accustomed to being provided with housing units. Twenty units of the 60 are under construction at Amelia's Ward in Region 10.

The implementation of these programmes would bring relief and improvement to the lives of approximately 3,050 beneficiaries.

2.40 p.m.

The Providence Gardens, formerly known as the Remigrant Scheme - I know my friends are going to take credit for the Remigrant Scheme - was repurposed to include locally-based Guyanese with high affordability, particularly young professionals. Since that change was done around April this year, 331 house lots were allocated, which says that we have people right here who could meet the demand for this particular community. I must say that they have been paying up. Notably, it was rezoned to accommodate light commercial activities, such as supermarket, book stores, pharmacy, *et cetera*, to support residents. Moneys generated from sale of these lots would be used to upgrade the infrastructure in this scheme.

Sustainable housing for the hinterland - Under the Sustainable housing for the hinterland programme, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), 46 families in Barima-Waini, Region 1, and 62 families from the Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo, Region 9, benefited from the subsidised housing component. Another 40 units are under construction in Region 9. Further to the subsidised housing, a total of 19 families benefited from the roof replacement subsidy component. A similar exercise is in progress for another 16 families in Region 1 and three in Region 9.

Over the years, hinterland housing was only focused on Regions 1 and 9, but we are a Government that is inclusive. In 2018, we have extended this similar project to Region 7, and we would further

extend, in 2019, to other hinterland areas. For the purpose of my Colleague Member of Parliament (MP), Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, we are Kako, Kamarang, Waramadong and Quebenang and there is a model house at Jawalla.

Adequate housing and urban accessibility programme - The Government of Guyana, in collaboration with the IDB, has reformulated a loan for the road network upgrade and expansion programme. The project, adequate housing and urban accessibility programme, is being implemented by the Ministry of Communities, through the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA). The project is comprised of three components: affordable and sustainable housing, consolidation of existing housing schemes and implementation of support and institutional strengthening. Under this programme, Guyanese in selected communities, more particularly between Little and Great Diamond on the East Bank Demerara (EBD), Georgetown, the East Coast Demerara (ECD) corridor and La Parfaite Harmonie on the West Bank Demerara (WBD), would benefit from road upgrades, construction of walkways, rehabilitation of community facilities, installation of street lights, home improvement subsidies and the core house support.

To date, the CH&PA has fulfilled all the conditions prior to the first disbursement. So, we are ready to go. Preparation of tender documents was completed, and the bidding process has commenced. Application forms have been distributed for the affordable and sustainable housing component. This would run for a period of three months, from November this year to February 2019.

Out of the projected 1,000 allocations for 2018, as at the end of October, allocations stand at 742 or 74.2%. These allocations were done in Regions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10. When we promoted the Housing Solutions 2017 and Beyond, in May of last year, among the type of houses featured was the duplex units. The critics had a field day. The naysayers went to town. Many said that it was a return to the Burnham days. Others contended that no one wanted to live in tenement arrangements. Well, as the late, great President Nelson Mandela once said:

“It always seems impossible until it’s done.”

I want to say, it is done. Some people must see it to believe it, but transformational leaders give people a vision to believe in. I am delighted to inform this House that 47 flat duplexes and two elevated units were constructed and fully allocated. In other words, people have embraced the idea

and now we do not have enough supply to meet the demand. We also built and allocated 66 two-bedroom elevated units, 14 two-bedroom bungalows, 10 flat two-bedroom units and 11 flat three-bedroom units so far. Additionally, we have already handed over 64 keys for Housing Solutions 2017 and Beyond.

Mr. Speaker, 1,110 applicants had their transports and certificates of title processed and 2,009 applicants actually received their transports and titles as at 31st October, 2018.

The CH&PA's planning function- I must say that many persons do not understand that the CH&PA has a major role in the planning function in this country. Many persons think that the CH&PA is just about house lots and houses. But we have a major role and more than ever we are playing that role because as you move around this country, you see so much confusion, and you are left to wonder.

The planning unit processed 788 applications as at October, 2018. This represents 98.5% of the planned target for 2018. One spatial development plan for Sophia was completed and procurement is ongoing for the East Bank, Eccles-Grove, development plan. Planning sessions were completed with nine municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) in Regions 3, 4 and 5. Sessions are also scheduled for NDCs in Regions 2 and 6, in January, 2019. Four housing areas within the Bartica Municipality and five within the Lethem Municipality were handed over. Housing areas within Greater Georgetown are next in line.

Squatter regularisation - Regularised squatter lots allocated - Efforts to curb the scourge of squatting continued apace. To this end, 211 regularised squatter lots were allocated, and 209 titles were issued. However, there has been a slow response by persons approved for allocation in making their payments. The CH&PA will continue to work with these persons. The CH&PA is currently commissioning a study on squatting in collaboration with other relevant agencies.

Seventy-four informal settlers from the Lamaha Canal Reserves would be relocated to Cummings Lodge in the new year. The buildings were numbered, household profiles were completed, and an inventory is to be completed by the end of this year. We are a caring Government.

In keeping with the CH&PA's community engagement strategy, the following activities were conducted: home owner sensitisation sessions, where 240 home owners participated in home

owner sessions across 11 communities in Regions 1, 4 and 9. Participants were sensitised on matters such as: building standards, expansion options and care and maintenance of their home. They were also issued with a maintenance manual, prepared by the CH&PA. In Region 4, the home owners were sensitised on matters such as: planning standards and compliance, the agreement of sale, expansion options, building design and community engagement activities.

The agency engaged 26 Local Democratic Organs, including Amerindian Village Councils, Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs), Municipal Councils and NDCs. We engaged the Amerindian Village Councils on project monitoring and project start up, and project close out workshops, specific to the sustainable housing for the hinterland programme in Regions 1, 7 and 9. We engaged the RDCs in Regions 1, 4, and 9 to provide updates on the projects in their respective regions. We further engaged the municipalities of Bartica and Georgetown concerning the handing over of housing areas within the municipalities' boundaries. Similar engagements were done at the level of the NDCs in Regions 3 and 4. We also engaged the Buxton/Foulis NDC regarding development works for a community ground within the NDC's boundary.

As the Minister responsible for housing, I engaged several stakeholders, both locally and internationally. These engagements focused on dealing with issues such as squatter eradication, private/public partnership initiative, acquisition of land for housing and exploring working with the banking sector to provide mortgages to potential homeowners. These engagements would intensify in the new year. Additionally, the CH&PA participated in several local exhibitions as a means of sensitising and educating the public about the agency's programmes.

2.55 p.m.

The International Decade for People of African Descent Assembly allowed us to engage small business owners on the procurement process and how they can apply for contracts. A brochure was developed to provide guidance on the procurement process.

The Timber Exhibition allowed us to give the public a preview into the new low-cost housing initiative that the CH&PA will be embarking on very soon.

At the Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce’s exhibition, patrons were able to see the housing solution options which will be available in their region as well as access information on the process of acquiring a housing solution.

At the Green Expo, we showcased an example of an affordable energy-efficient house, equipped with solar panels, light emitting diode (LED) lights and other components. That is in keeping with Guyana’s ‘green’ agenda. I am happy to say to this House and to the people of Guyana that the house will be on display at the upcoming 2019 Housing Expo and will be given away to a lucky winner. Free. That is how we do it.

A team from the CH&PA – we talk about empowerment - attended a Project Management training in Washington, DC and an International Development Bank (IDB) sponsored event here at home. Several senior managers attended the Caribbean Urban Forum seminar with emphasis on urban planning. Other staff attended the After-Katrina Study Tour in the person of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO); and in the person of the Chief Developing Planner, a programme in Latin America on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.

The path ahead - 2019 work programme details - After looking at what we have accomplished, I now want to share with this House and with the people, what we plan to accomplish in 2019. We have recognised that this is a big year for us, and we are going to do what we know to do best; and we are going to leave, in 2020, our comrades on the other side to remain on the other side. Guided by the measures of Budget 2019, under the theme “Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life,” we will pursue the following programmes.

In pursuit of Government’s ‘green’ agenda, the CH&PA has reviewed the design layout of schemes to include elements such as commercial spaces, green spaces, access to services, and improved mobility features, such as bicycle lanes and walkways. These features are included in the proposed design, starting with the Cummings Lodge housing development, which we hope will be the model for all future developments. Also, housing areas such as Sophia will be retrofitted to accommodate these features. Further, the CH&PA will partner with the private sector in the construction of green, low-cost houses that will have features such as LED lights, plumbing features that support less use

of water, and an improved septic tank display. The agency will promote the use of energy-efficient lights and renewable energy, such as solar.

It is widely known that persons in the lower income bracket represent the largest number of families in need of housing, and they are also the group that has the most challenges to acquire decent, affordable housing. We will be addressing this situation, frontally. The CH&PA has designed several low-income housing units, which will be on display during our exhibition in 2019. The cost of these units commences at \$4 million. In 2019, the agency will construct approximately 350 to 400 units in several areas. In addition, we will work with the private sector to deliver additional units across the country. House lots will be made available to those who are desirous of constructing their own homes. Additionally, low-income housing schemes throughout the country will benefit from infrastructure upgrade. These areas include: Sophia, La Parfaite Harmonie, Belle West, Uitvlugt, Ituni, Kwakwani and Kilcoy/Chesney, among others.

New Infrastructure Developments - \$3 million will be spent to do feasibility studies and designs for proposed new areas in Mabaruma, Region 1, and Lethem, Region 9.

Some \$1.926 million will be spent on infrastructural development in Anna Catherina, Region 3; Cummings Lodge and Providence, Region 4; Burma, Region 5 – Ms. Wade, you are going to feel good about that; and New Amsterdam, Region 6. This will open up some 213.5 acres of land for housing or 1,231 house lots.

Some \$315 million will be spent on the construction of 4.2 kilometers (km) of access road from Farm to Little Diamond in Region 4.

Road Upgrades - \$472.5 million will be spent to upgrade 11.25 km of roads in the following areas: Schoonord, La Parfaite Harmonie, Onderneeming, Westminster, Recht Door Zee, Lust En Rust, Belle West - Phases 1 and 2, Zeelugt - Phase 2, and Uitvlugt in Region 3; Providence - Phase 2, Herstelling, Farm Phase 1, Section D North - Non Pariel, Good Hope - Phase 2, and Hope/Dochfour, Region 4; Experiment, Region 5; Kilcoy/Chesney in Region 6; Tabatinga in Region 9; and Amelia's Ward - Phase 2 and Block 22 in Region 10.

Some \$204 million will be spent to provide full and/or partial subsidy for the construction of houses for 51 families in Region 7.

Some \$3 million will be spent on electrical installation in Recht Door Zee, Zeeburg/De Willem, lot PP - La Penitence, Non Pariel - Sections B & D, Providence, Peters Hall, Providence New Industrial, and Amelia's Ward in Region 10.

Some \$150 million will be spent on home improvement, repairs to roofs, walls, floors, expansion to overcrowded houses, sanitation, *et cetera*.

Some \$200 million will be spent on the Core Homes Support, construction of core houses for single family households and family living in structures that are non-habitable in Region 4.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have five minutes left.

Ms. Patterson-Yearwood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Some \$162 million will be spent on sidewalks. Construction of 6 km of reinforced concrete sidewalks will be done in Regions 3 and 4.

There is so much more that we plan to do in 2019 that will certainly, certainly seal a victory in 2020, but time does not permit.

The Hon. Minister of Finance included in his Budget Speech that the Government has commenced discussions with our development partners to secure more financing to undertake new housing development. Once successful, funds will be provided to upgrade infrastructure in all CH&PA schemes, without exception, and the construction of houses in all regions.

In Region 1, Mabaruma is earmarked for significant upgrade. Cocorite Hill Housing Scheme will benefit from road upgrades and the construction of a community facility. In Region 2, roads will be upgraded at Anna Regina, Onderneeming and Charity. In Region 8, at Mahdia, a transportation terminal, community centre and concrete sidewalk will be constructed.

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

Ms. Patterson-Yearwood: Housing is important for many aspects of healthy living and well-being. In an online article titled "The three housing problems that most affect your health," the *Guardian* asserts:

“A safe, settled, home is the cornerstone on which individuals and families build a better quality of life, access the services they need and gain greater independence.”

I want to close by saying that, it is with this in mind, our Government has embraced a policy direction that seeks to provide accessible and affordable housing in sanitary and safe communities, with the necessities for wholesome and dignified living. And we have moved beyond the approach of providing serviced lots to creating cohesive and sustainable communities. These factors have driven CH&PA’s 2018 programme, and we worked assiduously to meet the housing need of our people. The journey continued in 2018; 2018 will be history in a few days; 2019, the next stage of the journey, beckons. For as long as one family lacks adequate housing, we will not rest. Guided by the measures outlined in Budget 2019 ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member.

Ms. Patterson-Yearwood: Thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Dr. Westford: Mr. Speaker, I rise to add my contribution to this Budget debate.

Let me wholeheartedly thank the staff of the Ministry of Finance for the great effort they must have exercised in the preparation of this year’s Budget.

I had paid keen attention to the Budget presentation, another large Budget in our nation’s history - \$277 billion plus. But when it ended, there was nothing to be overly excited about. What could we debate, other than to ask, when will our people be afforded the dignity of a good life?

3.10 p.m.

Now, more than ever, there is much unhappiness, cynicism and despair, largely because our affairs are being poorly managed by this Coalition Government, which professed to have had the magic keys to skyrocket Guyana’s economy and provide a good life for all. The truth is, even if they make another sweetheart deal with Houdini for him to join the Coalition, he would not be able to assist them with that magic trick.

I am sure, without a doubt, that there will be a grand bramble offered in the rebuttal from the other side to excuse their complete failure as administrators. I am sure they will do their utmost to try to spin and confuse us with bull thirds and statistics that they themselves will not be able to explain

logically, but the time for that is done. The A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) partnership honeymoon is long over. We are fed up of the experiment with their political instability and their incompetence that has become a drag on the economy and a major distraction to our people.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that the issues on which this Government won its mandate were (1) crime, (2) the 16% Value Added Tax (VAT), which was said to be excessive, and (3) the perception of massive corruption in Government. On every count, all the hope and promise of an improved Guyana have turned out to be an illusion - a mirage. The citizens of this country have *jumped from a warm frying pan* into an *expensive hell fire* where political sniping, Cabinet's instability, incompetence and corruption are the hallmarks of our new politics.

The taxpayers and the citizens of this country are growing wiser and maturing politically. No matter how this failed Government tries to spin, rename, rebrand, reposition or just sound plain naïve, what they are foisting is more hardship on a daily basis.

The APNU Coalition offered itself to the people of this country, based on a promise of lower VAT taxes, on the basis of competence and the promise of a good life for all. The last five record Budgets came from the same people who claimed that the Treasury was empty when they took over, that we were in a state of financial ruin, that the People's Progressive Party (PPP) Government mismanaged the country and that *the sky was about to fall*. However, if anything they were saying about an empty Treasury were true, then where did they get all this money from to present all these large budgets? What has allowed them to spend so much over the past three years? Their dishonesty is boundless.

The tax exemptions on the retroactive salary increases for 2018 is welcomed by the public servants but they are very sceptical about the promise of salary increases for 2019, after discussions with the relevant Trade Unions, as was mentioned by the Hon. Minister of Finance. Sir, even the head of the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) is sceptical that this pronouncement will materialise. Once again, more vacuous promises.

The allocation of \$35.9 billion to public health may sound like a lot of money, but for a sector which is being plagued with problems that could easily be classified as a crisis, this sum is inadequate. We have repeatedly heard questions being asked of the Minister of Public Health, by Members of the Opposition, about the shortage and unavailability of drugs and other medical

supplies at our medical institutions, and more alarming, the increase in the number of maternal and neonatal deaths. Without a doubt, both Ministers of Public Health will tell us about the grandiose plans of the Ministry for the new budget cycle, but Sir, as the saying goes, *the horses will starve as the grass is growing* or, to be more specific, our mothers and babies will continue to die unnecessarily while awaiting the fruition of the grandiose plans.

We are aware that education is the pillar for nation building and, as such, the huge allocation to this sector is justified. But, again, without proper planning and more effective implementation, it will be a further waste of much needed funds, especially since billions of unspent dollars continue to be returned to the Treasury by this agency annually. My Colleagues with responsibility for education will ventilate more on the issues affecting this sector.

Another sore point is national security and law and order. This is a matter of great concern to every citizen and, as I said before, it was one of the pillars on which this Coalition ran for Government. An absence of law and order affects us all and, therefore, knows no political or other boundaries. In recognition of this fact, we, on this side of the House, remain entirely supportive of a nonpartisan approach to these matters. Our citizens and visitors cannot be allowed to be *sitting ducks* in the face of this Government's inability to articulate and successfully implement an effective crime plan. This failure is exacerbated by the Government's reckless and wanton dismantling of our national security systems which has denied us the protection that citizens deserve. The Government has budgeted \$35 billion and more for this new budget cycle. This, however, in the absence of an effective sustainable plan, is tantamount to throwing good money down the proverbial drain.

The Guyana Police Force (GPF) is the primary agency for dealing with crime prevention and detection in Guyana. There is no substitute for good police work. As such, we believe that this society owes not only a debt of gratitude to this institution, but also that we should exert our best efforts to ensure that their working conditions and general welfare are taken seriously. We must be concerned about the work and life balance of our police officers and other law enforcement personnel, given that they function in highly stressful and difficult environments. It was for this reason that the PPP/C Administration had instituted an annual one-month salary bonus as a salary relief which was unceremoniously taken away from them by this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition.

As I close, in my final two minutes, I simply want to say that the biggest problem facing this country today is the Government. We need a Government that we can trust. The level of trust in any Government has never been lower in this country. This Government has failed and will convince no one with its self-serving, incredulous rhetoric which this Budget represents. We are, without a doubt, heading for the precipice. The people of this nation demand to be allowed to live a decent life. We demand to be given the opportunity to access quality healthcare and quality education. They are fed up of hearing about plans and feasibility studies that bear no fruit. The nation is fed up of promises. Promises, as we know, are comforts to a fool. We started the day by referring to verses from songs. I, myself, would like to say a verse from one of *Bob Marley's* famous songs which states: **[Ms. Ally: Let us hear the song.]** I am not going to sing.

“You can fool some people sometimes but you cannot fool all the people all the time.”

We, as citizens of Guyana, demand jobs and a good life which must not, and I repeat, which must not be conditional on whether we are friends or card-bearing members of any political party whatsoever.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Public Service [Dr. Roopnaraine]: Mr. Speaker, Colleagues and fellow Hon. Members of the National Assembly, I am pleased, this evening, to make my contribution to this year's Budget presentation. More than a pleasure, however, it is, I am fully aware, my duty to provide an even further perspective on the comprehensive summary prepared by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan.

The 2019 Budget is a special one in many ways. It is special in that it is the Budget that marks the end of a particular period in our economic history and the Budget that prepares us for the transition to what will be a transformative era, where we stand to become, in a tangible way, the mythical El Dorado that we have long aspired to be.

As the Minister of Finance noted, this is the penultimate budget of the first five years of this Administration and of the 50th anniversary of our status as a Republic. It is a budget, therefore, in which we, as a Government, make a case to the people that we are worthy of the stewardship of

this beautiful nation, not simply into our next five years as the Executive, but into our second half century as an independent Republic.

There can certainly be no argument that the broad vision is there - A good life for all Guyanese in a green economy. There can be no argument that the policy that supports and extends this vision is being created and implemented every day, from the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS), currently in its final stages of preparation, to, among other things, the provision in the upcoming years' budget for the removal of the Value Added Tax and Duty on the importation of vehicles intended for the use of persons with disabilities.

3.25 p.m.

It is not enough in itself, however, to have a grand vision or progressive policy. We must ensure that we have the muscular capacity to carry out that vision or it will collapse. When it comes to the implementation of the policy that will take us into the future, the programmes that make this generous budget meaningful to the citizens of the country, that muscular capacity rests in the public service and the responsibility for ensuring that this capacity is kept optimal resides in my portfolio, the Ministry of the Public Service.

This year's appropriation of \$1.95 billion, almost 30% more than the current year's expenditure and 60% more than 2017's, represents this administration's commitment to demonstrably building capacity in the Public Service.

One of the primary innovations that this administration has brought to the mission of significantly enhancing, indeed transforming public service management is the introduction of a Planning and Analysis Unit. The purpose of this unit, introduced last year, is simple. It is to provide evidence-based planning an oversight to the management of public service, academic and training opportunities offered to Guyanese with a special focus on accessibility and ensuring that there is value for money in the distribution of scholarships, whether fully or partially funded.

This unit hit the ground running with its first critical task being the establishment of a priority training area matrix that distributes priority subjects across the range of available institutions and partners. For example, with the United Kingdom, our primary international partner for the

provision for public service academic and training opportunities, a comprehensive gamut of priority areas has been established.

In the oil and gas sector 2017/2018 scholarship opportunities focus on master's degrees in petroleum data management, petroleum expiration and oil and gas technology. In the thematic area of information management, master's degrees were offered in a range of areas, including records management, document analysis, software engineering and cyber-security. In addition to degrees offered in the health and agricultural sectors, priority areas also included heritage, museum studies, archives restoration and management as well as social cohesion mediation of conflict studies.

With regard to the general operations of the Ministry of Public Service, the Training Division, based on a needs analysis initiative undertaken by the Planning and Analyst Unit has undertaken several measures to enhance public service training locally. There has been a modern upgrade of the training room with more works still to be done, an aesthetic and catalogue upgrading of the Ministry of Public Service special library. The implementation on monitoring and evaluation measures developed to assess the impact of training in order to gauge overall achievements and to plan future interventions. All of this is with a deliberate focus towards having training programmes complement the 2018 education month theme, *Education for a good life through innovation and "STEAMS"*.

With regard to enhancing the management of information of the department, an increase investment was made in the provision of internet services by switching to high speed internet provided by the National Data Management Authority.

When this administration came into office, one of the first commitments made by His Excellency President Granger, that there should be a professionalised public service, began at the level of induction. Out of this vision came the concrete institution, the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service. The first batch of 58 cadets from around the country, graduated in December of 2017, one year ago, and the second batch of 60 cadets began their programme in November of last year. One of the primary missions of the college is in addition to ensuring that adequate capacity is developed in the public service from an entry level, but to also ensure that capacity is equitably distributed around the country according to regional needs. Towards that end, cadets are recruited from around the country and on completion of their programmes are placed in public service

institutions in their region of their origin. Complementary to that purpose is the inclusion of study tours into the curriculum covering Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 in order that cadets have a sense of the scope of the national public service and the needs of regions outside of their own.

For 2019, the Ministry intends to improve the facilities of the college by the acquisition of a new 30-seater bus to facilitate students transport, equipment to assist in transition to the institution smart classroom initiative, enhancement to the training building at Ogle and the procurement of additional more cost-effective living facilities.

It is the primary purpose of my portfolio, as I indicated in my introduction, to ensure that this country is prepared via the enhancement of skills available to the public service to ably meet and manage the transformative future that awaits us. As I refer to in addressing the work of the Planning and Analysis Unit, the Ministry of the Public Service fields a wide range of scholarships across a variety of subject areas undertaken across scores of institutions in Guyana as well as countries and every continent and islands across the globe. To give this Assembly a more concrete idea of the numbers, I could inform you, as of the end of July this year, there were 253 students engaged in continuing studies in two dozen countries, including countries as close as Brazil, Trinidad, Grenada and Barbados. The countries as far away as China, India and Japan.

We have scholars undertaking academic programmes in familiar partners like the United Kingdom (UK) Canada and the United States of America as well as in less traditional partner countries, such as Thailand, Indonesia and Georgia. Of these overseas students, slightly less than one-third, 71, are completing their studies and returning to Guyana to contribute to the public service. Also, as of the end of July this year, we also had a total of 978 students continuing studies at 14 institutions across Guyana, including Texila University, Art Willian and Harry Wendt Aeronautical School, the Guyana School of Agriculture, the Carnegie School of Home Economics, the E. R. Burrowes School of Art and the University of Guyana. The latter accounting for the vast majority of continuing students. As of the same period, there were some 58 fully funded overseas scholarships being undertaken in ten countries and 167 partially funded overseas scholarships being undertaken in 20 countries. It is towards this goal that the lion's share of this year's allocation to my Ministry goes towards training and academic scholarships, \$1.5 billion representing a 50% increase over last year's expenditure of \$1.08 billion.

Finally, my Hon. Members of this Assembly, I understand that rigorous debate and expenditure in various areas of national budget is congressed with the spirit of this Assembly. There is absolutely no other way of ensuring that the interest of citizens is protected. In this regard, I anticipate and welcome a dogged interrogation from the Opposition with regard to expenditure allocated to the Ministry to Public Service and subsequently I hope unanimous approval on this critical area of public expenditure.

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

Mr. Dharamlall: Before I start I would like to commend the makeup artist of Comrade Amna Ally for her nicely done rouge.

There are some adjectives which we could use to describe Budget 2019 and possibly even a number of phrases. When I looked at the body language of the Hon. Minister of Finance, as he was presenting his four and a half hours marathon, I noticed that this Government is in a state of nervousness and fear. I think that the battering that the Government took at the November 12 local government elections where it could have only mustered just over 34% of the electorate and the imminent no-confidence vote tabled against it jolted a knee-jerk budget presentation.

The poor performance, or may I say the super underperformance of the economy, though ill-advised policies and propaganda driven interventions of the Government did not create space beyond what was presented in Budget 2019. As a result, Budget 2019 is indicative of Government that is borrowing more, taxing more and spending more. A Government that has no plans for how, as a country, we could do more. This could very well be the last budget of this Government and its contents are a combination of four years of failures.

It has now become obvious that the “good life” promises that have been pontificated so liberally by the regime were constructed on sand and on the poorest foundation. Rather than being built upon a rock, they built it upon sand. Those of you who know the Bible very well, we know that a wise man built his house upon a rock. I would suspect that they are not very many wise on the opposite side of the House, which allows me to posit that this budget is based heavily on inequality and ideological morass where the poor are most affected. My honourable colleague, Irfaan Ali exposed the statistics earlier.

This Government lacks an ideological base which is built on working class enhancement. That is why this budget does not speak very clearly and definitively to job creation and addressing the 32-plus thousand jobs and primary livelihoods that have been lost over the last three and a half years. The taxation fetish, which has become synonymous with this Government, is ever present in Budget 2019. The continued deleterious and damaging effects on the poor and the vulnerable are still on the fast track. We now live in a country where poor people, working people, business people, breadwinners, mothers and, most importantly, young people who have become disillusioned, demotivated and unenthusiastic with the direction of this Government.

3.40 p.m.

Whilst the record of the PPP/C is well of proven success during its reign as Government and it is well documented during our 23 years of Government, this current coalition Government operates without a clear economic plan to ensure healthy economic growth, a stable currency lowering the public debt, an expanded GDP, cutting edge investments and job creation possibilities for tens of thousands of young people. The long and short of Budget 2019, I would classify as being cruel and callous, because it gives pittance, \$3.5 billion approximately in the tax measures, but it takes a vault in excess of \$31 billion in tax collection in 2019.

As we speak of tax measures, I would like to share that Budget 2019 is unrealistic and unsustainable in the medium to long term. Why do I say so? The reduction of VAT that this Government campaigned on from 16% to 14%, it claimed that prices were going to be reduced and cost of living was also going to be lower. What we now have, in 2017, VAT collection was \$42.5 billion. In 2019, at 14%, VAT collection is expected to increase to Guy\$54.464 billion and we are all paying for this. VAT exemption versus the zero-rated VAT. We know that the Government said practically everything that was zero-rated before previously, including baby milk, as we had done, pampers, and so forth, is now VAT exempted. The fundamental difference between VAT exemption and zero-rate VAT is that input VAT cannot be reclaimed and that is why we find that final prices or consumer prices are still so exuberant and the cost of living is going out of the window.

What about corporation tax that private businesses pay? Corporation tax in 2017 was Guy\$30.13 billion. It is expected to rise to \$36.355 billion in 2019. This again, who is going to be paying for

all of this? In effect, the final consumer is the one who is going to be bearing the cost of all of these.

Let us look at further at revenues. Bank of Guyana profits have deteriorated. In 2017, Bank of Guyana profits were \$3.75 billion. In 2019, it is expected to deteriorate by 44 % to \$2.1 billion.

Let us now look at the natural resources sector. Rents and royalty, the primary source of income of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), are reduced by 36% from \$9.42 billion in 2017 to \$5.95 billion expected in 2019. One must ask the question, and I hope that the Government has the answers, why royalties are reducing?

We would also look at incomes, the Guyana Gold Board. A reduction of 55% in revenues, \$73.92 billion in 2017, the Guyana Gold Board is expected to earn just \$33.34 billion in 2019. These are instructive numbers for all of our country to understand, and especially those who represent the Government, because the fanfare and the regaining of the House on an early budget and a \$300 billion budget, when we think of these figures, we realise that the output of the Government on the expenditure of the budget does not match what is expected by the people of this country.

The natural resources sector is now in a stalemate or state of permanent decline. Everywhere we go, every single miner, every forester that you come into contact with is worried and is in despair that their loans cannot be repaid, that their bills cannot be paid, their equipment cannot be repaired and a machinery cannot be maintained.

The oil sector, which has its genesis in the PPP/C, is now before us. We are 12 months before our first drop of oil is produced. ExxonMobil, only today, announced its tenth well, which it drilled, we now have about five billion barrels of oil. Twelve months away our country is worst off because of bad and - I dare say - corrupt negotiations of the coalition Government, regarding the oil contract. To date, Guyana does not have a local content policy, so how would our country benefit? To date, there is no sustainability plan of how oil revenues will be used to develop our country. To date, we are unprepared, as a country, to even audit the oil contracts between Government and the oil companies, so there is a good possibility that we will be paying cost oil in perpetuity. The decimation of the main sectors of the economy, which are the main source of the employment, community development and food security, is without doubt the most visionless and vindictive pursuit in the modern era. Seven thousand sugar workers - I repeat Comrade Volda Lawrence,

seven thousand sugar workers - have lost their jobs because of the vindictiveness of your Government.

On the Essequibo Coast, farmers are paid \$300 now, as I stand before you, for a bag of paddy, when, in fact, this Government claimed that it is going to pay farmers up to \$9,000 for a bag. The reason I raised this is because on the Essequibo Coast, at local government elections, there are 60 constituencies, the PPP won 46, APNU could have only mustered 14, the AFC could not even find a candidate to contest local government elections in Region 2. Just for your information.

The budget measures, delineated in the 11 pages of the speech, are counter-productive to stimulating in the economy. It gives one impression that the Government is driving in darkness without any headlights on. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, where are the poor-poor measures? Where are the incentives to generate productivity in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors? Where are the policies to engender local content participation in the oil sector? Where are the reforms that will ensure that our Constitution is compliant with the dreams and aspirations of our people?

One expects that the budget is an imperative tool to building a strong political process. The enhancement of good governance, the curbing and curtailing of corruption, which seems to be one of the things that is overtaking this Government, the building of trust amongst the political players, the fostering of goodwill between Government and the people, Budget 2019 is none of this. It is four and a half hours of verbiage that takes us blindly careening into the path of disaster. Budget 2019 is a grand show of incomparable incompetence and an aptitude.

Speaking of constitutional reform, may I remind that this had been a colossal failure over the last three and a half years to the extent that poor leadership and shameful levels of governance have overtaken this country at all levels. I wonder who heads the constitutional reform process in this Government. Let us hope not that constitutional reform is not just a rubber stamp.

The embroiling of bad governance, lack of accountability and transparency and malfeasance through proclaiming frauds and executive interference have become the norm these days. It is now obvious that both governance is a cliché rather than based on principles that are logical, fair and instructive to nation building and national prosperity. On this issue of good or bad governance, public servants and contractors of this country are beseeched with fear and fear of victimisation.

Only recently, the chairperson of the PNC, who is also the Minister of Public Health, is quoted in the *Stabroek News* edition of 30th November, 2018, on the front page headline, I quote, “The only friends I got is PNC so the only people I could give work to is PNC.” The Hon. Minister is heckling saying “So what is wrong with that?” It is fundamentally wrong. This country cannot move forward when the Chairman of the PNC and the *de facto* leader of the PNC is only focused on providing opportunities for card bearing Members of the PNC.

This uncontrollably crudity and quite unintelligent defence of it by the AFC Chairman, Raphael Trotman, who by way has been absent for quite a number of months and totally missing, spoke volume of how unhinged and unfair and possibly despotic this regime is. Rather than being qualified and employed through merit and fairness, the PNC’s chairman and AFC’s leader are promulgating employment through a PNC membership card.

Despite all of the verbosity in the budget, it is without a single major initiative to create industries that will generate enormous jobs with comparable incomes. I wish to posit that what is single new enterprise or job will be created through this budget, maybe except the proliferation of dog food stands across Guyana. Sorry to say, but the Minister of Finance has somehow become the centrepiece of this numerous exaggerated show of Budget 2019. The Minister prevaricated some positive growth, but cannot come clean and explain to this nation where exactly is the growth that he speaks of. Is it the private sector? No. How many jobs are created? None. Which segments of the business sector? He does not know.

An honest and expert perusal of the economic indicators, one can conclude that it is borrowed growth through increasing recurrent expenditure in non-productive areas. Hon. Member Mr. Ali spoke about the billions of dollars of expenditure on consumer bills earlier. No wonder our public debt is almost two times the size of our current revenue. We are moving from \$1.1 billion in 2015 to over \$1.8 billion by the end of 2018. This works out to \$476,000 per person owing in public debt in our country. A baby that is born tomorrow morning is born in \$476,000 of public debt. When the Islamic Development Bank US\$900 million loan is approved, each person in Guyana will owe, in public debt, \$728,000. The Government needs to cut its hype and theatrics about this budge. For all intent and purposes, Budget 2019 will increase the bondage of debt on our citizens.

Do not be sweetened by the meagre free ‘Bs’. Mr. Jordan’s economic of growth increase taxes, increases borrowing and increasing spending and we end up with the Jordan effect, a slowdown economy. The end result is an overtaxed, unproductive, uncompetitive country laden with insurmountable debt. There is no equal; there is no parallel; there is no bibliography to such economic mismanagement and incompetence. This Government does not know what it is doing, so I am enthralled that Budget 2019 may very well be the last of the APNU/AFC.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

3.55 p.m.

Minister within the Ministry of Public Health [Dr. Cummings]: Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Members, members of the media and visitors, a very good afternoon to you all. I rise today to a very good afternoon to you all. I rise today to register my resolute support for Budget 2019 which was recently presented on Monday, the 26th November, 2018 to this august body, by my erudite colleague, the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston DaCosta Jordan.

This budget is better than good as it should. Budget 2019 remains consistent with the applied practice of good governance as well as, equitable allocation and distribution of resources in line with the Green State Development Strategy. This APNU/AFC Government is committed to providing avenues for the increase in material wealth and a further advancement in the health and well-being of all, the people of Guyana, in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals 1, 3, 6,10, and 12 to 17.

Budget 2019 seeks to provide the Ministry of Public Health with suitable resources to fulfil its mandate of preventing, caring, curing, and managing illnesses, and to deliver the best possible citizen and patient experience in a financially sustainable way.

Budget 2019 is aptly themed, *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*. The increased allocation to the public health sector means that, as a Government, we are working assiduously to ensure that Guyanese live healthy lives so that they can benefit from and enjoy the “good life”. The bad days are finished, but the good days are not over yet. Delivering the best universal health coverage, therefore, remains a top national priority for this APNU/AFC Government so as to increase life expectancy, reduced

morbidity and mortality. Hence, Budget 2019, clearly indicates specific areas of focus that will, with the proper use of the resources made available, lead to greater population coverage as well as enhanced service delivery of public health care in an efficient and equitable manner to all Guyanese, inclusive of the poor and vulnerable.

To this end, with a budget allocation of \$35.9 million, or 11.9% of the national budget, which represents a \$2.6 billion increase from the 2018 allocation, the Ministry of Public Health will continue along the positive change continuum of enhancing the quality of care we provide to the people of Guyana. On page 72, paragraph 4.157, as it relates to tuberculosis, the budget speaks to an increase in the incidence of multi-drug resistant strains of this disease and alludes to the fact that with the revitalising of the direct observed therapy, the DOTS programme, we will be able to adequately detect, treat and monitor this disease. We will also work assiduously to reduce the prevalence of morbidity and mortality due to tuberculosis.

The global and local threat of antimicrobial resistance, which is the ability of infectious organisms, including bacteria to survive the agents designed to kill them, and save patients from infection, is real and can no longer be ignored. To this end, the Ministry of Public Health will be collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture to tackle the antimicrobial resistance threat through enhanced public awareness, antibiotic conservation and increased surveillance. It is the wish of the Disease Control Department of Ministry of Public Health to pilot a microbiology lab with antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as a priority.

The National AIDS Programme Secretariat (NAPS) continues to align all strategies towards Health Vision 20/20 and Sustainable Development Goal 3. Guyana has signed on and adopted the World Health Organization (WHO) September 2015 recommendations on antiretrovirals (ARVs) which recommends initiating ARVs as soon as possible after HIV diagnosis, regardless of CD4 count or WHO clinical staging. Thus, the Government of Guyana has made significant steps on the way to meeting the 90-90-90 treatment guidelines, in line with the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) fast track strategy of ending AIDS by 2030. The treat-all policy is geared towards the 90-90-90 UNAIDS target – 90-90-90 means 90 persons knowing their status and 90% of those that know their status are tested and treated and those who are treated and are on treatment go onto viral suppression.

The Government of Guyana has been absorbing the HIV programme gradually and has instituted a social contracting piloting process in 2019 and has a sustainability plan to assist in this process. At the end of 2017, Guyana stands at 70-75-65 of the 90-90-90, UNAIDS target, with 20-15-25 difference of the UNAIDS target. It is estimated for people living with HIV, using the software endorsed by UNAIDS spectrum, that 8,215 persons have AIDS in 2017, persons living with AIDS in 2018 - 8,369 and 2019 - 8,444 and by 2020, according to the software, it is going to be 8,510. In terms of estimated incidence of HIV, incidence in that point in time using the same software spectrum, in 2017, it is going to be 161 to 100,000, in 2018, 155 to 100,000, in 2019, 142 to 100,000 and in 2020, 139 to 100,000. With the treat-all policy for HIV, more persons would be placed on ARVs and the number of new cases should reduce with time. Number of eligible adults and children currently receiving antiretrovirals therapy as of September 2018, 5,390, and the number of newly diagnosed cases, as of end of May, 2018, was 247. It is estimated for us to have this treat-all policy to come to fruition, we would have to put 60 persons per month on the ARV treatment.

Piloting of the HIV, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), point of care tests commenced in July, 2018. Seventy-seven health care workers were trained in this testing. During that period that they were training, when they would have done their practice, 46 cases were detected positive. There have been strategies and targeted interventions to address adolescents with HIV. To our significant benefit, Global Fund has been assisting with some of the strategies and efforts of the Government of Guyana towards interventions to address HIV.

Ninety-two thousand long-lasting insecticide treated nets (LLINs), namely 60,000 hammocks nets were bought by the Government of Guyana and 32,000 bed nets were bought by the Global Fund and have been distributed in Regions 1,7,8 and 9 and they have a lifespan of two to three years. Four hundred and fifty of these nets were to the Guyana Defence Force and the Guyana Police Force and we have about 4,000 of these nets in our bond to do mop-up exercises. Our malaria cases as of September, our last quarter, was 9,023.

In 2016, we achieved 58% of mass drug administration coverage (MDA). In 2017, Guyana was able to surpass the target of the multi-drug programme and micro-filaria and soil-transmitted helminths with 84% coverage in Regions 3, 4, 5, and 10. In 2017, Guyana was lauded as having massive coverage as a result of the tremendous Government support along with such support from

Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). As a consequence, there is some optimism or a significant hope of continued success for the filaria programme. The WHO/USAID has already awarded US\$1 million per annum for the period 2018/2019. Guyana has endorsed the move to go to triple therapy. We were doing just albendazole and diethylcarbamazine and now we have added ivermectin so that we could cover the spectrum and hope that we will eliminate it very soon. With active case detection and following up on contacts around each case, more cases have been detected and more persons have been placed on treatment.

In 2016, total cases of leprosy were 52, 38 types of the multibacillary and 14 paucibacillary. The incidence of leprosy, nationally, in Guyana is 6.9 per 100,000. In 2017, 62 cases, 56 multibacillary and 11 paucibacillary. The incidence of leprosy in Guyana is about 8.29 per 100,000 population. In 2018, so far, we have 25 new cases.

Our National Reference Laboratory continues with the testing for Zika and other re-emerging tropical diseases. We no longer have to send overseas for some of our tests which are at a huge costs. Right now, we are able to do testing for viral load, CD4, dried blood spots, hepatitis B and C, syphilis, tuberculosis, multidrug resistance, GeneXpert testing, and so forth. So, we are saving in some cost. Such are the investments being made by the Government to strengthen our public health system in Guyana. In the not too distant future, it is our wish, the Ministry of Public Health, will collaborate with the University of Guyana to probably establish a school of tropical medicine in Guyana.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) consume approximately 70% of the public health budget. Undeniably, a significant number of years of healthy life are lost, globally, due to lifestyle and behavioural risk factors such as smoking, alcohol misuse and poor dieting. The Ministry of Public Health will be employing the behavioural change pathway and approach and cover the three stages of the NCDs, namely through: (a) lifestyle and prevention, that is the primary prevention, (b) detection and monitoring, secondary prevention and (c) treatment and adherence, tertiary prevention. Our primary prevention programmes will focus on lifestyle changes and prevention through getting people to adopt healthier lifestyles, making healthier food purchases in restaurants, cafeterias, supermarkets and engaging in physical activity. Emphasis will be placed on screening and monitoring for diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases, that is secondary prevention, while individuals will be steered towards behaviours for better compliance for more effective and

successful treatment. Key messages will be developed to highlight and reinforce behavioural solutions devoted to combat the scourge of NCDs through the use of targeted health promotion activities.

Guyana and the rest of the world will join PAHO's campaign to end cervical cancer so that our women and girls can live long and fulfilling lives. The human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine was relaunched last year and is currently being rolled out across Guyana. As we move into 2019, it is expected that we would maximise coverage.

The Ministry of Public Health, through the Mental Health Unit, utilises a whole-system approach to improve availability, access and the quality of mental health care being offered throughout the ten administrative regions. Making use of evidence-based practices and innovations, which focus on stepped-care, collaborative-care and task sharing, will ensure that we expand the geographical areas to which we provide effective and timely mental health services to those most in need.

The Ministry continues to provide emergency evacuation services for patients from the hinterland who are diagnosed with life-threatening conditions that require urgent tertiary care. In this regard, 271 patients have benefited from evacuation services during January to October, 2018. As 2018 comes to a close, there is an increase in early diagnoses of high risk conditions of patients within the hinterland regions. This increase is being buttressed by more timely referrals. The hinterland health systems are being upgraded to provide all the secondary care needed, which will ultimately see the significant reduction in referrals in the near future.

The new Baramita health facility is being completed and will be commissioned shortly. This new facility will allow for the increase range of services provided to the people of the Baramita community.

The Shulinab Health Post in Region 9 has also undergone significant infrastructural upgrades during 2018. These improvements are in preparation for the expansion of services at that location and the upgrade of the facility to a level two facility.

The Lethem Hospital laboratory and the expansion of the nurses' hostel are all testimony to the excellent work being done in preparation for a more integrated and comprehensive service delivery system.

The Aishalton District Hospital, having seen significant improvement in infrastructure, is now in a state of readiness to accommodate more services to the people of the South Rupununi.

The maternity waiting home at Annai is also a significant move in providing quality care for our antenatal mothers and their new born.

4.10 p.m.

The \$3.2 billion allocated for the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of public health infrastructure across Guyana, will surely contribute in great measure to improving the quality of public health services being offered and received within our hinterland communities.

Transportation is a critical facet in the total mechanism through which quality health care is delivered to the people of Guyana, including those living in the remote parts of our country. The Government, through the Ministry of Public Health, continues to support the regions with the provision of appropriate modes of transportation, vehicles and boats. In this regard, the Government had provided six all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to Regions 1, 8 and 9. These vehicles are intended to be used in transporting staff, patients and supplies in the health sector to and from hard to reach areas.

Additionally, the Ministry of Public Health has been able to complete the RYA Powerboat Level Two Course Program, where three operators have been trained by the Dutch Health BV, the company from the Netherlands. This programme has been specifically done to ensure the availability of competent operators to work with the power boat. As a consequence, the river transportation in Region 1 will be significantly enhanced, especially for the high risk maternal mothers and infants.

Human Resources, upgrade of district facilities to regional facilities: there has been a continued effort to have highly skilled and qualified medical personnel placed at strategic locations in the hinterland regions. This placement is primarily necessary as part of the Ministry's continued thrust to bridge the inequality gap between coastland and hinterland regions. Of course, we want to narrow the gap. In this regard, 32 general medical practitioners were deployed to all Level Two and Level Three facilities in the hinterland. In some cases, medical doctors were also placed at

level one facilities, where it was established that the service of a practitioner at that level of training was needed. I am speaking about the Imbaimadai and Baramita Health Posts.

Part of the Budget 2019 allocation will assist the Ministry in sending more specialist doctors into the regions so that we can better serve the residents of the hinterland communities and, when necessary, save them having to travel long distances to seek medical care.

Additionally, the Ministry of Public Health has commenced the process of upgrading the main health facility in each of the hinterland regions. To this end, attention is being placed on equipping and staffing the respective facilities. Three facilities have undergone significant improvements. In this regard, the Bartica District Hospital has been upgraded and services have been expanded to include cardiology, paediatrics, orthopaedics, general surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, radiology, internal medicine and dermatology. In addition, the facility has been equipped to support the work of the specialists. This is a profound achievement. A total of nine specialists were deployed to this facility and the Regional Administration is now in the process of making the necessary arrangements for the hospital to be given consideration for receiving Level Four status. The computerized tomography (CT) scan machine is well located and at the right temperature in a special building according to the specifications at Bartica District Hospital.

The Lethem District Hospital has also been upgraded in relation to staffing in preparation for the facility to be licensed as a Level Four hospital. The facility received six specialists with an anticipation of having additional staff in 2019. Moreover, the Mabaruma Regional Hospital is also being upgraded. Three specialists were added to the staff during 2018. The completion of the upgrade will take place in 2019, which will see the facilities being licensed as a regional facility, being able to provide secondary care for patients. To date, in Region 1, 446 patients have benefitted from a range of services during medical and surgical outreach.

There has been one successful completion of a Community Health Worker programme in Region 9. Twenty Indigenous youth were trained and deployed to their respective villages. Currently in Region 1, an additional 20 young people are being trained assuring that vacancies will be filled with staff equipped to deliver primary care in a culturally appropriate setting in all Indigenous villages.

Programme seven, Disability and Rehabilitation Services: I must let you know that, apart from the hinterland, the coastland has also experienced great achievements starting from Region 6 where we have the CT scan machine to be installed this week. We have new x-tray machines at Port Mourant. In Region 5, Mahaicony, we have a new health facility there. In Regions 2 and 3, we have ultrasounds machines and so forth. We continue to help and offer quality service to the people of Guyana.

The Ministry of Public Health continues to provide rehabilitation services to the persons with impairments and disabilities, thus, enabling them to achieve a greater level of independence and participation in society. To this effect, we continue to provide such services at the national vocational schools for the disabled young adults at the Open Doors Centre in Sophia, Harold B Davis Special School, Ptolemy Reid Centre and the Cheshire Home in Mahaica for the severely disabled persons. In addition, the making of prosthetic limbs at the Ptolemy Reid Home continues. Collaboration with the Starkey Hearing Foundation saw 700 hearing aids being given to persons with impaired hearing throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. Outreaches were conducted in the Georgetown and the Region 5, Mahaica/Berbice. The Disability and Rehabilitation Services Department, in collaboration with Maternal and Child Health Unit, the Mental Health Unit, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) provided psychosocial support and tumble form chairs to the mothers with babies born with Zika-related microcephaly.

The National Commission on Disability has reported the building of capacity among the members. There was the exchange of data base information with the Ministry of Education on out-of-school children with disabilities. It was also important to note that 72 staff members from the Disability and Rehabilitation Services Department received training for the re-integration of children from institutions to parental homes. There was the development of an accessible website for the National Commission on Disability. Advocacy training sessions were conducted for volunteers of the Commission. Sensitisation sessions were conducted with Government agencies, medical students of the University of Guyana and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on the Persons with Disabilities Act 2010 with the goal to look at the monitoring and implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010.

Disability and Rehabilitation Services Department stepped up its advocacy campaign by producing quarterly newsletters communicating information about activities of the Commission; creating of

advertisement for the Georgetown Seawall; distributing of disability etiquette posters to Government and Non-Governmental Organizations, conducting awareness campaign such as a media summit, to sensitise media operatives on disability issues and the content of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010. Much needed support from the Department of Public Information (DPI) to support the Commission in publicising information on disability, was forthcoming.

The Department also ensured that persons with disabilities are considered in the Country Work Programme for Disaster Risk Management (DRM) in Guyana. In addition, the Department established collaboration with the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) to ensure accessible homes are included in the Housing Solutions project.

Inspections of private and public entities to ensure accessibility is in keeping with the Persons with Disabilities Act, as were conducted in collaboration with Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/ World Health Organisation (WHO), with specific emphasis on the making of regulations for the Persons with Disabilities Act 2010 was established. Efforts were made to strengthen organizationally the National Commission on Disability, hence a National Household Survey of Persons with Disabilities (NHSPWD) in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 were completed. It was noted that the highest number of disabilities came from Region 6, while the lowest number of persons with disabilities came from Region 2.

We move into 2019, the main activity to be conducted will be a National Survey on persons with disabilities in Regions 1, 2, 7, 8, and 9. That was an overview of our programmes, three of our seven programmes in the Ministry of Public Health namely, Disease Control, Regional Health Services and Disability and Rehabilitation.

As I conclude, as it is expected, there are noises coming from some areas within our society about Budget 2019. Some misguided folk feel that Budget 2019 is tone-deaf. Budget 2019 is music to the ears of the people of Guyana. This budget is a budget from which the people of this nation will benefit comprehensively. Public servants will be taking home more money as a result of Budget 2019. We have dispatched the people's cash to make their lives happy as can be. Old age pension in 2014 was \$12,500. Budget 2019 has shown a 70% increase in Old Age Pension which takes it to \$20 500. These figures do not speak to hardship, but rather they shout about a Government that places great emphasis on the financial well-being of the wider citizenry. No one could frown

because we have stood our fiscal ground; because of our strong initiatives, this economy is on the rise, beyond its size. Anyone is surprised?

This Government is working industriously to better considerably the lives of all Guyanese. It remains a work in progress and requires the input of each and every one of us to do our part in nation building. We must continue to work as a united people to steer this beautiful nation on the right trajectory towards significant all-round development. Change is a process. It is a process that requires time. Change happens one gesture, one person, one moment at a time. When all of these gestures, persons, and moments are accumulated, we will witness an unprecedented transformation of Guyana.

Therefore, I urge all my Guyanese brothers and sisters to carefully manage their expectations and embrace the changes that are taking place all around you. Guyana is on the cusp of major development. The APNU/AFC Government will ensure that progress nationwide continues by, “*Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*”. This is it. This Government will not quit because our economy is round and sound. This means Mr. Speaker, you, the Government, the Opposition and everybody, from the Pakaraima to the Corentyne, win and we win again.

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

Dr. Mahadeo: Mr. Speaker, when the Hon. Member was saying the Budget was music to her ears, my Colleague here was saying, “Cha la la la la,” and I do not understand why. More money does not mean better services. This we have seen over the years, with bigger budgets there are poorer services. The Hon. Member mentioned the Directly Observed Treatment Short-Course (DOTS) programme, but, like all of the good programmes that were there during the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C’s) Government, this programme was also initiated under the then Minister, Ms. Gail Teixeira. The programme grew, and, in fact, it became world recognised. As to why it was stopped or why it is not happening anymore, only this Government can answer.

Hearing that we will re-implement, re-launch or re-vitalise the DOTS programme is good, but we should not have stopped it in the first place. We would not have been hearing about an increase in Tuberculosis (TB) or Multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). Tuberculosis is a killer, worse yet, Multi-drug-resistant TB is a killer in any part of this world. I would have loved to hear the

Hon. Minister say that we are not going to have shortages of drugs. I would have loved to hear the Hon. Minister say that we would have testing across the country so that we can identify and treat people, so that they do not become resistant. Again, I say, Multi-drug resistant TB kills.

The other point that I would like to find out - the Hon. Minister, said the CT scanner in Bartica is well seated in the correct temperature. I am not interested in that. I want to know if it is working and if people are getting services from this well-seated and correctly temperature CT scanner. I will deal with the other issues as I continue my presentation.

4.25 p.m.

As a geographic Member of Parliament (MP) for Region 6, I must present to this honourable House the concerns and views of my constituents, who, by the way, spoke loudly at the last Local Government Elections (LGE), which can be deemed a mid-term election of Guyana. My constituents have spoken loudly through the ballots, they have said that this Government is no good, incompetent, corrupt, and heartless and is not to be trusted to manage their affairs. In fact, my constituents cannot wait for the General and Regional Elections, which might be much sooner than 2020.

Today, I am not going to talk about the 'drug bond deal', neither am I going to talk about the 'HDM Labs deal', I am not going to talk about the 14% Valued Added Tax (VAT) that this Government placed on previously zero-rated items, when they had promised to reduce VAT. How from zero to 14% can be deemed a reduction — *gotta be jumbie mathematics*. I am not going to speak about giving jobs to party apparatchiks, incompetent though they might be. I am not going to speak about the spiralling crime situation or the tens of thousands of Guyanese, nationally, who are now without jobs and do not know where their next meal might be coming from or how their children will get food and clothes to go to school? I will be more specific to my region and my constituents.

I start with the awarding of tenders in my region. I guess a statement made recently that jobs should be given only to members of one party has been an occurrence in Region 6 for quite some time now. The weeding of the road shoulders, for example, is given to contractors from a particular political splinter of the governing coalition - this is known to all Berbicians. There are even more incriminating practices going on. Everything seems to be done through selective tendering in

Region 6. The type of selective tendering done warrants both exposure and investigation. This selective tendering in Region 6 happens in two stages. The first step is that contractors are evaluated after they would have submitted their documents to prequalify. Eventually, let us say for example, 20 contractors are selected as being qualified to build bridges, now, there is a second selection which is done by the Regional Executive Officer (REO). The REO chooses a few contractors to whom tender documents will be given. [Ms. Ally: She is right.] Here is where the corruption happens, and where party apparatchiks, relatives and friends are chosen. I am advised that this is highly irregular and corrupt. So, Madam, it cannot be right.

In fact, the Auditor General, in his 2017 audit said, quoting the Procurement Act 26(1),

"When a procurement method of restricted tendering is used the procuring, entity shall invite ALL suppliers and contractors to submit tenders".

However, analysis of the Regional Tender Board (RTB) minutes revealed that a maximum of four contractors and, in some instances, less than four, were invited to submit tenders for 140 out of the 153 contracts that were reviewed. The sum involved with these handpicked contractors was \$570,140,000. The Regional Tender Board breached the regulations for the purchase of drugs and medical supplies, again, in the 2017 and in the 2018 reports. First of all, in 2017 there were only two proven instances when there was actually shortages of drugs and medical supplies for emergency purchases to be done. This is according to the Auditor General's report.

When there are shortages of drugs and medical supplies, it is always made out to be an emergency. That in itself begs the question as to whether the handpicked managers of this Government are sleeping on the job or whether it is deliberate so that they can bypass the tender process. Let us look at what the Auditor General said in his report, as to how it is done. According to the Auditor General's Report,

"...before awarding a contract the procuring entity shall obtain and compare quotations from as many qualify suppliers and contractors as feasible but not fewer than three".

However, it was noted that the board minutes dated the 5th September, revealed that the administration only requested quotations from two suppliers for the supply of 134 items of drugs and medical supplies. It was noted that one of the suppliers did not have 42 of the 134 items and

the other did not have 30 of the items. However, the Tender Board awarded and approved the suppliers at their quoted prices. If we are to look at the prices, what do we see? Let us take one example, Ciprofloxacin, an antibiotic, at the Materials and Management Unit (MMU) it is bought for \$11 per tablet. The region bought it at \$50 per tablet. That is not all. Do you know how many tablets it bought? It bought 15,000 tablets. The region ended up paying over half of a million dollars more than it would have paid had it been bought by MMU.

Just a brief word on the sugar workers who were kicked out of their jobs. It would have been amusing had it not been so sad to read the *Kaieteur News*.

"According to Prime Minister, Moses Nagamootoo, the Government will pay the final tranche of severance payments due to the more than 3,000 workers, before the year ends; thereby keeping its promise".

Mr. Speaker, promise? This Government is famous for keeping its promises in the breach. I was asked by sugar workers in Crabwood Creek and in the Upper Corentyne to remind the Prime Minister that the workers earned their severance through sweat, tears and even blood in some cases. It is not something that the Government is donating or giving to the workers. The same workers asked me to tell some of the Members on the other side that they will always remember the promised 20% increase that some voted for but never got. The API that this Government never gave, and that one of the gravest sins is to take bread out of someone's mouth.

I will move on to health and then, if I have time, I will come back to rice. I start by asking, where is the CT Scanner that was donated approximately 3 years ago for Region 6? The residents of Region 6 surely are not benefitting from it. Remember, storage of that piece of equipment was in the tens of millions of dollars. Still no CT? Where is it? Maybe it is already obsolete. Maybe it needs refurbishing. Maybe it just is not working. This is a travesty.

Since 2014, there was a proposal for a health centre in the new Number 77 housing scheme. The construction was completed and handed over to the regional authorities two years ago. Yes, two years ago. But, do you know what? Up to today the health centre has not opened its doors to the public. Bushes and marabunta and other insects are in that facility, and the cost of that structure is \$11.8 million. Good job, party apparatchiks who are running Region 6.

On to Plegtanker Health Centre. Also, a brand-new facility, handed over to the regional authorities over two and a half years ago. Yes, two and a half years ago. Still to open its doors and by the time it is ready to open its doors it will need repairs. The cost to build that build was \$14.5 million. I ask this honourable House, is this money well spent? Is this more money and no service.

In the last budget, I said that there were shortages of medicines and medical supplies at the New Amsterdam Hospital. It was said that the Hon. Minister visited with a team and found no shortages. My Colleagues and myself, on the Social Services Sector Committee, asked on several occasions through the Parliament to receive copies of the CRIVs for the period in question. This was nearly a year ago. To date, it has not been received. Why? Is there something to hide. Again I, say there are still shortages of medicines across my region and I daresay across the country. I have seen several prescriptions that patients had to go and purchase medicines, including paying, of course, the 14% VAT on medicines that this Government implemented.

Onto the fleet of ambulances. There were five ambulances in 2014, three more were added when the Hon. Dr. George Norton was Minister of Public Health, which makes it eight ambulances. Where are these ambulances? Definitely not at the hospitals nor the health centres. I understand that only three ambulances are in somewhat of a working shape. Where are the rest?

There is an increase in the budget for Dietary for 2019. From \$91 million in 2017 to \$ 105 million in 2019. Is this more money better services? The requested amount has increased, although we have a problem of disappearing food for the New Amsterdam and Fort Canje Hospitals. Yes. There seems to be a mystery that causes serious investigations. Again, referring to the AG's report of a sample of 20 payment vouchers, where 20% of the food and supplies could not be found. Imagine what 20% of \$91 million would amount to. Are we satisfied that there are systems in place for the taxpayers to get value for money? Are we satisfied that the \$105 million for 2019 will be well spent and only the patients are going to benefit?

Let us look at the performance of the Skeldon Hospital. Same story, shortage of medicines, shortage of medical supplies and this is in spite of the \$400 million budgeted for drugs and medical supplies. This begs the question again, where is the money going? For over three months, the X-ray, the Rehab Department and the ultrasound machines at the Skeldon hospital are non-functional.

For these services, the patients have to go to a private institution if they can afford it. Most of them do not go and they do not go back to the doctors because the doctors require it for diagnosis.

Of greater concern, patients and relatives of patients complained to me that, ongoing to the Skeldon Hospital, the staff of the hospital had to use their phone lights in the night to look at the patient. Yes, in this day and age, a middle-income country, hand lights are used in a town to see patients. What happens in a real serious emergency? Those of us who practice medicine would appreciate the dilemma our colleagues go through, even in these modern times.

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

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, why do we not have stable electricity at the hospital or is the Skeldon Hospital collateral damage to the closure of the Skeldon Sugar Estate? The Skeldon Estate used to provide electricity to the hospital. Is there no planning? Just as the Government closed the estates with no plan as to what the workers would do, how Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) will be affected or how the workers will earn their severance.

Further, we left a vibrant management that had donated a standby generator in case of blackouts. Where is this standby generator? Why can it not be used; why can it not give electricity when there is blackout? It kind of reminds me of when I started working in 1990 at the New Amsterdam Hospital. I am sure my colleagues Dr. Westford, Dr. Anthony and Dr. Ramsaran, would remember those dark days. At the MCH section, doctors use to be in all the health centres, now we are not having the doctors there and I do not know why.

Let us look at HIV. The Minister spoke about the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). In Region 6, we used to have 50 counsellor/testers in the health system in 2014. Do you know how many counsellor/testers we have in the Government system in Region 6 today? I dare anyone to guess. We have one.

4.40 p.m.

He works at the Skeldon Hospital for two days; he works at the Port Mourant Hospital for two days and he works one day in New Amsterdam. How are we dealing with HIV and we are saying that we are working towards this great plan?

What is going on? The Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) Is in chaos. The mothers have to go to the hospital themselves to get tested. Some mothers cannot afford it. Mothers are not educated enough to know that they have to do it. I predict a rise in babies that will be born as HIV positive because you know what? The only time that some of these mothers know that they have HIV is when they go to the hospital and are ready to deliver and then they are tested. This is a travesty, not in this day and age. More money - where is it going?

Ophthalmology hospital: up to 2014, 472 cataracts cases were done; in 2017 to 2018, zero was done.

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

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What is happening with this national hospital that used to see patients in Suriname, from Guyana, the diaspora, Trinidad and Tobago and from Barbados? It is not working. Yet, we see that the Auditor General's Report stated in 2017, \$18.3 million was spent to rehabilitate this facility. What happened – zero surgeries, zero cataract. Where is the money going? More money, less service.

I would like to say that Region 6 is a representative part of Guyana and I am sure the happenings in Region 6 are happening in the rest of Guyana. As such, I can say that this budget is not a people's budget. It looks after some – the elite. To the poor it gives with one hand and takes a lot more with the next. Why I say so, like my Colleague said, we expect 4.6% growth, and yet we expect to collect 10% more in revenue.

Where would this additional \$30 billion come from? It would be from the poor, the unemployed sugar workers, the business bands and from everybody, even the students who are going to university, out of every Guyanese pocket and the poor man will feel it most.

This is another repressive budget. Again, I say with a clear conscience and I speak on behalf of my constituents, the overwhelming majority of Berbicians in Region 6, I reject this budget proposal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Adams: Mr. Speaker, before I commence my presentation, let me take some time to respond to the Hon. Dr. Mahadeo. First of all, in the Sunday's Edition of the *Chronicle* newspapers, the Director of Pharmacy of the Ministry of Public Health assured the Guyanese people that there will be no shortage of the Tuberculosis (TB) drug. Drugs being given to apparatchiks of the party, Region 6 is controlled by the PPP. The Chairman is PPP; the Tender Board is PPP, it means, therefore, that it is your people. Region 6 of all the regions has the largest budgetary allocation. It means, therefore, that we must move a no-confidence motion in the Chairman and the entire RDC.

I would not waste much more time. You know how it goes Dr. Mahadeo, you know what happens to the drugs. You were there, and you know what happens to it.

I rise to join my Colleagues on this side of the House as we debate the 2019 Budget. Budget 2019 was presented to this House on Monday, 26th November, 2018, under the theme *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*. I must at this time offer my congratulations to the Hon. Minister Jordan, Minister of Finance and his team for their effort and hard work.

Budget 2019 seeks to set out our Government's agenda for the coming year and in so doing it has catered for the needs of all Guyanese irrespective of race, religion or political persuasion. Our Government will continue to build on the foundation that it has laid when it entered office in 2015. We have promised to the people of Guyana a 'good life' and we will deliver the 'good life' to them. The Guyanese people gave us the mandate to govern this land and we will not let them down. It must be noted that this Government is just three years old and it has achieved much and has done much, and it will do more and will ensure that all Guyanese benefit. We will not allow our agenda to be derailed by the nay-sayers, the prophets or doctors of doom.

This coalition Government has many success stories. Most Guyanese who are honest will substantiate our claim. Mr. Speaker, please permit me to remind this House of just a few of our successes. We increased Public Servants salaries by 37%. We reduced the Value-Added Tax that was imposed on the Guyanese people by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) administration from 16% to 14%. We have held Local Government Elections twice in three years. The PPP/C failed to hold Local Government Elections in two decades.

We can recall where our senior citizens in 2009 got \$300 increase on their pensions. In 2019, our senior citizens will get some \$20,500. We have increased the minimum wage from \$39,540 to the proposed sum of \$64,200. We have increased the Income Tax threshold from \$50,000 to \$60,000.

Indeed, we removed the ‘one-hop’ cash grant of \$10,000 per school year, but we have replaced it with the Five Bs Programme, whereby we provide free transportation to all children attending school. Not some, all children. If they are not on the bus it is because they do not want to go, because you told them not to join it. If this is not the ‘good life’ we referred to in our Manifesto, then tell me what is. These are just a few of the initiatives this Government has taken as we set out on the path of empowering people.

The coalition Government has done much, and we will do much more. We can see the reason for the 2019 Budget being pegged to the tune of \$300.7 billion. These moneys will ensure that we carry through with our agenda as set out in the theme of this year's budget - *Transforming the Economy, Empowering people, Building sustainable communities for the good life*". It will take good governance and that would be provided, a resilient public service and a determined people for us to achieve our set goal, but with a strong Government we will achieve.

The various sums allocated for education, health, agriculture and infrastructure will foster development of all 10 administrative regions, towns and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). No region will be stifled for funds because of who the residents are perceived to be. This Government believes in equality. We believe that technology is vital to our country's development and that stringent measures have been put in place to ensure that our young people acquire the prerequisite training that will allow them to function effectively in their various fields.

We are all cognizant of the congestion on our roadways as we go about our daily lives. Our Government being cognizant of this fact, in the Budget 2019, has set aside some \$38.5 billion for public infrastructure. This sum will see preparatory works for a network of roads throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. Some \$2.9 billion will be spent on ‘Miscellaneous and Urban Roads’ in all 10 administrative regions, neighbourhoods and towns. In 2019, we will see preparatory works for the new four-lane Demerara River Bridge. This bridge will be affordable to cross and will not be gifted to any friend.

I must now turn my focus to the Essequibo Islands/West Demerara, Region 3. This region was allocated the sum of \$6.3 billion in the 2018 Budget for both Current and Capital programmes. I am

pleased to report to this House that Region 3 has done exceptionally well. I am pleased to report to this House that we are going to continue on that path of development. Region 3 was awarded 100% of its projects and 100% of the appropriated sum was expended. Region 3 received in 2018, \$463.999 million for its Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and has expended so far 94.5% of the budgetary sum. The remaining 4.5% will be held as retention.

The sum allocated saw works being done throughout the region. The works include, but are not limited to: the construction of a revetment at Stanleytown and Wakenaam sluices; construction of irrigation control structure at Tuschen; construction of heavy duty bridges at Goed Intent, Zeelugt New Scheme, Levans Street, Vergenoegen and Meten-meer-zorg; rehabilitation of streets in Stewartville, DeKendren, Den Amstel, Zeelugt, La Jalousie, among others.

In 2018, we saw the completion of the Department of Education building that was destroyed by fire in 2009. This APNU/AFC Government rebuilt it. For the first time, there is a special needs school at Schoonord, West Bank Demerara. This school will ensure access to education to children with special needs. The Vergenoegen Secondary School was extended over the reporting period. There was the installation of gas lines at the Laboratory of the Uitvlugt Secondary School. Wales Primary School has been rehabilitated after years of neglect. The floor of the High Dependency Unit (HDU) of the West Demerara Regional Hospital was upgraded. The installation of the central oxygen line at West Demerara Regional Hospital was installed and extension of the Records and Laboratory Departments and patients' washrooms at the Leonora Diagnostic Centre. Progress must and will continue under the APNU/AFC Government.

Region 3, in 2019, was allocated \$6.3 billion for both capital and current. There is a vast increase in the sum allocated in 2018. We will see major developmental works in every sector and in every part of the region.

Administration and Finance: under this Programme, the region will procure a vehicle valued at \$18 million. We will see the rehabilitation of the Co-operative building at La Grange, West Bank Demerara.

Agricultural Development: under this programme, there will be the construction of irrigation and control sluices at Canal No. 2 and La Destin, an off-loading ramp for farmers at Salem, East Bank Essequibo and construction of revetment at Leguan, Bonasika, Sisters, Hogg Island and Leguan. A sum of \$88 million will be expended on this programme. No community has been left out.

Public Infrastructure: under this head, the following works will be executed: construction of a concrete bridge at the West Demerara Regional Hospital and this will accommodate a foot path and two-lane traffic; reinforced concrete bridges will be constructed at Edinburgh, Parika and at Hague Backdam. Roads will be also constructed at the Leonora Hospital, which will be fully asphalted and will accommodate two-lane traffic and will have a foot path. We will construct another asphalted road at Nismes and at Jai Dam, Tuschen.

4.55 p.m.

Education Delivery: The sum of \$135 million would be spent on education buildings in Region 3. We would see the reconstruction of the Bagotville Primary School and the reconstruction of two blocks at the Leonora Primary School. An additional sum of \$14 million would be used for the procurement of a bus, specially designed for children with disabilities to use. There would be the construction of staff quarters at Leguan. We often send our nurses and doctors on the island of Leguan, but there is no housing. This Government would provide housing for the doctors and nurses when they go to Leguan. There would be the extension of the Health Post at Zeelugt, the Out Patients Clinic at the West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH) and the kitchen and laundry at the Leonora Diagnostic Centre.

Land and Water Support: The allotted sum would see the region procure an enclosed refrigerator truck to transport the drugs from the Materials Management Unit (MMU) to the West Demerara Regional Hospital. There would be the purchase of a new X-ray machine and operating beds for the West Demerara Regional Hospital.

Guyana is moving forward and so is Region 3. It must be placed on record that, apart from the budgetary allocation for the region, works will be carried out by the Central Government. These works include: the construction of the La Parfaite Harmonie Secondary School, the completion of the La Parfaite Harmonie Police Station, the construction of the Practical Instruction Centre at Fellowship and the rehabilitation and construction of several roads throughout Region 3. I am pleased to report that the reconstruction of the Den Amstel Youth Camp is moving fast apace and the works there are 95% completed. We will certainly see the completion of this edifice in 2019. Region 3's youths would benefit tremendously from this project.

The housing development will continue to expand at Tuschen, Zeelugt and Recht Door Zee. La Parfaite Harmonie would benefit from much needed road upgrade and recreational facilities. There would be no more paper roads.

Time does not permit me to expound on the various developmental projects listed for Region 3 in 2019, but I could assure this House and the residents of Region 3 that this APNU/AFC Government will deliver on its promises and they could be rest assured that no one will be left out. We will transform the economy; we will empower the people; we will continue to build communities and deliver that good life to all Guyanese.

I now command this Budget to the House for passage. I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is a good time, according to our timetable, to take the suspension. If Hon. Members have a different view, then I am sure someone could express it and the Speaker would consider it. Hon. Ms. Manickchand, you have the floor. Do you wish to say something?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, please. Sir, we have two more speakers and they are both speakers who have been allotted 20 minutes. We could finish those two and then retire to the Lounge. It also leaves space for other persons to do whatever else they may have to do.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Ms. Manickchand is saying that Hon. Members have the stamina and the ability to remain. Is everyone in favour of that?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: It augurs well for the future, perhaps. I thank you. We will continue.

Ms. Veerasammy: Good afternoon, everyone. I rise to make my submission on the Budget 2019 presentation, delivered on Monday, 26th November, 2018 by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Winston Jordan. It was the largest budget presented to this august House, to date, to the value of over \$300 billion. But before I do, I would like comment on two submissions that the Hon. Member, Mr. Adams, made earlier.

First of all, the region does not have the ability to employ the Regional Executive Officer (REO). That resides with the jurisdiction of the Government. The REO carries out the mandate of the

Government and, second to that, the REO is the one who is the chairman of the Regional Procurement Board. The problem within the regional bodies and even the National Procurement Board is the single sourcing of contracts for items that are needed within the Government structure.

Secondly, the most expensive feasibility that was even done in this country, according to the Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali, this morning, is that of the Demerara Harbour Bridge. That is quite fine. We will be getting a four-lane bridge but look at what it costs. A feasibility was done and then cancelled to start all over again. Who paid that \$150 million?

People have dreams and each day they hope that their dreams could come through, some through hard work and dedication and others hope to win the Lotto. All in all, hopes and dreams are the things that keep people going. The Government, since it came into office in 2015, has excelled in its imposition of more than 200 taxes on this nation, more than anything else. And each day, it continues to shatter the dreams and hopes of our people. Governments are not only expected to tax people at every opportunity. They are expected to create conditions for economic growth. They are expected to encourage and provide incentives for job creation for young people. They are expected to provide services and redistribute resources to the underprivileged, the elderly, the disabled and the mentally challenged, including a more efficient health care system for all.

What is life without promises? Like hopes and dreams, promises are made to be broken and some say that promises are comforts for fools. The Guyanese people spoke clearly in 2016 and again in November, 2018 at the Local Government Elections (LGEs). Through their vote, the people have shown that they have had enough of the Government's facade and promises. The Budget 2019 presentation was seen as nothing more than an electioneering propaganda with more empty promises.

This Coalition has broken promise after promise, beginning with their 2015 election Manifesto. More than that, their taxation has increased the hardships on our people, pushing them deeper into poverty, while flaunting oil as the answer to all problems. The promise of the good life continues to be a good lie again, an illusion that is like a bad dream that we wake up from.

Budget 2019 has generated much discourse and disappointment across the country, among peoples of all political persuasion, ethnicity, class and geography. Some described it as one 105 pages of

gaff, lots of words, lots of empty promises with no tangible relief for the people, especially the poor and the vulnerable.

I was impressed with the introduction of the budget presentation, so I listened intently and took a lot notes at the beginning. I waited impatiently for the Hon. Minister to outline measures to address some critical social issues that are plaguing our country, such as women's empowerment, single parents, the poor and the vulnerable, domestic violence, suicide and mental illnesses, to name a few. I wanted to hear the strategies that would create jobs, alleviate poverty and reduce the margin of those living below the poverty line. I waited in vain. The word "woman" was not mentioned in that almost four-and-a-half-hour speech. Not once did the Minister speak about women's empowerment, a plan to alleviate poverty among single parents, training for unskilled women and girls, plans to create awareness to reduce the scourge of domestic violence and death by domestic violence in our society.

One would have expected that since His Excellency, President Granger, on International Women's Day, 8th March, 2016, committed his Government to realising 50/50 by 2030, that the Hon. Minister would have, respectfully, considered the President's promise to us, the women of this country, who make up more than 50% of this country's human resources, by including measures in his Budget to achieve the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I would like to remind the Government that Guyana signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in July, 1980. I would like to further remind the Coalition Government that the People's National Congress (PNC) was in government then and they signed and ratified this Convention. Presently, we have joined the rest of the world in marking 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, beginning on 25th November and ending on 10th December, 2018.

At the beginning of this period, on Tuesday 27th November, 2018, a man chopped his female partner several times about her body at Swan, Soesdyke/Linden Highway and then hanged himself. The woman, a mother of seven children, received two emergency surgeries and several units of blood to save her life, but she lost three fingers on one hand and was in a critical condition at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). Sir, 14 women were killed in 2017 and 22 have

been killed so far for this year. A few of the perpetrators even killed themselves by committing suicide.

The problems associated with domestic violence in Guyana have been escalated by the present state of employment and economic hardships on families, compounded by alcoholism and power struggles between couples. This major social problem cannot be ignored because each life lost from domestic or gender related problems is one too many. The Budget did not address this issue, much less outline strategies to eradicate it from our society. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister to ensure that adequate funding is made available to the Ministry of Social Protection to create awareness of this issue across Guyana, so that it could be reduced and then eradicated. We are all aware that most women stay in abusive relationships because of financial dependency and because they have nowhere to go with their children.

The Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of 2000 stated that almost 50,000 families were single-parent headed households, most of whom were women. Most of those single parents were unskilled, not highly educated and could not secure well-paid jobs. A survey that was done in 2007, by the former Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand, confirmed the above and she immediately put several measures in place to improve the livelihood of single-parent families. Some of those measures were: the Capacity Building for Skills Advancement Training Programme by the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute, Non-Traditional Skills training for women by the Board of Industrial Training (BIT), the Women of Worth Programme (WOW) and several others.

During the last years, women's empowerment has reached an all-time low. So, I would like to call on the Hon. Minister of Social Protection, Amna Ally, who has responsibility for gender affairs, to step up to the game, to put plans and programmes in place to meet international obligations and local needs and to demand that women's issues are placed high on Government's agenda.

There is the urgent need to develop programmes to create awareness among our women and men that violence is not the answer to domestic problems and death is certainly not the solution. The Gender Affairs Bureau, then Women's Affairs Bureau, had established women's desks at the Regional Democratic Councils (RDC) offices in several regions. This process must continue until all 10 offices have women's desks, which must be managed by social workers and its work monitored to ensure maximum output.

5.10 p.m.

I would like to encourage the Minister of Social Protection to consider the establishment of women's desks at each Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) across the country to provide easier access to persons within the local authority areas, who will refer them to the Probation Department for further intervention when needed.

Children attending school must be taught that conflicts can be resolved through communication and negotiations, and not through aggression, threats and fist fights with knives or guns. The promise of Guidance Counsellors in our schools must not remain a pipe dream. It must become a reality. Children sometimes need to speak to an impartial person rather than their teachers or their parents. This person must have the requisite psychosocial skills to help them through their pre and adolescent years. Speak to teachers or check Facebook and one can find videos of our children brawling on the street corners in their uniforms. I have personally witnessed this in the streets of Georgetown on several occasions.

Guyana continues to remain high on the suicide statistics of the world. I am not sure which Ministry has responsibility for this social problem – because everybody is speaking about it – which affects families throughout the coastland of Guyana. The National Suicide Prevention Plan, issued by the Ministry of Public Health, identified poverty, mental illness, access to lethal chemicals, alcohol misuse, interpersonal violence, family dysfunction and insufficient mental health resources as key factors that cause suicide. Further, Sir, the Ministry of Public Security's records show that approximately 70% of suicides occur in rural communities because people turn to alcohol to cope with feelings of hopelessness, poverty and economic despair.

Research suggested that while there is no support system for persons with suicide ideation or mental illnesses, there are plenty of illegal rum shops around the country, and drinking alcohol is a popular pastime. Further, Mr. Speaker, can you imagine what is going on with those families whose breadwinners were thrown out of their jobs after 2015? Family dysfunction and gender-based violence are not the only factors that are contributing to the high suicide rates in Guyana. Unemployment is also a predominant factor.

Attempted suicide continues to be a criminal act in Guyana. And guess what? The suicide hotline is run by the police. Do you believe that persons with suicide ideation will call that hotline for

help? Of course not. Figures released by the World Health Organization (WHO), in April 2017, suggested that Guyana has the third highest suicide rate in the world. That means that we are going more. Sir, it is also disheartening to note that among our youths between the ages of 15 and 24 years, suicide is the second leading cause of death in Guyana.

Anyone can purchase rat poison, ant or fly bait on the paves in the city or they can purchase weedicides and pesticides at village shops in agriculture-based villages. To minimise suicide by poisoning, adults must be sold such poisonous substances which must be stored in a secure place. Only awareness can help to stop or reduce this. We can never forget September, 2018 and the story of a nine-year-old boy from La Grange Village, who bought rat poison at a village shop and whose baby brother ingested it and subsequently died. That was such a sad situation.

I would like to encourage those ministries with responsibilities to work harder to provide help to those individuals, families and communities suffering with suicide ideation or death by suicide. Therefore, I ask that funding be made available to create the awareness that suicide is not the answer, and that life is worth living.

Sugar workers from the Wales Estate received their severance pay after almost two years of despair. The workers at other estates are waiting for their severance pay. These workers worked for their money. The Government is not giving them it or doing them any favours. Engagements with many workers revealed that they were severed from their work, and if they were not able to have 750 contributions, they are not entitled to pension. I am asking this honourable House to consider that those persons be paid a percentage of their National Insurance Scheme (NIS) pension, based on the contributions that they have paid to the NIS.

Very little remains a secret in the world of science and technology where everyone has a smart phone, and what is covered up will eventually see the light.

In Guyana, we have one of the best public health systems in this part of the world. The People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) Government built it from backwardness into one of the most modern healthcare systems we have. I always recommended this system to people. When taxpayers' moneys are paid to provide healthcare for people, there should not be any shortages of drugs and equipment with that amount of money.

Not having adequate drugs and medical supplies at hospitals pales in comparison to a mother, who, after carrying her baby for 9 months and then after delivering that baby, it dies. I am not a medical person, but I am social worker and I am saying that babies do not have to die. I am saying that the Neonatal Intensive Care Units (ICUs) at hospitals should be fully equipped to provide effective care for premature babies, or babies born with complications. I am also saying that after delivery, mothers do not have to die. I am, therefore, appealing to the Minister of Public Health, who is a mother herself, to pay personal attention to what is taking place in the maternity departments across this country.

Do you know that if a pregnant mother goes to the hospital in labour pains, and she has only dilated by only two centimeters (cm) they send her away? Who is going tell that woman at home, “You are now dilated to three centimeters. Go back to the hospital and deliver your baby?” From the stress of going home and coming back, do you know the amount of complications that can arise? Both the baby and mother can die. This happened recently at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). Recently, at the West Demerara Regional Hospital, a young woman gave birth to twins and both babies died.

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

Ms. Veerasammy: I commend the Minister for thinking about people who are suffering from disabilities, but his Budget only speaks about those who can afford to buy vehicles to transport their relative to and from hospitals or wherever they have to go. What happens to those who need prosthesis? What happens to those who need braces? What happens to people who suffer from spinal injuries and need some kind of support? Those people make up the majority of this nation with disabilities who cannot afford to purchase such a vehicle.

I, therefore, suggest that the Minister of Finance goes back to the drawing board and give that same tax exemption to taxi services which provide services to ordinary people to get them from place to place. I would also like to propose to the Minister of Finance that he makes more funding available to the difficult Circumstances Unit (DCU) to help those in need purchase these prosthesis and braces. It is because the DCU only gives partial funding to purchase such things that these persons need.

Hope for all Guyanese is not a promise of oil. When oil comes, it should be distributed to improve the lives of everyone. Realising hope is about creating conditions that give all the opportunities to realise their dreams. Realising hope is about allowing people to live free from discrimination and be able to provide for their families. It is about owning a plot of land, building a house, getting a loan, having a job, repaying the loan and taking care of one's families. It is about working and building without fear that someone will invade your house and steal from you, everything that you worked so hard for.

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

Mr. Carrington: It is an honour to contribute towards the Budget debate 2019. Congratulations are in order for the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, on his presentation of another Budget that continues to position Guyana for economic and social transformation. This means improvement in living standard, infrastructural development, and accessibility to foreign investments that will benefit citizens and make the country internationally competitive through the adoption of new technologies for it to have greater prosperity. All these are necessary for a society in transformation. It should also be emphasised that these gradual changes will be able to bring greater opportunity for empowerment of the people.

As I sit here, since 2015, all of the Budgets that passed through this House, for the PPP/C, were bad. All of the Budgets the PPP/C condemned are bad. How could all of the Budgets that passed through this House have been bad?

I travel across this country, all over this country, and what I have seen so far is development. You could go to Berbice or you could go to anywhere, and you will see development. You will see thousands of new houses under construction. You will see thousands of new cars. You go all across this country and you will see infrastructural development: roads, hospitals, clinics in Mahdia and Lethem, *et cetera*. You name it. There is infrastructural development and people's development taking place all over this country. If the people have development, if the people are building their houses, buying cars, purchasing from all over the place, then they have to be doing well. They have to find the money from somewhere or another.

I sit here and all I here is condemnation, from time to time, that this Budget is bad; that last year's Budget was bad and the Budget the year before was bad. My brothers and sisters, this country is a

good country. This country is a loving country, and people survive. We do not have oil and people survive. You can go to any market place and you will find all of the vegetables, all the greens. Our farmers are doing well; they are producing a lot to feed this nation.

I sit in this House and sometimes I am very disappointed. I must say that I am very disappointed because of the psyche of some of the people. Instead of trying to develop this country and build it, they try to kill this country. For what? It is to just get back in power. We need to move from that behavioural pattern. Everybody could benefit in this country if everybody works together to develop this country. This country is not hard to develop; all that this country needs is unity to develop. Unity. We need to unite for the betterment of Guyana. When will we start doing this? We need to start doing this. Regardless of if we are Opposition or Government, we need to unite to develop this country.

Many claim that we have done nothing. Since we are in power, the wages have raised at about 50% for the public servants. It raised, I think for the Ministers, about 50%. The parliamentarians, I think, have gotten 18% so far. I hope we would reach the same amount of 50% across the board at some time. This country has moved a far way. I want to say that the major problem we have in this country, at the present moment, is that our country is importing about US\$1.6 billion in goods, and we are exporting about US\$1 billion. What is taking place is that our exports are far less than our imports.

5.25 p.m.

When a country's export is far less than its imports, it puts a demand on the United States (US) currency, and when there is a demand on the US currency, there is automatically a devaluation and the Guyana dollar is strong no more. So, although the Hon. Mr. Winston Jordan gave over 50% increase to the public servants, if there is a devaluation, you would run into problems. Now, we would be giving 7% in some cases and 5% in other cases in raise of pay. I just hope that when we give this raise in pay, we do not hear that goods and services raise by 20%. It is what has taken place in Guyana over the years. That is a major problem we have in Guyana. Every time a raise in pay is given to the people by 8% or 5%, automatically goods and services would raise by 20%. It is not necessary this year because of the Minister of Finance. It has nothing to do with the Minister of Finance. This year, there is no tax increases in the Budget, but you will see that the majority of

goods and services will raise by 20%, which is \$20 per every \$100. We have to find a way to stop that. It is because if we do not find a way to stop that, every time there is a raise in pay, the people's money will be taken away. Whether you like it or not, both the Opposition and Government must come together to find a way to deal with the cost of living in Guyana in order to keep it at a certain level.

This country is a lovely country. People enjoy themselves in this country. We live like brothers and sisters all the time. When we, as Hon. Members, leave this Chamber we would eat together and chat with each other whether it be the Member of Parliament's (MP) Lounge or elsewhere. But when it comes to this House, there is a difference, and this has to change somehow or the other.

We hear about oil come 2020. Every day we read something about what is going to happen when oil comes and there are a lot of cries about it. When oil comes on board, we will have approximately, I am made to understand, US\$300 million coming to the coffer a year. That, automatically, will create a revaluation of the Guyana dollar. As the Guyana dollar gets stronger, our people will have more money in their hands and better spending power.

My brothers on the other side are really fearful of the resource coming into the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government's hand because they know as long as it comes into this Government's hand, automatically, they will have to stay where they are at the present moment. The big fight is to destroy this country with their utterances. They always complain. Everything is bad. Nothing is good. They are complaining that this entire Budget is bad. This Budget has to manage all the schools, the hospitals and the clinics that we have and yet this Budget is bad.

This country is a good country. I want to be straight and frank. I love my country. Earlier in the day, my brother, the Hon. Irfaan Ali, complained that 32,000 people are out of jobs in this country. I think it was 32,000. **[Mr. Nandlall: It is 32,000 jobs lost.]** Okay, jobs lost. Guyana has natural resources in abundance. You name it. Guyana has agriculture and natural resources. But it takes skills and education to put those natural resource into finished products. So, we have to educate our children in the area of technical education. The Ministry of Finance has a

lot of money, this year, and a lot of those moneys will be going into that area of technical education to create jobs for our people. I love my country and I will work for my country.

As a proud resident of Region 4, Demerara/Mahaica, I can say that the allocation of \$7.2 billion for 2019 will, indeed, continue to advance this region's development. Though Georgetown is not Guyana, much depends on what we do in the city for the image of Guyana. Since 2015, when Guyana was blessed with a change of Government, Georgetown started to change. No more major floods. At this point, I would like to wish the new Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors of Georgetown all the best in the future.

At the Guyana Passport Office, there are no more lines. Our public buildings have been renovated and new ones [*inaudible*]. Significant, at this time, also is that Guyana is on the list of the world's top would be oil-producing nation with first oil coming soon. There is no doubt as to the total change in Guyana's expected development.

Budget 2019 lays the foundation for the take off in big ticket infrastructural projects. We are laying the basis for proper housing, quality healthcare, improved educational standards, better security and, above all, a cleaner image of Guyana in all respect. Many communities have been without proper roadways or without any for as long as could be remembered. Now, construction and upgrading are ongoing programmes that will provide proper roads at Diamond, Friendship, Victoria and Ann's Grove in 2019.

There is even more street illumination that gives a brighter environment while ensuring better physical safety. Most parts of Sophia, Patterson and Cummings Lodge's areas now boast improved roadways and street lights. This has been for the first time since the entry into Government of the APNU/AFC Coalition. This also extends to service from the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), with some communities such as Sophia, many communities along the Soesdyke/Linden Highway and on the East Coast corridor now being able to access water for the very first time. Call this "service" to the people without discrimination of any sort.

In addition, I wish to recognise the Government honouring the wishes of the people by creating two new Neighbourhood Democratic Councils at Yarrowkabra and Kuru Kuru on the Soesdyke/Linden Highway. These communities have also benefited from new roads and, coming in 2019,

street lights and a host of other development which they have long lobbied for but were denied by the previous Government.

There are still too many communities within Region 4 where connectivity exists, but by *[inaudible]* boards being placed across waterways. Government has, since in 2015, been replacing these archaic connections not only in this region but also in other areas across Guyana. This is understood, given efforts at social cohesion. Therefore, for 2019, bridges will be constructed at Ann's Grove and Buxton, while a culvert will be built at Herstelling and a revetment will also be constructed at Victoria.

Education as a sector holds particular interest for the Coalition Government...

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

Mr. Carrington: ...because of the critical role that it has played, and which it continues to play in the development of young Guyanese for their self-development and subsequent role in national development and nation building. Since 2015, dozens of schools have been rehabilitated, thus making the classrooms learner friendly and friendly in specific cases regarding the young children.

This year, we have seen larger numbers of students graduating from high schools and from the University of Guyana (UG). A new pride shines over Georgetown and Region 4. This is why it comes as sweet music to the ears of Demerara residents that, in 2019, there will be construction, extension and rehabilitation of Bladen Hall Multilateral Secondary School and Friendship Secondary School, Diamond Primary School and Kuru Kuru Nursery School.

I am certain that citizens, especially parents, will be pleased to be informed that the construction of schools at Craig on the East Bank Demerara and *[inaudible]* on the East Coast corridor will be completed in 2019. There has been an exciting interest by our school students in the challenging and wonderful world of science. I am certain that the numerous science fairs are still vivid in the minds of the print and electronic viewers. Given the advance in oil and the fact that this is a science-based technology, it is commendable that our Government has been encouraging young people to become involved in science.

The provision in Budget 2019 for the construction of science laboratories at the St. Cuthbert's Secondary School and Ann's Grove Secondary School in Region 4 is further evidence of the Government's support for this very necessary aspect of science and technological development.

Since 2015, there has been specific focus on having a state health system that is more than capable of delivering quality healthcare to the public. The aim of this initiative is to have adequate health facilities within coastal communities that will cater for medical needs of our citizens within the immediate area, thus preventing them from journeying to the city, therefore reducing the rush on the central health system.

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

Mr. Carrington: Thank you, Sir. In this regard, health centres will be constructed at Supply and Diamond/Grove on the East Bank Demerara, while there will be extension done to the health centres at Clonbrook, Timehri and Soesdyke. These are, indeed, the key areas that are vital to any country's quest for proper social and economic development that will eventually lead to the quality life for its citizens.

5.40 p.m.

The work on the card for Region 4, which has the highest concentration for all of our races and people of different ethnicity and culture, will benefit all of our citizens. This means all Guyanese, regardless of race, gender or political affiliation, will benefit. Only a person who has love for condemnation will attack and condemn this budget.

Mr. Speaker, I ask of you... and I will say here now that I support this budget a hundred per cent, and I am hoping for the new year to come that the Bill on the legalising of cannabis will come up in the National Assembly next year. I thank you, in anticipation, that we will lay the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Bill in the National Assembly next year.

I support this budget a hundred per cent.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for his statement. Hon. Members, this brings us to an end our business for today. I thank you for your cooperation. Hon. Prime Minister and First Vice-President please move the adjournment.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the adjournment to this honourable House to tomorrow Tuesday, 4th December at 10 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow Tuesday, the 4th December, at 10 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 5.45 p.m.