



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF
THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC
OF GUYANA

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2021) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN

18TH Sitting

Thursday, 11TH February, 2021

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.14 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.,
*Speaker of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.*

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

(i) MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY/CIVIC (PPP/C) (38)

Prime Minister (1)

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,
*Prime Minister,
Prime Minister's Office,
Colgrain House,
205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.*

Vice-President (1)

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
*Vice-President,
Office of the President,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

+ Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, M.P.,
*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs,
Ministry of Legal Affairs,
Carmichael Street,
Georgetown.*

Senior Ministers (17)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
*(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Government Chief Whip,
Office of the Presidency,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Lot 254 South Road,
Georgetown.*

+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
*Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
Ministry of Finance,
Main & Urquhart Streets,
Georgetown.*

[Virtual Participation]

+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
*Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
*Minister of Health,
Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Minister of Education,
Ministry of Education,
Lot 26 Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Minister of Agriculture,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,
Minister of Amerindian Affairs,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
Ministry of Labour,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
Lot 96 Duke Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Lot 229 South Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Nigel D. Dharamlall, M.P.,
(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
Minister of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
DeWinkle Building,
Fort Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),
Minister of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Human Services and Social Security,
Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,
Lot 357 East and Lamaha Streets
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,
Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Main Street,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
Minister of the Public Service,
Ministry of the Public Service,
164 Waterloo Street,
North Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

Junior Ministers (4)

Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,
*Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister,
Office of the Prime Minister,
c/o Colgrain House,
205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,
*Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
*Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Fort Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
Lot 41 Brickdam & United Place,
Stabroek,
Georgetown.*

Other Members (14)

Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,
*Lot 71 BB Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,
*(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
148 Lethem,
Central Rupununi,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Lot 4 Public Road,
No. 66 Village,
Corentyne,
Berbice.*

Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,
*Lot 60 Section 'K',
John Street,
Campbellville,
Georgetown.*

Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,
*Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,
*Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,
*Lot 340 East Street,
South Cummingsburg,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,
*55 AA Victoria Avenue,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),
Lot 16-30 New Street,
New Amsterdam.
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,
*(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Lot 290 Area 'J',
Tuschen, North,
East Bank Essequibo.*

Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
*Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

*Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
*Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.*

*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
*Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.*

Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,
*Lot 32 Crown Dam,
Industry,
East Coast Demerara.*

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Joseph F. Harmon, M.S.M., M.P., <i>Leader of the Opposition, Lot 99 Mazaruni Street, Guyhoc Park, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Virtual Participation]</i>
Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P., <i>Lot 10 Delph Street, Campbelville, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, M.P., <i>Lot 410 Caneview Avenue, South Ruimveldt, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P., <i>Lot 3202 Pricese 3, Providence, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P., <i>Lot 933 Block 1, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Dr. Nicolette O. Henry, M.P., <i>Lot 2227 Ozama Street, North Ruimveldt, Georgetown.</i>	
Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P., <i>Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme, East Coast Demerara.</i>	
Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P., <i>Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue, South Ruimveldt Park, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P., <i>Lot 48 Atlantic Ville, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Virtual Participation]</i>
Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P., <i>Opposition Chief Whip, Lot 609 Conciliation Street, Tucville, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Virtual Participation]</i>
Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P., <i>Lot 842 Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Virtual Participation]</i>

Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P., <i>Lot 151 Durbana Square, Lamaha Gardens, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, M.P., <i>Lot 202 N, Fourth Street, Alexander Village, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 13 A, New Providence, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P., <i>Lot 18 Public Road, Johanna Cecilia, (Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P., <i>Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P., <i>Lot 1110 Plot ‘B’, Herstelling, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P., <i>Lot 590 Good Hope, East Coast Demerara.</i>	
Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P., <i>Lot 1282 Block EE, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	
Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P., <i>(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo), Shulidnab Village, South Central, Rupununi. (Culvert City Lethem)</i>	
Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P., <i>(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini), Mabaruma Compound.</i>	

Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,
(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
Lot 55 Henrietta,
Essequibo Coast.

Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P.,
Lot 14 Plantain Walk,
West Bank Demerara.

Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 88 Nelson Street,
Mocha Village,
East Bank Demerara.

[Virtual Participation]

Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,
Plantation Belfield,
East Coast Demerara.

[Virtual Participation]

Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 40 Block 3
Craig Milne,
Cove & John,
East Coast Demerara.

[Absent]

Mr. Vinceroy H. Jordan, M.P.,
(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),
Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,
West Coast Berbice.
C/o Christopher Jones

Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Lot 80 Babu John Road,
Haswell,
Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.

Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
(Region No. 8 – Potaro/Siparuni)
Church Street Mahdia.
Lot 4 Public Road,
Stewartville,
West Coast Demerara.

Mr. Jermaine Figueira, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 136 2nd Street,
Silvertown,
Wismar, Linden.

[Absent]

Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 90, Section C,
Wismar, Linden.

(ii) A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)

Mr. Lenox R. O'Dell Shuman, M.P.,
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,
St. Cuthbert's Mission,
Soesdyke Linden Highway.

Officers (2)

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A.,
Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Hansard Division Officers (20)

Ms. Allison Connelly,
Chief Editor

Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor

Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor (ag)

Ms. Latoiah Joseph,
Senior Editor (ag)

Ms. Carol Bess,
Editor

Ms. Shevona Telford,
Editor (ag)

Ms. Christina Ramroop,
Editor (ag)

Ms. Tesia Ellis,
Reporter

Ms. Indranie Persaud,
Reporter

Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter

Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter

Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Reporter

Ms. Bianca Cummings,
Reporter

Mr. Rohan Ramjas,
Reporter

Ms. Nadeila Allen,
Reporter

Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter

Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician

Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents *Page*

18TH Sitting Thursday, 11TH February, 2021

Introduction of Bill & 1 st Reading	2321
Public Business – Government Business	2322-2395
Bills 2 nd & 3 rd Readings - Law Reform Commission (Amt) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 11/2020	2323-2335
Bills 2 nd & 3 rd Readings - Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amt) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 12/2020	2336-2348
Suspension of Sitting of the National Assembly	2349
Remarks by the Speaker	2350
Address by His Excellency - The President	2351-2373
Bills 2 nd & 3 rd Readings - Small Business (Amt) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 13/2020	2374-2394
Committees' Business	2396
Adjournment -	2397-2398

[Technical difficulties were experienced due to power outage]

INTRODUCTION OF BILL AND FIRST READING

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. V. Persaud]: Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw the Adoption of Children (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 15/2020, which is on today’s Order Paper for Second Reading. The Bill which I will now present to the National Assembly for First Reading will take the place of the Bill mentioned. [Inaudible]

1. Adoption of Children (Amendment) Bill 2021 – Bill No.15/2021

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Adoption of Children Act.”

[Minister of Human Services and Social Security]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Bills – Second and Third Readings

1. Adoption of Children (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No.15/2020

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Adoption of Children Act.”

[Minister of Human Services and Social Security]

Dr. V. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I wish to withdraw the Adoption of Children (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 15/2020, which is on today’s Order Paper for Second Reading.

Bill withdrawn

2. Law Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 11/2020

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Law Reform Commission Act.”

[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: I rise to move that the Law Reform Commission

(Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 11/2020, which was published on the 20th November be now read a second time.

This Bill deals with the establishment of a law reform commission. Rather, it deals with the composition of the Law Reform Commission which has already been established by law, and the qualifications of persons who will constitute that Commission.

A law reform commission may be defined as an independent body established by Government to consider the State’s laws and make recommendations or proposals for legal changes or restructuring. Most Commonwealth jurisdictions have such a commission established and it plays a crucial role in driving the law reform process in a proactive, institutionalised and methodical manner, thereby, dispensing with *ad hoc* reactive law reform.

A law reform commission, in most of these jurisdictions, also engage in law revision which is a completely different legal process from law reform. Law revision entails the updating of the laws by insertion of amendments and the new enactments, along with accompanying regulations in consolidated volumes of the laws at periodic intervals.

The Law Reform Commission is admittedly late in coming in this jurisdiction. A few years ago, I recall a motion being put to this honourable House by the late Hon. Ms. Deborah Backer in which, in that motion, the Hon. Member called for the establishment of a law reform commission. The then Attorney General, Mr. Doodnauth Singh, Senior Counsel, had explained that the reason the Government of the day was not going to move in the direction of a law reform commission, at that point in time, was that we were then engaged in a law revision exercise. Recall, Mr. Speaker, that the last complete and comprehensive law revision exercise, which took place in this country, was between the years 1974 and 1977. After a very long hiatus, then we commenced another one which was concluded in 2012.

10.29 a.m.

At the time when that motion was put to the floor and was being debated, we were in the middle of that law revision exercise. It was explained by the then Learned Senior Counsel and Attorney General, Mr. Doodnauth Singh, and we on this side of the House, all concurred with the then position that, when the law division exercise had been completed, we would have moved to the establishment of a law reform commission. Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, we have completed that law revision exercise. The establishment of a

law reform commission in Guyana is a component of an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded project under the rubric, 'Support for the Criminal Justice System'. In 2016, in this honourable House, the Principle Act was passed. In Opposition, we welcomed the concept of the establishment of a law reform commission. We were vehemently critical, however, on the appointment process and the manner in which the Commission was constituted. We expressed those sentiments of opposition to the Bill in the debate. Of course, we were ignored, and the Bill was passed.

In 2017, 2018, and 2019, huge sums of money were budgeted for this Commission. A building was rented for all these years at a cost of \$800,000 per month. Ten clerical staff were appointed and were paid for all of these years. A new vehicle was acquired with a chauffeur was hired. This Commission consumed in excess of \$100 million but no commissioner was ever appointed. This constitutes, once again, another manifestation of a colossal waste of taxpayers' dollars, characterising the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change's (APNU/AFC) style of governance.

In direct contrast, as soon as we assumed Office, I caused the rental contract to be terminated immediately, saving this nation \$800,000 per month along with the cost for electricity bills, phone bills, internet bills, *et cetera*. When we examined the credentials of the staff and only one person, who has a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree, was hired and paid a whopping sum of \$750,000, when compared to a fully trained Attorney-at-Law attached to the Attorney General's Chambers, who earns less than \$300,000. This is another feature which characterised the previous Government. We could have terminated the employment of all those persons, but we did not. Many times, we were accused of witch-hunting and of terminating employment and putting people on the breadline, and here it is that we could have easily done that with this Commission because there was no commissioner. The Commission existed on paper only while it had 10 staff and a chauffeur, *et cetera*. What I did, instead, was to employ all of those persons as clerks within the Ministry and, of course, adjusted their salaries to bring them into conformity and consistency with the range of emoluments enjoyed by persons of that status at the Attorney General's Chambers. These clerks, these typists, were earning \$200,000 per month at the Law Reform Commission. They were earning as high as the State Counsel, or just below the State Counsel, but we did not pasture them. We brought them back within the Ministry and we adjusted... because they were all employed on contracts.

I heard the Hon. Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley speaking about and glorifying public officers. They were hiring all of these officers on contract. She is now pleading a case for public servants when their Administration hired more persons to work in the public sector on contract than was done in any other period in our history.

These contracts that they were operating under were terminated and or adjusted to bring them in conformity with public servants' salaries. Up to today, they remain employed within the Ministry of Legal Affairs. With the kind courtesy of my Colleague Minister, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Hon. Mr. Charles Ramson, I was able to secure accommodation within a building over which that Ministry has ministerial responsibility. That building is located at Middle Street and we were able to acquire it free of cost. This is where the law reform commission, once established, will be accommodated.

As I indicated, our objections to the Principal Act were twofold: the appointment process and the qualifications of members. Under the Principal Act, the President made all of the appointments after consulting, only, with the Minister of Legal Affairs. No one else was consulted in the process. All of the persons appointed to that Commission were persons possessing legal qualifications only. That is what we found significantly objectionable. One, the President acting only upon the advice of his Minister, appoints all of the commissioners, and the persons who were considered for appointment, or rather, only persons with legal qualifications were qualified under the law to be appointed to this Commission. That, we considered to be a most myopic, flawed and strange understanding of the nature and function of a law reform commission. In principle, there is absolutely no basis to concentrate all of these powers in the Executive without an input from any other sector of the country.

Laws are made for the benefit of all of us in a society. The law is not made for one section of the society. If a law is made for one section of a society, then the law-making institution must be equipped to deal with the peculiarities of that segment of the society. It is for that reason that a law reform commission must be as broad-based as possible, both in its appointment process as well as in those who constitute the commission.

How can one have a law reform commission without an input from the legal profession, without an input from the judiciary, without an input from the private sector, without an input from the trade union movement, without an input from the

religious organisations, and without an input from the human rights based organisations? That is inconceivable. That is how our society is composed. Laws are passed by this National Assembly that affect the constituent membership and constituency of all the organisations that I have identified. What we must always understand about the law is that it requires the support of the populace that it is expected to govern. The moment one imposes laws that are not in sync with the philosophy, that do not enjoy the support and that do not coincide with the aspirations of the society that it is expected to govern, those laws will be observed in defiance and disobedience. One has to pass laws that a society find, generally, acceptable and not repugnant. That is why it is important that, in a law reform type institution, there is the broadest possible representation.

This Bill repeals this manifestly absurd appointment process and makes the Commission more broad-based and representative of important stakeholders in society. As I said last night on a television programme, this Bill also demonstrates and illustrates that we do not embrace the style of Government of which Mr. Ramjattan normally accuses us. *Control freakism* is the term, I believe, that he used. If we were, I would not have been standing here making amendments to a law that is already in existence, which concentrates in the Executive Government, all the powers of appointment without the resort or the facility of consultation. This here is an example of where we are, voluntarily, migrating and alienating Executive power that we already have, compliments of that side. We are, in a sense, extending it to have an involvement and an engagement with those who are extrinsic to our Executive Government. This exemplifies the type of difference in our philosophy and in our style of government.

In relation to the qualification of the members, here again we see a palpable misconception and a very untutored view of who comprises a law reform commission. The previous Government felt that a law reform commission should only be comprised of persons with legal qualifications – a manifest absurdity. A proper law reform commission, in addition to legally trained persons, must also have persons trained in social sciences, in the natural sciences, in economics and commerce and in law enforcement.

10.44 a.m.

As part of the commission's mandate, it will be required to recommend or draft laws to meet these sectoral interests. Scientific research may have to be done and social surveys

will be conducted, and economic and commercial activities will be examined to inform legislative policy and, indeed, law reform itself, hence, the need to expand qualifications to include personnel trained in these pursuits. This Bill seeks to correct these abysmal errors by clause 3.

I will read clause 3 (3) quickly:

“The Chairperson and at least three other members of the Commission...”

For those of us who have read the Bill, we have a seven-member Commission.

“(3) The Chairperson and at least three other members of the Commission shall be persons appearing to be suitably qualified by-

- (a) the holding of, or by having held an office as a judge of a court having unlimited jurisdiction...
- (b) experience as an attorney-at-law for at least ten years; or
- (c) experience as a teacher of law in a University for at least ten years.”

The expansion goes on, now, beyond these legally trained people:

“(4) Subject to subsection (3), any other member of the Commission shall be a person who has had a minimum of ten years' experience in any of the following fields-

- (a) banking, industry, economics or commerce;
- (b) social or natural sciences; or
- (c) law enforcement.”

So, you see how we have moved from only legally trained persons to persons trained in banking, industry, economics, or commerce, social or natural sciences, and in the area of law enforcement. When a commission of law reform sits, should have these skillsets, having regard to the training and qualifications of the persons.

Another important addition, which the Bill makes to the Principal Act, is contained in clause 5, by substituting a new section 11. In clause 5 of the Principal Act lists the various organisations that have to be consulted before membership or before persons are appointed to the commission. They are all listed in the Bill.

In addition to the organisations that are listed, we have an amendment that we will propose to add another entity in which to consult. That amendment is going to be moved by one of my Colleagues on this side of the House. I want to recognise the Hon. Deputy Speaker for drawing to my attention that we should include, in the entities to be consulted, the organisation representing the Indigenous peoples.

With those few remarks, I commend this Bill to the House. I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. The next person on my list is the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you have the floor.

Before I call on the next speaker, let me recognise online the Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, and the Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess.

Hon. Member Mr. Charlie, you have the floor.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to join my Hon. Colleague and to add my contribution to the Law Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill 2020 – No. 11/2020.

Having a representative of the National Toshias Council (NTC) on the Law Reform Commission is timely and necessary, since the NTC represents more than 200 Amerindian communities across Guyana.

As enshrined in the Constitution of Guyana and under the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, the Amerindians have a right to participate in national decision-making regarding matters which affect their rights. The NTC representative on the Law Reform Commission would truly represent the diverse nature of Guyana's society. Added to that, the Amerindian community needs a representative that understands the challenges of its people in its own country. The dispensation of information would be timely to hinterland villages, village leaders and in the hinterland regions, since the representative would hold dual appointments on the NTC and on the Law Reform Commission. That will afford them the opportunity to transmit legal advice and developments, while gaining full feedbacks and reducing misinformation and ambiguity in specific regard to law reform.

Under the Coalition Government, our community was treated as pariahs in the national landscape under. However, the PPP/C Administration has treated the Amerindians of Guyana

as equals to every citizen of the land. It is made evident, today, in this august House, through the amendment of this Bill, by having a NTC representative sit on the Law Reform Commission.

I humbly ask that the Law Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill 2020 – No. 11/2020 be unanimously supported in the best interest of Guyana's legitimate First Peoples.

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

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, understanding reform revision and what is needed for the country to move forward cannot be taken in isolation. There must be a context to everything that is presented, and I ask the House's indulgence for me to impart a little bit of history as we talk about this Law Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill.

Before this country was formed, Indigenous peoples existed in Guyana. We existed across the Americas without borders; we had territories. Before we demarcated the country that separated families across the Americas, not a single person came and asked if the Indigenous peoples wanted to be part of a State.

In 1814, when Guyana was given to the British, no one came and asked the Indigenous peoples whether they were willing to be subjects of a crown. When the laws were made, not a single person came and asked the Indigenous peoples if they were willing to have the laws brought upon them. It took, I think, until 1948, and even then, the Amerindian Act, done by Her Majesty, did not address the needs of the Indigenous peoples. It took us until 2006, with the Amerindian Act coming to life, for us to have a voice. It was long overdue.

It is important that we understand the implications and value of what the Law Reform Commission Bill Act with. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that we have a right to self-determination, and that we have a right to processes that affect our lifestyle and our lives. The Constitution of Guyana, under article 149 G, also enshrines that right.

We are sitting here in this House, once again, as we did about three weeks ago, debating a 6,000-year issue in the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Bill, which is the intellectual properties of Indigenous peoples. It is important that we understand the context of what we are doing here, today, and to ensure that what we do benefits the people. In

the history of this country, we have never had meaningful engagements to ensure that everything done at the highest level, we have had an opportunity to speak on them. We have never had the opportunity to influence policies that affect us.

I must commend the Attorney General and the Administration, at this point, for taking such a proactive, ambitious and bold step to ensure that Indigenous peoples will, finally, through this Bill, have a voice in the reformation of the legal structures with which we have to deal and live.

Indigenous communities lived in conflict and perpetuity. Whether it is the Mines Act, the Forest Act, the Lands Act or the Amerindian Act, all these things conflict, at some point, with Indigenous peoples.

10.59 a.m.

We are talking about reform and we are yet to broach a very sensitive topic of constitutional reform. We are yet to broach another sensitive topic about the revision or reformation of the Amerindian Act of 2006. What we are going to see happen through the simple amendment, as proposed by my Hon. Colleague Mr. Charlie, is for the first time in this country a true and meaningful consultation and input from Indigenous people. Not only is it timely, it is also long overdue and welcomed. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Datadin: I rise to support the amendments proposed in the Law Reform Commission Bill. The amendment is crucial and indeed necessary, if law reform is to be effectively undertaken and we are to achieve the objectives which law reform should indeed achieve.

Mr. Speaker, you heard from the Hon. Attorney General; the principal thrust of this amendment is to make the commission, that is to be established by this statute, more broad-based. It is to make it more inclusive and allow for the participation of greater society.

Since Roman times, democracy has been understood to be the will of the people. It does not only mean that once a representative is elected, the wishes of the people are to be ignored. If we are to reform our laws and if we are to introduce legislation that are going to govern the people of Guyana, it stands to reason that we should at least consult with them and listen to what they have to say.

This reform must take place with consultation and with an even hand. That cannot be achieved if all of the power rest in the Executive alone.

The amendment that is proposed gives effect to article 13 of our Constitution. It provides:

“The principal objective of the political system of the State is to establish an inclusionary democracy by providing increasing opportunities for the participation of citizens, and their organisations in the management and decision-making process of the State...”

Those words must have meaning. It must mean that the decision-making process of the State must not exclude the citizens and their organisations. It must not exclude from them, the opportunity to contribute. We all know that every civilised society is governed by laws. It is obvious to all that the laws in Guyana need updating. The laws in our country must *move with the times*, as is the popular parlance. We must recognise improvements, developments and new concepts. This is necessary to reflect how society changes and reacts. It is necessary that we adjust our statutes so that they bring to bear that which the nation needs and must have as a tool to progress and to move forward. It must be done if we are to address new challenges in every sphere of society, to remove from our law books, old archaic, and I daresay, to some extent, useless legislation.

The administration of justice requires consultation. The reforms to the Judicial system and indeed, our statutory regime, requires consultation. There must be broad-based representation in that consultation process. Our laws must be for all Guyanese and meet the needs of a nation that is growing, and it must reflect the morality of its people. This can only be achieved if we provide for a law reform commission that consists of all segments and all sectors of our society.

In 2016, by an act of Parliament, this Commission was established. Alas, like so many other things during the last Administration, it was left incomplete, save and except for the excesses mentioned this morning by the Hon. Minister. The Commission itself was never constituted. It was a difficult piece of legislation to meet the needs of the Guyanese people. It was designed to establish a commission of persons who were all appointed by the President. He had to do so through the Minister but, the President, ultimately, was the appointing force. It consisted of persons with only legal training. The arrogance of such a provision, to stipulate to a nation that only the lawyers are capable of coming up with the ideas of what are the needs of a society. It was myopic and unfortunate but, perhaps, its fatal flaw was that what it

sought to do would not have reflected the needs and morals of a society because it did not provide for any inclusion. The result of such a commission would have been laws that were, really and truly, only flowing from the Executive arm and wishes. That is not how legislation should be undertaken, certainly not the reform.

The proposed amendment raised by the Hon. Attorney General, with which I am in total agreement, can be identified as being on two principal plans. One, it provides for the appointment of the M members of the Commission and it provides for who should be represented and consulted by that Commission. In relation to the appointment of Members, the existing legislation provides for the President alone, with the Minister, to appoint persons to be members. The previous President – we all know that, under the last Administration, concentration of power is dangerous. It seemed a common policy. It was sought and exercised even where it did not exist. The unilateral appointment of the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), Mr. Patterson, is one such incident. That required the intervention of the highest court, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), to correct it in a matter that was brought in the name of the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Mustapha. However, let us not escape it. It is not desirable in democratic societies that the concentration of a law reform commission be held only by the Executive.

The Act provides for a total of seven members to be appointed. The amendment provides for the President to appoint two persons, five of those members are appointed by the Minister, Hon. Attorney General, after he has engaged in wide and meaningful consultations. This is so that society may have an input, the voices of the wider society can be heard, and the consultations can be broad-based.

Who are the persons to be consulted? The legislation in the amendment, section three provides the organisations that must be consulted: the Bar Association of Guyana, the private sector, the trade unions, consumer affairs, religious communities and by the amendment, the National Toshias Council (NTC). You have heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, emphasise the importance of that.

Not only are we saying in the amendment that there should be broad based consultations, we are putting in the statute those that are entitled to be consulted, so that they can say when they have not been consulted and they can say that this is what we think and this what we would like to see in our laws.

The present legislation provides only for persons with legal training. The Hon. Attorney General explained the limitations of having only persons with legal training. The amendment provides for persons with 10 years' experience in fields such as banking, industry, economics, commerce, social and natural sciences, and law enforcement. This now allows the Commission to be constituted by persons who have considerable experience – 10 years – in the different spheres of society which makes it function. Natural resources are important to the nation at present. We should have someone with that qualification.

11.14 a.m.

Economics, law enforcement, these are all issues which the nation and the people of Guyana want to have considered in their laws. This is what inclusivity means. We must remember that this Commission is charged with reforming our laws and of necessity. Every aspect of our lives will fall for consideration; every aspect of the lives of every Guyanese will fall for consideration. For that reason, we should hear from all facets, all spheres, every *nook and cranny* of society must be able to contribute.

Importantly, the reforming of laws is an expensive process. Funding is usually available. In our particular case, the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs has alluded to the existence of funding.

This legislation goes further. It states, very clearly, that we can make use of available grants and we could make use of other assistance that is available to us. We have put in the amended legislation, a mechanism that is clear that we could take advantage of all assistance in reforming our laws to better represent our people and to better represent the wishes of the society.

The amendment provides, expressly, for this inclusion. We must reform our laws. Our laws are out-dated in many respects. We must correct this in the shortest possible time at the soonest opportunity. This amendment provides a framework for a commission to not only engage in this activity of reform, but to achieve this reform that is so desperately needed.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the proposed amendment and I thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of the Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Mr. Speaker, when I was preparing my speech for this debate, it was a legitimate expectation by me that there would be no

contestation to the proposed amendments for the Law Reform Commission Act 2016. It was for the obvious reason that this Bill – Bill No. 11 of 2020 satisfies the resounding call for inclusivity by the public. It is something that is necessary, and I wholly support the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs in bringing and tabling this Bill in Parliament today.

A little bit of research globally will tell you that, in any modern society, laws are expected to be reviewed regularly with an aim of being simply understood, accessible, fair, modern and cost-effective. Any law reform commission, acclaimed to have success globally, the fundamental feature of that commission is independence and inclusivity. Those are two fundamental features that any law reform commission could credit its success to.

In Guyana, after revising the laws, the next step would have been to enact the Law Reform Commission Act. That was done in 2016, but in the usual *half-baked nature* of the Opposition. The key factor, which is the Commission itself, was never constituted, never established. Yet, exorbitant moneys were spent every month without any service in the best interest of the public. Rent was being paid for a building of \$800,000 per month. This was one of the first things that came out in the public when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) took Office, after 2nd August, 2020. It was wastage as in every other thing that was being done.

One can only conclude that, because there was the lack of constituting a commission that would serve the people, there was a disinterest in serving the people of this country. The fact that the President had all of the powers, through the appointment of Commissioners, only in consultation with the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, showed to the world and the country that there was an intention to have that chokehold – that political chokehold – that wanting to remain in partisan or playing partisan politics. With all of the calls for Government to release control of a commission, this is what the amendment proposed here will do.

It is not rocket science to figure out that to have reform in all laws in every sector, there must be voices heard from different sections of society and not only heard, but accurately represented and addressed. That is what sections 3 and 4 of the amendment proposes to do and it is laid out here clearly. This is not an 'if' or a 'but', this is a 'shall'. This is mandatory. This is what the process will be. This restores confidence in the public that there are challenges and there

are issues that will be adequately addressed through their representatives.

Those persons who will be appointed on this Commission have the responsibility to each section for which they are representing. It is also a feature of the Law Reform Commission Act to develop laws for civil society, for democracy and for the rule of law. In this country, we saw, five months prior to 2nd August, 2020, our democracy almost at a collapse. No one knows better than us that we need law reform.

Again, I whole-heartedly give my support to the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs for the proposed amendments to be enacted. [*Applause*]

Mr. Nandlall (replying): Permit me to thank the Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr. Shuman; the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin; the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie; and the Hon. Member, Ms. Parag for their support and for assisting me in explaining to the House the nature and purport of the amendments.

I assume that, by the absence of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) from this debate, they are also supportive of the Bill. I know that they cannot come to grips with the reality of standing here and expressing their support to what is obviously, a faultless piece of legislation. Rather than stand here and show the Guyanese people that they are supporting the Government, because they cannot come here and oppose this Bill, they have decided to stay away. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their support.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time, we will request your leave to pursue a minor amendment, but at this point in time, I respectfully ask that the Bill be read a second time.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 2

Clauses 1 to 2, as printed, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

Mr. Charlie: In clause 3, under the new Section 4(1) of the Act, paragraph (v) of the Act, delete the word "and".

Also, in clause 3, under Section 4(1), paragraph (vi) of the Act, substitute the 'full-stop' with a 'semi-colon'.

11.29 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: One moment, please.

Sorry Mr. Charlie, I was just double-checking the procedure. Before your contribution I would need to have the Hon. Member, Mr. Williams, for whom I have a signature here, second that motion.

Mr. Williams, Mr. Charlie has moved the motion, do you formally second the motion?

Mr. Williams: Mr. Chairman, I second the motion.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 3, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: There is a slight correction, I was putting 'clause' instead of 'section'. Just for the record, it was Section 2 that I proposed, it was passed and Section 4, which was just amended.

Clause 4

Clause 4, as printed, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5

Clause 5, as printed, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

Mr. Charlie: Clause 3, also needs an adoption, by inserting after paragraph (vi), a new paragraph (vii) as follows:

“Cap. 29:01 (vii) the National Toshaos' Council established under the Amerindian Act.”

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I may have *jumped the gun* because I put the other two amendments prior. Just for completeness, the Hon. Member had two other amendments, so let us put the second amendment that, in Paragraph 4 by substitution of the full stop with a semi-colon.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 3, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, I report that the Bill was considered by the Committee and amended. I move that the Bill now be read a third time as amended.

Bill reported with amendments, read a third time and passed as amended.

(3) DECEASED PERSONS ESTATES' ADMINISTRATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020 – Bill No. 12/2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration Act.”

[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with that second reading. The Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, one of the characteristics that an avid observer will note regarding bills that are coming from the PPP/C Administration, is that, most of these bills, save and except those of a highly technical nature, are bills that have a human face to it, are bills that are intended and are designed to positively impact the lives of the people of our country. That is a fundamental component of law-making.

Every time I have a discussion with the Bar Association of Guyana or any of the important stakeholder organisations in this country, I invite them to submit to me, areas of the law that require amendments because they have become outmoded, they have become archaic or have lost their conceptual purpose and have now become burdens and obstacles rather than regulating and assisting the population. The law was never intended to become an obstacle to human progress, the law was conceptually designed to enhance, regulate and advance human progress, assisting people in the conduct of their everyday life.

It is against that backdrop that I speak on the Bill that is before this House. It is small in its form, but I daresay, it has far-reaching and very positive ramifications and implications for the widest cross-sections of our population. Any lawyer who has been in active practice and most persons who may be listening to us here today, would be able to relate directly to this piece of legislation.

As one may know, when a person dies the assets of that person forms part of that person's estate and that is the legal entity that holds those assets of a deceased person by operation of law, until someone duly authorised to deal with those assets are appointed. The process by which such a person is to be appointed, is one that is legal. If the deceased dies intestate, meaning, if a person dies without leaving a will, then the person next authorised by the law to apply for the letters of administration, by law, has to approach the High Court and request that the court make an order, granting letters of administration for that deceased person's estate. If the deceased person dies testate, meaning that he dies leaving a will, the will normally appoints an executor and that executor is required to apply again to the High Court for probate to be granted in relation to that will. It is only when either of these instruments are appointed – the letters of administration and the probate – that the person to whom they are granted is authorised to *stand in the shoes* of the deceased person to deal with the assets of the estate of the deceased person, subject, of course, to certain legal principles which protect the interest of the beneficiaries of that estate.

If the deceased person has a car, no one can sell that car, apply for insurance for that car, or apply for certificate of fitness for that car, unless that person obtains either the letters of administration or the probate, as the case may be.

11.44 p.m.

If the deceased person has moneys in the bank, those moneys cannot be withdrawn or cannot be touched, for any matter whatsoever, unless that grant of probate or the letters of administration is presented to the bank by the person to whom it is granted. Only then would the bank allow a withdrawal of moneys from the deceased's account. In other words, the assets of the deceased remain frozen until these processes are made, and these two documents or instruments are granted.

The problem that we face, and that society faces, realistically, is that this process to which I am referring is a very expensive one. One has to retain a lawyer. One has to compile the assets. One has to have them valued by a certified Valuation Officer. One has to go to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and have all the assets examined in an inventory. One also has to compile the liabilities. Based upon the net value of the estate, one has to pay estate duties and then make the application for the grant to which I am referring, either probate or letters of administration, to the High Court. A

Judge must examine the application and then the document or the application is granted.

The process that I have just outlined is a very expensive one and costs an average, at a minimum, of \$200,000 to \$300,000. That is the lowest I have gone and that is for the smallest of estates. On the other end of the scale, it could run into millions, depending upon the value of the estate because the lawyer's fees vary in accordance with the size of the estate.

Then, the time it takes to compile all the documents that I have spoken about...sometimes one cannot find the transport for a property. One would have to apply to get a certified copy of the transport. One may have a transport lodged at the bank; one would have to get a certified copy from the court. One may not be able to find the registration for a vehicle; so, one may have to go to GRA to get a certified copy of the registration. To prepare the application that one must lodge with the court is by itself an expensive exercise, and I have not included the lawyer's fees which I quoted earlier. By itself, that could be a very time-consuming exercise. When one gets that and makes the application, there is another long and protracted delay before the court grants the application.

Only yesterday, a person whom I know personally asked for my assistance to intervene in a matter. Her husband died, the application for letters of administration was filed since 2018 and, to date, it has not been granted. Her husband has some money in a bank account and the only child of the family is at university and in dire need of that money to pay for his tuition. The mother has made the application to the court since 2018 for the letters of administration to be granted. As of yesterday, it was not granted, and my intervention was sought. This is 2021. I am giving the House a live example of the time that it takes for one of these applications to be granted. I spoke about the time it takes to prepare the application to take to the court.

In those circumstances, persons across our population, in particular poorer people, working people and our more vulnerable people, have had to endure tremendous hardships because of this position in the law that prohibits them from touching the assets of a deceased until the grant is made.

A man from a poor family may have \$500,000 in the bank and that is all the money the family has. His family cannot go to the bank to withdraw that money, even to do the funeral, and that may be all the money they have to do the funeral. They have to wait until the grant is made by a court and they may not have money to do even that. The worst-case scenario

is where the money in the bank is more miniscule than the cost to make the application to get the money. A person may have \$300,000 in the bank but the cost to get the \$300,000 might be \$400,000 and so it is left in the bank.

Late last year, I had a meeting with the Guyana Association of Bankers and they drew to my attention the number of accounts which have been rendered dormant with moneys in it, simply because persons have refused, omitted or neglected to withdraw them after the death of a deceased.

The Deceased Persons Estates' Administration Act, which is the Principal Act to this Bill, is almost 100 years old. Our law, 100 years ago, recognised the hardships which I have just outlined. The Principal Act excepts estate of a certain value. I think it was \$250 or something like that. It made certain exceptions in relation to those estates of that size and also allowed for the withdrawal of a small sum of money – now it is small, but at that time it would not have been small – without the grants that I am speaking about. This Bill that is before this House, along with some amendments which I will propose at the appropriate time, seeks, cumulatively, to alleviate the hardships to which I have alluded and allows for a dispensation of grants of probate as well as letters of administration.

In relation to estates that are \$750,000 in value, the Bill that we are proposing, along with the amendments, dispenses with the need for a probate to be granted in the event of the deceased person leaving a will or for letters of administration if there is no will. Once the net value of the estate is \$750,000, then one does not require letters of administration or probate. This applies to estates which the Public Trustee is also, by law, required to administer. It applies to intestate estates; it applies to testate estates; and it applies to estates over which the Public Trustee and other organisations may have responsibility.

The second important component of the Bill is in relation to the bank accounts. Whether the deceased dies testate or intestate, a duly authorised person...If he dies intestate, meaning without a will, of course, the rules of intestacy create a hierarchy of persons who are entitled in that order to apply. It starts with the spouse and then the children. If there is no spouse and if there are no children, then it is parents and then siblings. It is all outlined in the Civil Law Act in the order in which they take priority. Any one of those persons could go to the bank and withdraw from the deceased's account a maximum of \$750,000, immediately upon the presentation of documents that the bank would consider

relevant. This is obviously the death certificate of the deceased and obviously document that would be establish, to the satisfaction of the bank, that the individual is one of the persons who is duly qualified – a marriage certificate if one is the spouse. If one is a child, then it is his or her birth certificate with the name of the deceased stated as the father.

Significantly, we have already amended, in 2014 when we were in Government, the law to allow for a common law spouse to benefit from the estate of a deceased spouse in the same fashion that a married woman would. We have already corrected that deficiency in the law.

Here, a married wife or a common law wife would be of equal standing if such a person is to approach the bank.

11.59 a.m.

Also, if the deceased died testate and there is an executor, then the executor will go and present himself, provide the documents requisite and will be allowed to withdraw up to \$750,000.

Significantly, unlike the Principal Act, which had confined withdrawal to a limit if the account was of that limit – in other words, it only applied to small accounts – in the amendments that are coming, that limit has been expanded so that it applies to all bank accounts. Of course, one is only entitled to withdraw \$750,000. Let us say that the deceased person has \$100 million. Then, one could withdraw \$750,000 immediately, without the grant of probate or letters of administration.

This Bill and the accompanying amendments, which I will ask, at the appropriate time, that we consider, present a great reprieve against the hardships that are imposed on persons as I said, especially the poorer classes of people in our society, who may have great financial constraints and difficulties when the unpredictable phenomenon of deaths raps on their doors.

This Bill, in my humble and considered view, is long overdue and will help a wide cross-section of our population. It also, again, manifests and demonstrates that the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) Administration has a legislative agenda that is not sterile and reactive to international organisations, but is one that is proactive and caters for and addresses the concerns of the people of our country in every sector of our population.

All of these Bills that are on the Order Paper, if Your Honour is to look at them, you will see the deep human element in all

of them. The Small Business (Amendment) Bill 2020 deals with small businesses; human beings right away. The Hire Purchase Bill 2020, when we get to debate that, has the people at heart. The amendment that we made to the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act has the people at heart. The Law Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill 2020 was expanded to allow for all of our people to be consulted. We have a parliamentary legislative agenda to which the population could relate. We do not make laws in isolation.

The Opposition is not here. I would have asked them to point to one law that they passed, from 2015 to 2020, that had a people component to it. I was racking my brain last night, but I could not think of one. They passed a whole series of Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AMLCFT) Bills, which were all draconian, as the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill said, but they were to satisfy technical requirements. The series of laws that they passed was to impose taxes on the backs of the people. That is the type of laws that they have a speciality in passing and, also, the type of laws that allow the GRA to invade persons bank accounts without notification and the kind of law that allows a person from GRA to stop someone at the airport if he or she owes taxes. That is the kind of law. One sees the juridical and philosophical content of the type of legislation. On that side, it is oppressive and repressive and, on this side, it is affectionate and loving. That is the different between the two.

I ask, respectfully, that this Bill be read a second time. At the appropriate stage, I will, respectfully, invite us to consider the amendments which I am proposing. I thank you most kindly, Sir. *[Applause]*

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Attorney General just alluded to another Bill that carries a human face. The common tread with all of the Bills presented by this Government is that they have a human face and a human component that is relative and could connect with the people of this country.

The amendments to the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration Act, though they look minimal, carry a huge impact on a large section of our society. Being someone who had encountered many clients in private practice – and I am most certain that the Hon. Attorney General and the other lawyers who are in the National Assembly here today would have experienced this – for 90% of the clients who come to deal with small estates, the lawyers have to end up doing it *pro bono*. That is because the cost is so much. The legal

process of accessing the estates to which they are entitled deters them from doing so and the lawyers end up doing the work for free because they want to assist.

The amendments proposed in this Bill will have a very far-reaching effect. Many times, small estates are left inaccessible to the heirs. Many times, the process is so long. The Hon. Attorney General spoke of an experience that he had of it taking two years. Sometimes it is longer than that. Persons die waiting to access something they are entitled to get. This proposed amendment is to give relief to those persons who have to get what they should get.

The process has not changed, legally, very much. Therefore, persons are really constrained by the cost and time. This is something that should had been looked at in the last five years. It is something that was necessary. It is something that would have caused ease to so many persons. Persons have to come from Mahaicony, Region 5, to Georgetown. They have to pay their transportation costs so many times. They have to pay taxes and get compliances, which take a percentage of the estates. The lawyers' fee is a percentage of the estate. Persons just do not have money. The fact that they are trying to access something as small as estates of \$750,000, which is the proposed amendment, means that they are in need of finances for many reasons. Perhaps, it is to have their loves ones sent off in the best possible way or they have other needs for that money. The fact that they cannot access it is unacceptable. It is for this reason, again, I support this Bill. I know this is something that would give relief to poor people. It is a pro-poor Bill.

I do not really have much to say on this Bill, except that anyone with an ounce of sense will know that this will bring relief. It is just one of the measures that will bring relief to the people. In saying that, I do not believe I have anything much to add. The Hon. Attorney General stated so much on what the proposed amendments are. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to stand here and support the passage of this amendment, an amendment that should see support from every Member of this House who claims to be representing people in this country.

The character of government could be judged from how it treats not only large numbers, masses and people who would celebrate relieves and goodness with letters in the newspapers, and, perhaps, even thank you cards and thank you billboards, but the people who need it so much and who are so poor, perhaps downtrodden, that they have no means

even to celebrate goodness that is brought to them and who have little means to even represent that they need that kind of relief. A government could be categorised by how it treats its most needy as equally as how it treats its loudest members of society.

This Government is committed to making sure that we address the needs of everybody. There are business people who have great wealth and who help to generate wealth in this country who need our interventions in this House to pass laws and implement policies. But there are people who we will never hear from who really need us. That is the category of persons this amendment is going to serve. We heard from the Attorney General what it is really about. It is an amendment that seeks to offer relief to poor persons whose families have a deceased leaving \$750,000 or less in the bank. That alone tells about the category of persons we are dealing with – persons who have less than \$750,000 in their estate. This is not new to the law. When the law was first made, it was recognised that we should not burden persons with a small estate with the hassles of getting letters of administration, if one dies intestate, or probate, if a deceased die leaving a will.

12.14 p.m.

That involves the expense of a lawyer, which the Attorney General spoke about. It is usually 5% of a large estate. If it is not a large estate, like he said, it starts at \$150,000, \$300,000 or \$500,000, depending on the lawyer.

It is not just the lawyer's fee. There is an estate duty that has to be paid, now called processing fees, to the Government. There are valuations that have to be had. There are bank statements that have to be had. All of these things cost money; affidavits have to be sworn and so on. That is very burdensome financially. The running around to get to the process is also extremely burdensome for a grieving family. One has to come to central points. The magistrate's courts do not deal with estates. It is the High Courts. We know we have High Courts in only three places in Guyana – Berbice, Essequibo and Georgetown.

In fact, all the estates come to Georgetown, although one could visit his or her lawyer in his or her particular area. This becomes very burdensome for our dear citizens. The Principal Act recognised that and catered for it. Because it is such an old Act, it catered for \$1,000 estates. We are now raising that to \$750,000. That underscores how important a Law Reform Commission, for which we just passed a Bill in the Assembly, is needed. These are the kinds of holistic changes

we have to look at. One thousand dollars will mean nothing to a grieving family at this point in time. That is something we could fix easily and that is what we seek to do here today.

This Bill is going to allow the beneficiaries of persons who died testate, that is, they died leaving a will; persons who died intestate, that is, without a will; or persons who died leaving a will but not naming an executor following the procedures of law to access up to \$750,000 from their estates to be able to do several things. Many persons actually need that money urgently to bury their dead, their loved ones, and to dispose of their loved ones. Many persons, once the breadwinner is gone from the house, need emergency money to be able to cater for the shock that is created in their family when that breadwinner goes. This is going to serve our families, our poor and people who are already in grief.

There are a few amendments that I believe the Attorney General is going to propose from the floor. This allows, firstly, the principal beneficiary – who would be the beneficiary of the estate and the Attorney General went through the various levels of beneficiaries – to receive up to \$750,000 from the bank if the estate has more. If a deceased die and has \$3 million in the bank, this amendment allows the beneficiary to receive at least \$750,000. It also allows for the beneficiary to receive all of the money once it is under \$750,000. The amendment would also cater for people who die testate. That was not in the previous Bill that was laid before the House and that is an advertence. We are making no distinction, by these various amendments, between the person who died testate and the person who dies intestate

There are a few other things that would have to be done. If someone is going to the bank, they would have to show proof of death and kinship – how they are related. If it is a wife going to claim, she has to show proof of death as well as her marriage certificate. Minister Benn is going to become very important in this process, because it makes no sense for us to come here and pass laws and they cannot be effected. Death certificates take forever to be issued. We would have to put in place, and I truly hope this conversation will be had as soon as possible after this Bill is passed, the ability for these types of applicants to be able to access a death certificate almost immediately. We have to do that or this amendment would make no sense to them. The urgency that we believe people need money in these circumstances would be diluted because of other logistical nightmares with which they are usually faced sometimes with these services. We have to look at this holistically, even after it is finished. We have to walk this through to see what are all the obstacles and hurdles that

would lay in the path of an applicant to determine how we could make it as easy as we would want to make it.

I remember the last amendment we made under the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration Act. We had made a lot of progressive changes regarding the common law wife, who is defined to be a single woman living together with a single man in excess of five years. We had made a lot of amendments, but we failed to make one. That was to allow a common law wife to make applications under the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration Act, the Principal Act that we seek to amend today. It was this Attorney General, during the 2011 to 2015 period, who brought that to the House where we demonstrated how caring we were to the common law wife and how much of a friend we are to the families by making that amendment. Five or seven years later, we come back to make an amendment, again, for people who would be disadvantaged by this particular law. Like I said, one could use government to trample on people, to speak down to people, to try to rig elections, to install, unilaterally, Elections Commission (GECOM) Chairman or one could use government to change lives for the better. This Bill would change people's lives for the better.

Ironically, many of the people who would benefit from this probably never even realised how easy it would be for us to change this for them. We know how easy it is and we are here, less than seven months in Office, making a change that would impact people in this country, who have no recourse and who need it most. We commit to the people of Guyana that this would be the characteristic underlining our governance. Whatever it is we do, we will do it to make sure it serves people, so that people benefit, so that families benefit, so that our communities are stronger and so that our systems improve. This is going to offer that kind of relief. It is aimed mainly to address the families whose loved ones die leaving very small estates. There is provision also for the loved ones of a person who dies, leaving a larger estate, but the family immediately needs some money,

I am absolutely certain that the banks would be happy with this also. I am aware of many persons who had \$200,000 or \$300,000 in the bank, after years and years of saving, and died leaving that there and their families have no wherewithal to get it out. It is left there in the bank. How unjust is that? That is just so unjust. It might be a father who died leaving a mother and three children and she is thrown into financial shock because of that death and she cannot access that. We are changing that today.

I take great pleasure in commending this Bill to this House and in saying that this is the kind of change, legislatively, the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic would be looking to bring to this country. I thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, before I take the suspension, I just want to tell you that we are going to return at 1.30 p.m. The challenge we have been having is a quorum in the Assembly and online to restart. Hon. Members, I would appreciate if we could get back here before 1.30 p.m. so we could resume the debate on the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill 2020. Hon. Members, I now take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.25 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.31 p.m.

Mr. Narine: Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my full support for the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill 2020, Bill No. 12 of 2020. As I considered the amendments proposed, I recognised that they go a far way in alleviating the burdens many families are confronted with on the passing of their loved ones. Often times, especially for poorer Guyanese, this represents another period of anguish for the families of the deceased as they seek to bring closure to the life of their beloved one.

The amendments proposed by the Hon. Attorney General are timely and constitute yet another tangible demonstration of the PPP/C to bring relief to the lives of the ordinary Guyanese people. Indeed, in the absence of the amendment, our people were required to find certain large sums to comply with the Act as currently structured. The sums demanded may, at times, exceed what was held by the deceased. Therefore, the families are denied such sums which may be needed to defray final expenses.

This is a sad situation too many times faced by poor Guyanese. As I review the amendments, I recall the stories I heard of many people being unable to afford the requisite fees to be able to access their deceased relatives' estates. Imagine, Mr. Speaker, a person who managed to save \$5,000 per month. It would take that person roughly 12 years to put away a sum equivalent to the new threshold.

1.34 p.m.

While for some who might be earning at the national minimum wage level, it might take a lifetime to save that amount. Based on the current arrangement, a significant portion of that sum may be required to offset legal fees to

assess the estate of the deceased. Thus, the amendment will allow relatives of the deceased, especially younger children, to benefit from the lifesavings of their relatives.

While I am heartened by the amendment, I must admit that I am not surprised because the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) has a long tradition of progressive, pro-poor measures as it seeks to improve the wellbeing of our peoples. These amendments are yet another testimonial of the PPP/C commitment to our people and, more so, the poorer Guyanese who were, during the past five years, disregarded by the previous Government.

The situation of the ordinary man and woman, during the stint of the Coalition in Office, was nothing short of miserable. They and their families suffered, remarkably, during that period. They saw several of their benefits whittled away. Many of their gains were erased with the stroke of a pen and their backs were burdened by onerous taxes and other increases in the cost of living. This was the nightmarish life that the Coalition gave to the ordinary citizens.

When one looks at what has been proposed, one has to see clearly that the ordinary people would be the ones to benefit the most. As was pointed out by other speakers, one cannot erase the fact that this amendment will go a very far way in helping the ordinary people. It would help them to breathe easier and, also, it would make life easier for many who would need this money at the time of the passing of their loved ones.

I believe that this amendment should have the unanimous support of this House. I call on my Colleagues on the other side to join with us and to fully support the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, you have the floor.

Mr. Nandlall (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank all my Colleagues who spoke in support of this small, but very impactful Bill that we are debating here. I would like to thank them for their various explanations and for emphasising the various facets that the Bill brings in terms of alleviating the hardships that the current law poses, especially for the poorer classes in society.

Mr. Speaker, I see that the Opposition has not yet returned and, again, I interpret their absence as full support for this

Bill. As I said earlier, they do not have the courage to come here and endorse a good measure that is in the best interest of our population. They prefer to stay away but, I recognise their support and I thank them for it.

As I indicated in my previous presentation, there are some amendments which I would like to put at the appropriate time.

With those few remarks, I respectfully ask that the Bill be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Attorney General.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 and 2

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Chairman, in relation to clause 3, I had circulated, earlier, a document that contains the amendments I am proposing. I, respectfully, ask that those amendments in the document circulated in relation to clause 3 be proposed now in the order in which they appear in writing.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 3, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

Mr. Nandlall: I propose that Clause 4 be amended in the manner and form contained in the document circulated. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 4, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Nandlall: I now move, Mr. Chairman, that the Bill be considered as amended.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported with amendments, read a third time and passed as amended.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Members, we will take a suspension to allow for the arrival of His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

Sitting suspended at 1.45 p.m.

Arrival of His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali.

IN THE CHAMBER

Sitting resumed at 2.11 p.m.

Remarks by the Speaker

Mr. Speaker: Your Excellency the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali; Hon. Members; Your Honour Mdm. Chancellor (ag); Mdm. Chief Justice (ag); Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps; esteemed Judges; distinguished members of our society; special invitees and fellow citizens present and those joining us via social media, good afternoon and welcome to the National Assembly.

To their Excellencies of the People's Republic of China and the Chinese people, I say – I hope that I do not say it wrong – *Gong Xi Fa Chai*, Happy New Year. I wish everyone riches in this Year of the Metal Ox, which represents strength and sustainability.

Hon. Members, by virtue of article 51 of the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*:

“There shall be a Parliament of Guyana, which shall consist of the President and the National Assembly.”

Article 6 and subsection (1), further, goes on to state:

“Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, Parliament may make laws for the peace, order and good government of Guyana.”

Parliament may be deemed as being the Legislative Arm of Government with traditional functions such as representing the electorate, making laws and overseeing the Government by way of hearings, committees and inquiries and the act of Members being able to table questions to other Members, usually on the other side of the House.

In a democratic society, Members of Parliament are nominated by their respective political parties. However, it is the electorate, which means – in ordinary layman's language – the citizens and the people of Guyana, who elect their representatives by the simple act of placing their respective ballots in a national election.

The intention of Cap 1:03 of the Laws of Guyana, titled Representation of the People Act, is to make provisions for the elections of Members of the National Assembly under a system of proportional representation.

2.15 p.m.

Today, Hon. Members, amongst us is a man who not only served as an elected Member of Parliament, sitting on both the Government and the Opposition sides of the House, but also as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and Co-Chairman of the Economic Services Committee. His progression includes sitting as a Member of the National Assembly to that of a Minister of Government, who held portfolios such as the Minister of Housing and Water, Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and, at separate times, performing the functions of President and Prime Minister. Having been continuously gaining the confidence of and being elected by the citizens of Guyana to serve them for some 15 years and counting, his experiences, qualifications and leadership skills have spoken for themselves.

During his tenure in this honourable House, commencing in 2006 and culminating in 2020, where, in August of that year, he was elected by the majority of the people of Guyana to serve as their Tenth President... While the President does not sit in the National Assembly as an elected Member therein, article 67, sub-section 1, of the Constitution stipulates:

“The President may at any time attend and address the National Assembly.”

Further, sub-section (2) states that:

“The President may send messages to the National Assembly and any such message shall be read, at the first convenient sitting of the Assembly after it is received, by the Prime Minister or by any other Minister designated by the President.”

A Presidential Address in Parliament is an extraordinary event which has been historically documented since 31st March, 1970, almost 50 years ago when the first Executive President of Guyana, the late His Excellency, President Arthur Chung addressed the National Assembly. This

tradition continued throughout the decades which includes the Ninth President, His Excellency, David Granger, addressing the Eleventh Parliament.

Therefore, Hon. Members, it follows that, today, this House is honoured to be addressed by the man who has made history as being the first Muslim President of this Country. It is my distinguish honour to introduce to you His Excellency, the Tenth President of the Co-operative of Guyana, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, to make his first Address in that capacity to this Twelfth Parliament of the National Assembly. Hon. Members, special invitees and people of Guyana, I introduce to you His Excellency President Ali. *[Applause]*

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

His Excellency the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana [Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali]: Thank you very much. Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly, Chancellor of the Judiciary (ag), Hon. Prime Minister and Leader of Government Business, Hon. Vice-President, Hon. Members of the National Assembly, Your Excellencies of the Diplomatic Community, the Hon. Chief Justice (ag), Chief of Staff of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), Commissioner of Police and distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the eyes of the people of Guyana are upon us, all of us. Me, as President; Ministers of the Government; and you, the Members of the National Assembly, from every political party represented here.

The people of Guyana are waiting to see what we will do with their affairs. Will we serve their interests faithfully – every one of them – regardless of race or creed? Will we deliver the good governance and accountability each of us, each political party, promised? Will we strive to make their lives better as all of us pledged to do?

For me, our nation stands at a crossroad in its history, particularly after we endured an alarming period of uncertainty when our democracy was threatened at home, and our place of respect was imperilled abroad. The paths before us, as already embraced by my Government, is to lead to a better Guyana where its bountiful potential will be realised and from which bounty, we will ensure that every Guyanese benefit.

For me, as the Ninth Executive President of our beloved nation, there is no doubt of the path my Government and I have chosen. It is a path that celebrates the collective wisdom, strength and character of our Guyanese people; the very people who stood up, fearlessly, in defence of

democracy, the very people who have sacrificed much in bringing our country together, regardless of race or political persuasion.

For those who choose an alternate path, you too will be held accountable but, I assure you, such a path brings nothing or adds nothing to the Guyana we want to build. All of us gathered here today have been summoned by the spirits of our ancestors who laboured in its cause. Their voices have called us from the depths of our nation's past to govern this land at an extraordinary time of our people's history. Those summonses, those calls, have not been made to the Government representatives alone. They have been made to all who serve in the National Assembly as representatives of the people, regardless of their party or political support. The people of this nation elected the parties represented in the Assembly. They want us to be partners in serving the country, not adversaries in pulling it apart. That is not to say that they did not expect us to disagree or that they did not anticipate that we would differ, but they do not expect us to differ at their expense or to disagree to their detriment. They put us all here in the same ship of state. They expect us to navigate it through calm seas and turbulent waters alike, and to take them to a haven of progress, prosperity and peace. To do so, calls for political maturity that puts, at all times, the national interest and the people's welfare above all else. The success of our nation depends on it. None of us should let our nation down. In the words of our national Poet, Martin Carter:

“Like a jig shakes a loom; like a web is spun the pattern. All are involved; All are consumed”

Our most acute challenge is the national emergency we face – tackling the ravages of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Coronavirus disease has taken a toll on our economy, substantially reducing the projected growth in our gross domestic product (GDP) forecasted by the international financial institutions for this year. In human terms, the immediate economic impact of the pandemic, which necessitated the closure of our borders and the shuttering of many businesses, is the hardship that has been visited on the most vulnerable in our society. The elderly, single mothers and children are the worst affected. Their situation demands our immediate and intense attention. They have suffered far too long already. My Government is determined to move decisively to improve their condition. I assure you that no resources will be spared in this effort.

It is, as a public health emergency, that the silent cruelty of this fearsome disease has been most brutal. The consequence

is that, so far, we have endured the anguish of 8,023 confirmed cases and suffered the loss of 181 lives. All of those lives mattered. Some of them had been the sole breadwinners in families now left to struggle, not only with the pain of their loss, but with the strain of no livelihood. That is why tackling COVID-19 is my Government's most pressing priority. Safeguarding the health of all must be our highest priority.

Amongst the actions we took is the mobilisation of regional, national and international support, while supporting the livelihoods of families with direct cash and food transfers. We also implemented various measures through the central bank to help small and medium sized businesses, in particular, to cope with the economic fallout of the pandemic. We have supported frontline workers, our children's education and created an innovative environment for our economy and governance systems to continue. Whilst we continue our fight to contain the virus, we are, aggressively, pursuing every avenue that will lead to the complete vaccination of our population by the end of the year. I assure you that no resource will be spared in this effort.

I remind this Parliament that our nation suffered five long months of fear, anxiety, and nervousness waiting for the results of General and Regional Elections. This was a circumstance caused by those who put themselves above the law and their political greed over the wellbeing of the people. In all that time, no budget was presented for consent, no borrowing was authorised, and no spending was approved. In defiance of the law and the rulings of the highest courts of this land, the previous Administration arrogated power unto itself by spending the taxpayers' money with no authority and no legitimacy. This must never occur in Guyana again. That is why constitutional reform to guarantee a democratic Guyana will receive priority attention, based on a national consultative process. My Government will introduce, in the National Assembly, a Bill to authorise such a consultative process by an independent body. Lawlessness must never be tolerated in Guyana again. Contempt for the people must never, ever, be allowed in Guyana again.

Over the last months, feverish and difficult work has been undertaken to put before the National Assembly, a full budget to address the myriad challenges that confront the nation. Since its installation, my Government has encountered huge issues of transparency and accountability of cronyism, of waste and of fraud. Unemployment is much higher than the nation was led to believe. To fix this grim situation, we need

to move now and we need to move swiftly. We are faced with what Mr. Barack Obama described as the urgency of now.

We want our factories to be humming with production. We want our people back at work. We want our businesses turning profits and investing in new and expanded enterprises. We want a Guyana that rises, like the fabled phoenix, from the ashes of neglect, spreading its wings and soaring proudly to the heights that should, long ago, have been its perch. We want every Guyanese to be part of that rising, sharing in its transformation and in its resultant benefits. This is no young man's dream nor is it an old man's vision. It is a reality within us grasped as a nation and what we need is the will to seize it together. That is what I invite every Guyanese – every man, every woman, and every child – to do.

2.30 p.m.

As the President of Guyana and the Head of Government, my credo and the credo of this Government is 'nation building'. The key word of my Government is 'oneness'. The essential character of my Government's vision is 'inclusion'. Stop being defined by race and stop being defined by politics. Start being defined by our one nationality and by our common love for our one country. Let us lift it up together and, by doing so, let us lift each other and ourselves – *One people. One nation. One destiny.*

I propose to give meaning to my call for One Guyana by requesting the Leader of Government Business in the National Assembly, the Hon. Prime Minister, Brigadier Mark Phillips, to introduce the adoption of an Act of Parliament establishing a one Guyana commission, which he will head. As the great philosopher C.L.R. James puts it:

“A nation is built not on abstraction, but on tackling and solving the problems which occupy its people.”

The purpose of the commission should be to try and do just that in relation to the practical steps that we can take to cement our one society, encompassing and respecting the diversity from which our oneness springs. The work of the commission would be countrywide, and it would listen to the free expressions of all voices concerning ways in which every Guyanese can honour their ancestral heritage, while giving the highest regard to our blended Guyanese civilisation. Among the matters it would address include education concerning our history, our religions, how we ensure equal opportunities for education, employment and entrepreneurship, and the institutional strengthening of the

existing Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) to make it more effective. In all this, we must be guided by the wisdom of Nelson Mandela:

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

We must move our nation’s building from abstraction to action and lose not one more moment in doing it. Let us stand up for our one nation, our one Guyana. Let us stand up for what we know in our hearts and in our minds to be right. Let us stand up for our one identity – the Guyanese identity.

I say a special word about our Amerindian-Guyanese community, the first people of our nation. They and their ancestors have been in Guyana and of Guyana longer than any other community in our one society. Throughout the lands of what is now the Americas, from Canada in the North to Argentina in the South, the Indigenous people suffered historic injustices, including colonisation by European nations, dispossession of their lands, and prevention from developing in accordance with their particular needs and interests.

In our one Guyana, the Amerindian community occupies a special place as our first people. This is a circumstance we must never forget and must always honour. They deserve the respect of all of us for their indigenous knowledge, culture, and traditional practices that contribute to the sustainable development and informed management of the environment that we all share and from which we all benefit.

Over the next five years, while my Government is tasked with the responsibility of managing our country’s affairs, we are determined to improve the lives of the Amerindian-Guyanese communities through a range of measures that we will implement. These include updating the Amerindian Act after consultation with every Amerindian community, as well as improving education, health facilities, housing and infrastructural development in the areas in which they live. The culture of the Amerindian-Guyanese is a golden thread in the rich tapestry of the common civilisation that we have collectively fashioned for almost two centuries. All of us should be proud of it, treasure it and celebrate it. We must do all in our power to strengthen their status and their contribution, thereby, enhancing not only their community but our one nation to which each group is integral, and from which no group is divisible.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of the National Assembly, we are at an unprecedented time in our nation’s history. We stand together on the cusp of what can be a new economic era of prosperity in which all will share now and from which future generations will benefit. But let us not fool ourselves that this new economic era will happen without our collective effort, that it will happen without our national unity, and that it will happen despite ourselves.

There has never been a greater moment when we, as Guyanese, need to stand as one to secure the benefits of our natural resources and to protect our sovereignty, the right to make decisions in our national interest, and our territorial integrity.

Regarding our territorial integrity, the threat from our neighbour Venezuela has not receded, simply because the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ruled that it has jurisdiction in the matter and is proceeding to adjudicate the merits of the case before it on the Guyana/Venezuela contention. We all know that, recently, Guyanese fishermen were arbitrarily arrested and detained by the Venezuelan military, while they were operating in waters of Guyana’s exclusive economic zone. This demonstrates that the threat is an ever-present danger, even as we pursue a path of settlement by peaceful means through international law. In respect of our sovereignty, that right to make decisions in our national interest, while the prospect for wealth from oil and gas is now real, could dissipate if we fail to take the necessary steps to ensure that Guyana’s interests and its rightful income are safeguarded.

Our nation is dealing, for the most part, with giant companies in the oil and gas industry. This is uncharted territory for us, but we will have to map the way that leads to the best circumstances for our country. For sure, we will need expert advice based on sound knowledge and robust experience of the industry, including operating agreements, concessions, laws, and regulations to promote good governance and prudent management of the oil and gas sector to make sure that our people benefit. Above all else, we need every Guyanese, united as one, to stand in defence of our rights and entitlements. Guyana’s sovereignty and territorial integrity must be the nation’s constant unified watch. It is this patriotic duty where every Guyanese must stand up to be counted. Every political party, every trade union and every business organisation must stand up and be counted. This National Assembly must stand up and be counted.

Let me be clear. My Government wants a cooperative partnership with the companies now licensed to operate in the oil and gas sector of our economy. Leaving oil and gas in the ground is not an option. It cannot be an option when their production and sales can transform the economy of Guyana, bringing in considerable revenues that can be utilised to dramatically improve the lives of all our people. We must also acknowledge that we cannot take advantage of our oil and gas resources without the considerable investment of the companies now operating in the sector. They are entitled to a fair return on their investment. Therefore, our relationship should be based on fairness, on equity and on mutual interests. That is the goal to which the Government will work to ensure that future production contracts resound to the significant benefit of Guyanese without seeking to disincentivise foreign investment. To support Government in managing of the oil and gas sector, we will be pursuing various legislative and institutional initiatives: an update the Petroleum Act, building capacity and institutional framework for the audit of expenditure, and the drafting of new production agreements with international standards under which any new production license will fall. Even as I look forward to the establishment of the petroleum commission, my Government will introduce legislation for consideration in this session of the National Assembly.

One of the pieces of legislation will be to fortify, in law, the Local Content policy, which is currently undergoing the phase of public consultation. The aim is not only to align the Policy with international best practices, particularly regarding reporting and transparency, but also to deliver more business and more jobs to our people. That legislation will be drafted based on the outcome of consultations that I will hold with stakeholders in our society, concerning provisions in the law that would best serve our national interest. Guyanese must not be second-class citizens in the oil and gas sector in our own country. They must be its principal beneficiaries, ahead of all and second to none. Thousands of Guyanese will be trained, at every level, to create a national corps of managers and technicians to effectively administer the sector.

For the benefit of this generation of Guyanese and those yet unborn, we will establish an arms-length sovereign wealth fund which will be insulated from political interference. Legislation will be enacted to define how finances will flow from the fund into the budget and the purposes for which they will be used. My Government also intends to account to the nation, for every cent earned from the industry and every cent that is spent. To accomplish this, legislation will be introduced during this session of the National Assembly,

making the Minister of Finance and the Finance Secretary (FS) responsible for publishing, in the *Official Gazette*, details of all revenue and expenditure. This would allow the people to track all transactions. Failure to do so will result in severe punishment under the law.

The revenues from the sector, like all other sectors, are the peoples' money. They are entitled to know how much money is earned, how much is spent and on what it is spent. I made it clear to my Ministers, also, that transparency and accountability are the fundamental principles by which I expect them and myself to conduct ourselves, and to which I will hold them accountable. We are the custodians of the people's assets and we will be accountable to them for all that we do. That is why we will also establish a regulatory framework that is independent of politicians, and that is why we will build strong national capability to hold oil companies accountable and to verify production and other expenditures.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of the National Assembly, let me be clear on something else. My Government does not intend to allow the oil and gas sector to encourage what is called the 'Dutch Disease', which dominates all other sectors of the economy and diminishes them in value and sustainability. Our country must not suffer the fate of other nations that came to depend on oil and gas so substantially that they faced ruin when the sector floundered, contracted, or diminished. Revenues from oil and gas resources must be used to strengthen the agriculture, mining, manufacturing and services sectors, to make them globally competitive so that Guyana can be a resilient nation, now and in the future.

That brings me to the manifesto which my party presented to the nation at the March 2nd General and Regional Elections. Our manifesto is a statement of my Government's ambition for our country. It is an ambition that we shall aim to fulfil. Like all ambitions, we shall have to mould it to life's changeable realities, to the realities of Guyana as impacted by the world of which we are a part. It is a path we shall follow in fulfilment of our dream for Guyana.

2.45 p.m.

There will be times when we pause to check our bearings and times when our bearing call for variable tracks, but our goals will be constant and our promises secure. We shall do so over the life of the Government. Fulfilment cannot be instant in all matters; some will be delayed by circumstances, but you will have no cause to doubt our resolve to keep our promises.

Mr. Speaker, without going into the details of every pledge in our manifesto, which remains publicly available on the internet, my Government, in our period in Office, has strived to honour every aspect, every promise and every commitment. Let me mention here a few that must command immediate attention.

We stated quite clearly that our objective is to create 50,000 jobs. That goal, which once seemed distant and impossible, is now within our nation's reach, made possible by the transformative agenda of Government that would see the expansion of construction, investment in mega-scale infrastructure, reduced cost of energy leading to industrialisation and upscale agro-processing and manufacturing, environmental services, engineering services, and the spinoff of major private sector investments in new hotels and shore based facilities.

The area of logistics and energy security would also see massive investments and opportunities. These, supported by the revitalisation of our agriculture sector, support to the mining and an expansion in quarrying, will pave the way for job creation.

Even with inadequate shipping facilities, we already supply fish, vegetables, and fruit to regional markets, and even further afield, to our diaspora communities in the United States of America (USA), Canada and the United Kingdom.

An example of the market opportunities available to increased agricultural and fisheries production is that, last year, the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) imported more than US\$5 billion worth of food. This gives every reason why our farmers, including our rice farmers, should seek a significant share of that market. Therefore, my Government will give every assistance to farmers by improving drainage and irrigation, by incentivising young people to pursue farming as profitable careers, providing concessions for large scale farming, the removal of value-added tax (VAT) on machinery, equipment, fertiliser, and pesticides, and providing a grants support system for small farmers. We intend to do the same for fisheries, manufacturing, and forestry by providing incentives, concessions, and support. We want our farmers, fisherfolk, miners, and livestock growers to think globally as they develop and increase their production and the marketing of their products. My Government is committed to providing the infrastructural framework in which these enterprises can develop and expand, improving directly the lives of all who invest their efforts in them, and benefiting our country as a

whole indirectly by increasing its wealth and the welfare of our people.

I want to say a special word about sugar. Sugar is more to us as a people, than a mere agricultural crop. In a real sense, it represents our beginnings as a Guyanese nation. Yes, our ancestors were brought from different lands, the place of our first people – the Amerindian Guyanese – but sugar was the start of the fashioning of our identity as Guyanese, and our struggle as one people to end colonialism and exploitation, and to take control of our destiny.

Dr. Cheddi Jagan once observed that both Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese watered the sugar cane fields with their blood. We should all ponder that thought. Those sugar cane fields, in which our ancestors toiled and in which their blood was shed, represent the shared exploitation of our people. Well, the blood, sweat and tears of our people should never again water fields for any exploiter. In the words of the Jamaican-American poet, Mr. Claude McKay:

“If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain...”

All of this is why, we Guyanese must resolve to nurture and care for what we have built together, and never allow the circumstances to arise where we dilute our ‘oneness’ or weaken our one Guyana. Sugar symbolises all of that. But, even more, sugar still has every possibility of continuing to provide jobs, revenues and modern skills to our people, while providing them with dignity.

In resuscitating the industry, I have already directed a detailed revitalisation plan for every estate, whilst we are examining possible private investment to support the diversification, expansion and modernisation of the industry, leading to its sustainability and economic viability.

Every Guyanese aspires to a better quality of life. Each of us want a home, reliable electricity, water when we turn on the taps, education for our children, health facilities and a job that will allow us to pay for those things. That is why job creation is at the top of my Government's priorities. We recognise that, while we create the conditions for more jobs and better incomes, there are immediate steps that must be taken to improve the living conditions for all. That is why we have

removed VAT on electricity, water, medicines, and certain food items. That is also why we will upgrade health facilities across the country, including the expansion of diagnostic services such as computed tomography (CT) scans, ultrasound and echocardiogram, at key regional hospitals as well as improve ambulance services.

We will also focus major investments to address issues of mental health, reproductive health and invest in a state-of-the-art maternity and children's hospital. We will also create the enabling environment to drive private investment in healthcare, thus making Guyana a regional and international hub for health services.

We will also ensure that there is adequate supply of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies with a focus on timely procurement, proper storage and reliable delivery to hospitals and health centres. Very aware that our medical practitioners – doctors, and nurses – are in the frontline of maintaining the health of our people, particularly now, we intend to improve conditions of services and remuneration for healthcare workers generally.

Let me take this opportunity at this Parliament, the highest decision-making body of our nation, to express, publicly, our deepest appreciation and gratitude to the medical personnel who have risked their own health to help our nation in the battle against the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Even as I note that the battle is far from over, and more will be expected of them, I thank them most sincerely on behalf of a grateful nation, and I call on all here gathered to applaud their effort with respect.

As a nation, we will not be judged only by the way we treat human beings, but we must also pay particular attention to the environment, our natural heritage, and the way we treat animals. My Government will support initiatives and invest in programmes that addresses all these issues, sometimes referred to as 'soft issues' but which importantly adds to the story of who we are as Guyanese.

Guyana is blessed with an abundance of natural resources that provide opportunities for every Guyanese. Few other countries in the world can boast of being home to gold, diamond, bauxite, sugar, rice, cattle and other livestock, forestry, oil and gas, abundant agricultural lands, fresh water and tourism. There is no reason for our country to be poor, or for our people to want. We, together, have to take hold of these natural resources that have been gifted to us and turn them into national treasure. My Government intends to lay

down the infrastructure that will result in the full utilisation of these resources.

I do not wish to pre-empt the budget that will be presented to the National Assembly in a few hours. Our development plan will be set out in granular details in the budget. However, I give the honourable House and the Guyanese public insights into elements of our development plan, including some of what we are doing and why we are doing them. We plan to expand our road system across the country, including community roads and hinterland roads. We will also build a bypass road with connections to Mocha, Eccles, and the Demerara Harbour Bridge. We will initiate work on several transformative infrastructural projects that will take years to complete, but we will start them. They will include: a deep water harbour in Berbice; support to shore base facilities; support to private investment that will see new branded hotels; support to agriculture that will see mega investments in large scale agriculture; opening up of new lands for the construction of farm to market access roads; commencement of the Linden to Lethem road; four lane highway from Georgetown to Timehri; commencement of the Parika to Goshen road link to Bartica; upgrade and development of new all-terrain road links from Timehri to Bartica; upgrade of regional airports and building of new ferries; construction of a four-lane link between Mandela Avenue and Diamond with interconnection to the existing highway to reduce travel time; completion of the new Demerara River bridge, and the construction of a new superhighway from Schoonard to Parika.

We are working with our neighbour Suriname to establish a Corentyne River bridge which would have great benefits for the private sector in enlarging markets, expanding the scale of business, and increasing employment.

We are very conscious at the rich but fragile environment with which we have been endowed by nature. As promised in our manifesto, the Government will reinstitute an expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). The strategy as it is now will be broadened to include wider environmental services, water resources management, climate resilience, biodiversity, renewable energy, and the marine economy. We believe that this strategy would allow Guyana to earn substantial revenue that can be utilised to diversify the economy and create employment opportunities for our people as we did previously under the Norway Agreement. In this agreement, we can earn hundreds of millions of US dollars as we have established in our earlier arrangement with the Norwegians. From this agreement we seek to ensure the

creation of new clean jobs. We also intend for the benefits from the Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) to flow to all Guyanese, especially our Indigenous communities, where First, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) principles and the Opt-in Mechanisms shall strictly be observed. The expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy will also include the establishment of an international Centre of Excellence for Biological Diversity with the objective of promoting cutting edge research and developing and exporting educational services.

The national strategy will also seek to strengthen the institutional mandate of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by providing an empowering regulatory framework to guide economic growth initiatives.

3.00 p.m.

This also means that the National System of Protected Areas will also be strengthened and expanded in accordance with international standards of environmental integrity.

Finally, the expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy will provide opportunities to our people by creating avenues that will provide grants for start-up businesses of a renewable energy nature.

Beyond the management of our natural resources, the expanded LCDS will also ensure the issue of land management, and access to land is addressed. This will be done by the establishment of a formal inter-agency mechanism with the intention to coordinate among key sectors to address various land use conflicts in Guyana *via* the implementation of the Land Use Policy. The implementation of this policy is also expected to be implemented with a regional dimension that will ensure to incorporate the interests of both residential and commercial users.

The expanded LCDS will guide our developmental trajectory along an inclusive, low carbon, sustainable, clean, resilient path with increased economic opportunities and investments linked to greater social and infrastructural development for the benefit of all.

Beyond the richness of our natural resources, Guyana has no greater wealth than its people. We recognise that human capital development is crucial for inclusive economic growth and transformation and it is the responsibility of government to ensure that its people are prepared for this change. Therefore, my Government will ensure that all Guyanese are equipped for transformation in the economy by identifying

employment intensive sectors and ensuring that our people are trained to enable them to meet the demand of these sectors.

Investing in Guyanese is not only good for our economy but, has broader equity and welfare implications. With rapid change in technology, we recognise that investing in our people is pivotal. Our move towards knowledge-intensive industries will also enable greater participation from female Guyanese and help to reduce the gender gap in our society.

These fields are expected to see higher future demand as our economy continues along its diversification path and will be supported by the 20,000 scholarship programmes, expansion and improvement in educational facilities, expansion and use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in education, enhancement of opportunities in Technical Vocational Education, curricula reform, establishment of an online university to promote e-learning, and provision of textbooks to our school children among other things.

The drive towards diversification and sustainable employment requires a vibrant private sector to absorb labour and labour market that allows flexibility, skill building and reasonable compensation. My Government will continue to work with the private sector, recognising that they are the backbone of any economy. Our local companies must be given a level platform to compete; training and capacity building initiatives, along with the transfer of skills and technology are important to this process.

We are cognizant that there are impediments to businesses providing goods and services to the oil and gas sector, especially in the area of finance and cost optimisation. My Government will ensure that our regulatory frameworks are conducive for local companies that work in this sector so that they can garner the necessary resources needed to take advantage of these new opportunities. Our economy is changing, and we have to ensure that our policies are flexible and fit for purpose. These incentives will ensure that our Guyanese people continue to prosper and truly benefit from the oil and gas sector.

It is our firm belief that the Guyanese people are the greatest asset that this nation possesses. In supporting the new economy, my Government understands the necessity of developing skills in emerging areas such as oil and gas, agro-processing, industrialisation, manufacturing, climate services, environmental services, bio diversity, sustainable tourism management and aquaculture, while at the same time

strengthening our capacity in the traditional sectors with the aim of making them more productive and competitive.

Our potential to become a major player in the energy market is not only limited to our borders, but we have already commenced discussions with our neighbours, Brazil and Suriname, in the establishment of an Energy Corridor. Guyana's Energy Security will be driven by an energy mix that will see solar, wind, hydro, natural gas, all being key components in making us the energy capital of the region. This, of course, will see tremendous investment in manufacturing and industrial development that will be supported by the gas to shore project, the natural gas plant and the establishment of the Wales Development Authority.

We have already received numerous proposals from major manufacturers looking at Guyana as their next investment destination. To support the growing demand and potential for commodity trading, Government will be establishing free zones to facilitate trade and open up new opportunities. These investments will also see the expansion of the hinterland electrification programme, and the development of micro-grids for large hinterland villages for off grid areas.

No country or society can progress without the safety and security of its people. We have committed to the reform of the security sector, the update of laws, strengthening of capacity and building institutions that will support our plans and programmes for safer communities and country. We have already commenced tackling crime with the involvement of people. To this end we are strengthening community policing, intelligence services and widening focus on making existing institutions stronger.

We are investing in new and appropriate technologies, providing tools and equipment to allow for better response to crime and more proactive policing, whilst at the same time, we are working on the improvement of welfare and conditions of service for our men and women in uniform.

Critical to the strategic approach to crime fighting is the strengthening of the regionalised structure of the Guyana Police Force. Greater integration with interest groups and stakeholders at the regional level will be facilitated to improve accountability and transparency in crime fighting. We will also be strengthening our ability to secure our borders with the establishment of a border patrol unit. Special legislation is being drafted to give effect to this.

When my Government's budget 2021 is presented to the National Assembly and when my Ministers contribute to the

debate, greater details will be provided on the implementation of our manifesto pledges, covering more aspects than I have mentioned in this address. However, I want to speak myself, on the matter of partnerships between Government and representative bodies in the governance of our One Guyana.

The watchword for the governance of our country must be partnership. I propose to have regular high-level consultations with the representatives of the private sector, the trade unions, religious bodies and other civil society groups to address key issues that confront our nation. I intend also to directly engage communities and community leaders across every village in building trust and deepening relationships to the benefit of the people of those communities, and I propose to do this personally – leading this personally – in every village and every community we will build trust, we will win hearts and we will develop in the interest of all of the people of this country.

With these representatives, it is my desire that consensus will be found on how to tackle these issues effectively.

I have encouraged my Ministers to establish similar consultative machinery so that, in making decisions, Government can be advised by the best brains and talent in every area of our national endeavour. The hand of partnership will be extended to the Guyanese diaspora. It is my intention to enhance the oversight of diaspora affairs so that we can maintain meaningful links to the diaspora and for convening meetings with their organisations. In this connection, we are in the process of establishing a diaspora council to engage the Government in a structured and regular manner. Our diaspora is a source of investment, of talent and of knowledge – all of which can benefit our nation. They can also be an important influential body in the countries where they have made their second homes. For promoting the interests of Guyana, all must be involved; all must be consumed.

My Government understands the importance of youths in the development of the country. It is for this reason I have established the soon to be operationalised youth advisory council, which will be at the heartbeat of policymaking. Our support for young people will go beyond education, health and sports. We will be establishing a special development, innovation and research fund to stimulate new business ideas and to create a space for youth participation in the new economy. Young people can expect investments in every region that will give access to state-of-the-art sporting facilities, and importantly, incentivising participation in the creative industry.

Our support to cultural development and the creative industry will be critically linked to our tourism and hospitality sector.

Home ownership for young people, with support from the banking sector is also a top priority for my Government.

All of which I spoke is dependent on the institutions, systems and various arms of Government understanding their distinct role in a common future for our country. Whilst the arms of Government are separate, they must all assess the direction of the country and build the relevant institutional capacity to meet the demands of the future. This, of course, requires training, retraining, retooling and expansion of the existing framework in which they operate. To support this, my Government will unfold a legislative agenda that will create the statutory and legal foundation on which a new and modern Guyana will rest. This will require the modernisation of archaic laws and the introduction of a new set of laws to reflect the changing nature of our new economy. However, the legislative agenda must be people focused, making it easier and less costly to do business, whilst at the same time creating a more efficient and affordable system to give justice to the ordinary man.

In closing, I wish to share just a few targets, in key areas, that my Government will pursue over the next five years.

We believe that we must be held accountable and, in holding us accountable, you must know where your country is going. You must know the targets. Therefore, I wish to share just a few of those targets.

In the area of energy:

- We propose to have the development of a world-class energy mix;
- Installation of 400 megawatts of new installed capacity, inclusive of hydro power, solar, wind and natural gas;
- Reduction of electricity cost for households and businesses;
- making Guyana's energy cost globally competitive, working with Brazil and Suriname to create a new energy corridor; and
- Outlying a clear path to become a net energy exporter.

3.15 p.m.

In the area of environment:

- We would be adopting an expanded LCDS as our national development framework, to create opportunities to tap into and earn hundreds of millions of US dollars through the sale of environmental services. Our Vice-President will be leading these efforts. Much has already started, and we are confident about the returns that could come to Guyana. We did it before and we will do it again.
- Establishing a world class bio-diversity centre;
- pursuing opportunities for payment of eco-systems services;
- Incentivised good environmental performance in the private sector. The private sector also has a role and we are going to support them in that role.

In the area of infrastructure transformation:

- Opening up of hundreds of thousands of acres of agriculture lands through the investment in farm to market roads and drainage and irrigation systems;
- New superhighways on the West-Demerara, East Coast and East Bank corridors;
- A new Demerara River bridge crossing;
- Support private investment in new hotels adding at least 2,000 more rooms to our stock; creating environment to make Guyana a major logistics hub;
- New shore base and harbour facilities supported by Government's policies and planning;
- Investment in new ferries and capital drainage equipment to improve efficiency of our ports. One of the major difficulties of our ports is the dredging of the Demerara River and it has caused our ports to become very inefficient. We are going to invest in the capital equipment to resolve this issue and make our ports viable, sustainable and operate at an optimal manner;
- Commencement of the Linden to Lethem Road Highway;
- Creating infrastructure that will see more investments in agro-processing and manufacturing supported by a ballooning of engineering services; creation of new

- road networks in the hinterland and riverine communities;
- A new road and river link between Timehri and Bartica;
- commencement of work on the Parika to Goshen Road; investment in key transformative infrastructure in the hinterland – Regions 2, 6, 9 and 10; and
- Modernisation of our community roads across all regions and investment in hinterland and regional airstrips to boost our tourism products.

Already on a bright side, we have been able in just six months to bring forward the approval of the new four-lane road from Ogle to Eccles, funded by the Government of India by almost one year. Today, we received the news that all the approval has been given in India and we are now moving to the procurement stage. This is a project that was delayed for almost seven years. Today, we are on the journey of accomplishing this and bringing relief to the people of Guyana.

Human resources:

- Building a world-class and highly skilled and literate population;
- Investing in technical and vocational education leading to international certification;
- Creating opportunities for training, retraining and retooling of our human resources to meet the future demands of the economy;
- Conducting a market-driven analysis as a basis on which our education system will be geared to ensure that there is a right match between education output and economic output. On the positive side, we are in an advanced stage of discussion to have our own Institute of Oil and Gas here in Guyana.

In the area of technology:

- We will see the creation of a master plan for ICT development in Guyana;
- Investment in technology to improve our competitiveness, efficiency, transparency and reliability; moving government's services towards a paperless environment;

- Ensuring every child leaves school computer literate;
- Investing in a patient-care management system that would see every Guyanese connected through one card;
- Expanding access to internet services across all communities;
- Reduction in the cost of data to individuals and households;
- Increasing the number of persons using the internet from 36% by 100% by the end of our five-year; increasing the number of households having access to computers from 31% by 100% in five years; and
- Investment in technology that will increase competitiveness in doing business and breaking down barriers; and
- Investment in software development that will reduce time to processing construction permit, and getting electricity and water connections by 50%.

Important to all of this, we must have world-class social services:

- You will see public and private investments that will see a world-class health care system, acting as a net foreign currency earner for our country. Already, we have tremendous interest in this area, and I am very delighted that many Guyanese are coming together in pursuing this interest also;
- You will see specialised health care for maternity and children services; comprehensive and reliable access to primary health care across every region;
- world-class educational facilities as incentivising private investment;
- building of sustainable communities in achieving the 50,000 houselots;
- Commencement of a new modern sustainable secondary city;
- In addition to the provision of free university education during this term and the granting of 20,000 scholarships, you will also see the establishment of an internationally accredited oil and gas institute;

- Investment will be made in training and increasing the quantity of educators, while modernising the curriculum;
- Expanding the use of technology;
- Improving educational facilities;
- The mix of new communities and infrastructure links will be geared towards the reduction in traffic congestion;
- Improvement in road safety;
- The physical security of our people;
- Expansion of affordable homes and quantum leap in eradication of squatting;
- Investment in water resources to ensure 100% access by every community and expanding treated water coverage to at least 70% of the population;
- Direct investment and allocation will be placed in the national budget to support persons with disabilities;
- Direct investments and allocations will be made to support associations and organisations in our efforts to prevent cruelty against animals; and
- Specific provisions will be made to support mental health and reproductive health.

Important to the achievement of all these targets is a sound, stable and viable macro-economic framework. The aim is to create an environment that will ensure competitiveness, diversified economy and support sound monetary and fiscal policies, whilst enhancing transparency in a pro-poor approach to growth and development. Whilst we are targeting a high economic growth-rate, this acceleration must, and I emphasise, it must be managed to minimise the risk of overheating. Our focus will be on maintaining exchange rate-stability and managing inflation in lower single digits, rebuilding our depleted foreign reserves and diversification of new industries for large-scale plantation-type agriculture, including aquaculture, among other things,

I am pleased to say that we have already managed to bring our livestock producers together. With the enthusiasm, private investment and public investment, we anticipate that all the protein needs in the production of feed will be produced locally – all the corn and all the soya beans.

We will support businesses. We will support the private sector and we will support workers. Let me be clear, every single worker – public sector workers – whether you are nurses, doctors or members of the Judiciary, I assure you, by the end of our fifth year, not only will you be better off from a salary's perspective, but the benefits, the society in which you live and the services that will be delivered to you would enable you to live a good life, a great life in Guyana.

No more must the dream be to exit the shores. There is a bright future ahead. Let us embrace it, let us support it. Dream big, your Government will support those dreams.

There is no end to the manifesto's tasks that lie ahead, for there is no end to the efforts we must make for the homeland. We all want Guyana to be for each of us and for all of us and for the generations that will follow, the best it can be. To build that home, it would not be right for us to forget or neglect our obligations beyond our shores, in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), in the Americas, in the world of small states and in global affairs, for we are not an island unto ourselves.

We owe a special debt to CARICOM for helping to ensure that we could sit in this democratically elected Parliament today. It is one we shall never forget as we work to build a Caribbean Community worthy of the highest ideals of regional integration, nor will we be neglectful of members of the international community who kept vigil with us – Canada, the United States of America, the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK), among others. We will honour their vigilance for us, by joining them in pursuing the values of equality, of peace and of the rule of law, worldwide.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, for too long our country has been held ransom to the ambitions of partisan politics and the narrowness of partisan ambition. It is time to set those imposters aside and embrace, in their place, the virtuous cause of patriotic duty – a commitment my Government has made already. Guyana and the Guyanese people deserve no less. They have endured enough. We are at a decisive moment in our history, with a greater opportunity than previous Parliaments, to make our country a better place than it has ever been. This is the honour and challenge that time and events have laid at our door. We must, each of us, live up to it.

The people of Guyana expect us to not spend our time squabbling and bickering. They want us to find common ground on which we can build a nation in which they are safe,

and their children's future is secure. I pledge myself to that task and I urge every representative in the National Assembly to join me in striving for its fulfilment. There can be no task more fulfilling, no task more honourable and no task more noble. Let us, together, run, with endurance, the race God has set before us. God bless you; God bless our beloved country; and may God bless our joint endeavours.

I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Your Excellency, the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

Hon. Members, firstly, let me correct a *faux pas*. I want to apologise to and recognise the First Lady, Ms. Arya Ali. I also want to sleep in my bed tonight, so I recognise my wife, Ms. Maria Nadir. Joining us, also, are Brigadier Godfrey Bess of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF); Commissioner, Mr. Nigel Hoppie of the Guyana Police Force (GPF); the Deputy Director of Prisons, Mr. Nicklon Elliot; and Fire Chief, Mr. Kalamadeen Edo.

Mr. President, we want to thank you very much for that all-encompassing Address, sharing the vision of your Government for the next five years and, more particularly, establishing tangible targets by which our people can judge you and your Government.

On behalf of the National Assembly, we congratulate you on your election. We pray that you and your Government will be given the divine strength and vision to accomplish these noble objectives, for the benefit of all of our people of Guyana. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Hon. Members, we will now take a suspension. You will hear the bell when we are ready to resume our business for today. Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 3.33 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.48 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please be seated.

Small Business (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 13/2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Small Business Act.”
[*Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce*]

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Small

Business Amendment Bill 2020, Bill No. 13 of 2020, published on 10th November, 2020, be read a second time.

The genesis of the Small Business Act 2004 was out of concern that small businesses were being consumed by a fiscal regime that favoured big businesses. Therefore, a special set of incentives were developed and the Small Business Council was formed. The aim and the policy objective of this were to nurture entrepreneurship and to institutionalise support for a sector that contributes significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of our nation, to employment and to development as a whole.

The Small Business (Amendment) Bill 2020 continues to support and promote these policy objectives and to further crystallise them. The clauses that I will speak about, will briefly explain the objectives and the policy objectives that they seek to address and implement.

Clause 2 will be criticised. I believe if my Colleagues had sought to be here, they might have said...So, I have pre-empted the criticism. What clause 2 does is place the three criteria that would designate a business a small business... Presently, the three criteria small businesses have to meet are: a small business has to have less than 25 employees, it has to have less than \$20 million in assets and it has to have less than \$60 million in profits yearly. In the current regime, a small business has to satisfy only two of those three criteria.

The Small Business (Amendment) Bill proposes that small businesses ought to meet all three of the criteria. This may appear to be onerous but allow me to present a hypothetical case of two businesses that meet the criteria. Business A has 16 employees, which is below 25; it has \$19 million in assets and \$40 million dollars in revolving funds, annually. The hypothetical case continues with Business B in the same sector: it has the same 16 employees, it has \$19 million in assets, but \$250 million in annual profits. Clearly, the business in scenario one is at a financial disadvantage but both businesses would be qualified as small businesses under this regime.

What this Bill does is make it mandatory that businesses have to meet all three criteria. What it does is level the playing field for all businesses in the same sector. They have to meet all three criteria, which eliminates disadvantage. All businesses would be competing like-for-like. It eliminates the mischief that the Bill had sought to cure, which is that small businesses are disadvantaged because of other businesses that are better financially placed and are able to compete and out compete a small business with fewer resources. This class of

businesses is now going to be broadly similar and businesses would be able to compete like-for-like under the set-off provisions which I will speak about later on.

Clause 2 amends section 2 (2) (a) of the Act to replace the requirement for a mere declaration that the business satisfies the qualifying criteria. The Amendment Bill seeks to have businesses, instead of having a mere declaration that 'I fit these criteria', to now provide evidence of such. This, once again, is to make sure, with evidence, there is no significant disparity in the actual size, resources and capabilities of the businesses that are presented before the Small Business Council. These applicants will have to provide evidence, such as financial statements and records of statutory deductions, prior to being recommended for approval. We continue to do this, not with a view to making it more bureaucratic or making it more onerous on the small businesses, but to create the environment, remove the mischief that we have seen and improve their opportunities.

If they are able to prove that they are genuine small businesses, they can become so registered. As such, we do not revert to the *status quo* of large enterprises crowding out the smaller ones.

The proposed amendment to section 2 (3) removes the power of the Minister to declare a business an approved small business, in accordance with the Act, and places that power squarely in the hands of the Council. This Small Business Council, once constituted according to the provisions of the Act, is contemplated to comprise of persons with a wide range of relevant skills, relevant stakeholders and people of varying competencies who will sit and adjudicate whether a small business qualifies.

This amendment seeks to remove the potential of political discretion and vests this discretion in a Council with a set of capabilities and competencies that may put them squarely above a politician who may not be best placed to make those decisions. What this does is send a message to all small business owners that, regardless of their political persuasion, regardless of who they may have voted for, all Guyanese who own small businesses can be assured that there would be a zero (*inaudible*) of political interference. We are saying, clearly, that we are a Government that seeks the development of all Guyanese and all Guyanese small businesses, regardless of their political affiliation. That is the message the amendment seeks to convey.

4.58 p.m.

The final amendment that I wish to speak about is the highly anticipated and eagerly awaited reform to implement the 20% set aside in Government procurement for small business. I might say this is a watershed moment for inclusive economic development. It allows for the inclusion of works in the section that provides that Government must give 20% of its procurement for goods and services. Now, this amendment would include works for all contracts given.

Since we have taken Office, we have seen a number of proposals from international businesses. Many large multilateral companies have been registered and have set up operations locally and we are excited about these developments. While we unreservedly welcome genuine and serious foreign investors, this Administration would not neglect our local enterprise. Essentially, by expanding its scope of benefits for small businesses from Government procurement, by the addition of works to the class of contracts from which small businesses may benefit under the set off, we could see how this would continue to contribute to an inclusive national development and promoting competitive local industries, especially with our start-ups and small businesses.

With this set off amendment, we guarantee further reach for our small businesses; we guarantee that big businesses would not crowd them out; and we guarantee that they would get their piece of the exponentially expanding pie that is our economy.

All of Guyana is excited about what is to come. We heard His Excellency speak about all of the major transformational infrastructural change that is going to happen in Guyana. The new Demerara Harbour bridge, the Corentyne Bridge project connecting Guyana to Suriname and the Linden aerodrome development are just a few of the large capital projects to come.

With this amendment, our small businesses would be able to access opportunities for downstream contracts for works under these and other large capital projects. The amendments proposed in this Bill would have the effect of providing and enlarging secure markets within which our small businesses may thrive and grow. Thus, I unreservedly commend this Bill to the honourable House for passage. [*Applause*]

Minister in the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to support my Colleague, Minister Walrond, with the amendments to the Small Business (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No.13/2020. The origin of this Bill came into being with the signature of then President, Mr.

Bharat Jagdeo, on 31st March, 2004. When this Bill was initially contemplated, the provision in the Bill to give 20% of goods and services to small businesses was well placed. Today, this amendment is to build on that provision.

The Italian Economist, Vilfredo Pareto, came up with the 80/20 Rule which is called the Pareto Principle. If one were a student of strategy, one would have come across it. The 20% rule is built into this Bill.

I would like to speak on the 20% rule directly. For someone who came from a private sector background and as a former President of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), this particular provision in the law gave hope to small businesses. The implementation of it was something that we would have liked to see broadened and enforced a little more.

Globally, most economies are driven by medium, small and micro businesses and it is no different in Guyana. In Guyana, 60% to 70% of the businesses that makeup the fabric of the economy is small, medium and micro businesses. It is a fact. Everywhere one goes in the country one sees small businesses setup and they are operating for years.

The ceiling or the cap this Bill puts on the employees of not more than 25, the turnover of not more than \$60 million and assets of not more than \$25 million is to really determine what is an approved small business. There are certain big businesses that create small businesses and compete in the market. Through this Bill and the provisions of this Bill, we will be able to find those out and give the true small businesses an opportunity to get into the game.

The crowding out effect that my Colleague just spoke about is something real which creates disparity in businesses – where the big businesses continue to grow and the small businesses suffer and die. They just pop up, live for a year or two and then die because the opportunity dries up in the marketplace. The provision of 20% gives them the assurance that they could bid for goods and services and works in the entire Government. This is hope.

If one walks the length and breadth of Guyana, one would see that small and micro businesses are setup. In the time of a pandemic, these businesses were hurt the most. The complaints of small businesses, which do not have access to any form of bidding for Government goods and services and works, are overwhelming. What has been happening is big businesses continue to have the technical capacity and resources to bid. When evaluators check bidding documents,

they would disqualify a small business for any least thing, and that is a problem.

For small businesses to get into the game and start to climb to make themselves formidable players in any one of the Government sectors, they must develop these capacities. It involves money; it involves cash injection; and it involves the hiring of technical staff. One cannot hire them, have that high fixed cost on the books and cannot bid and successfully win a job. It means that person would run bankrupt sooner or later. It has been the history in Guyana where businesses of well-put entrepreneurs sit, do up their business plan, setup their business and when they go to bid for projects and so on, one would find that they do not have the capacity.

Small businesses in Guyana have been subject to some level of hardship, added to the lack of opportunities they saw in the last five years. The hardship measures, over the last six months, were discussed in this very House. It was found that taxes, fees and all sorts of things were placed on them. This was just what one would call *adding insult to injury*.

Recently, the private sector did a small survey. The survey dealt with the burden of regulations and systems on small businesses. There was a report done by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) titled, “*Institutions and the Legal Framework for Business Development in the Caribbean.*” This report was done some time in 2010, but findings of the report still resemble the reality of today. I would tell the House what the report stated. The report graded the burden of Government regulation on small businesses and the global average was an index of 3.08. The Latin American countries were an average of 2.63. The Caribbean was an average of 2.84. This is the index value. Guyana rated 2.53 in the matrix. In terms of our regulation on small businesses, it is a cry that small businesses always had. In the private sector, they cry about the regulations and the cost of it on doing business. Our Government is looking at all the impediments to small business. This is just another example of what we intend to do to move those things aside. Businesses do not need headache. When a man, woman or a group of people get together to start a business, they do not need more headache. They need assistance. They need the environment to operate and the regulations sometimes do not help them.

This amendment that was brought by the Minister is a well-placed amendment. It adds more to the basket or the pie that small businesses could now access. They could now bid for broader scope of works. This would lead to two things. It could lead to them getting into the sector and closing the gap

between the disparity of big businesses getting bigger and the small businesses getting downsized. The amendment would act as a tool to bridge the gap because the pie is bigger and there is more for everybody.

This amendment is a no-brainer and I support my Colleague with the amendment she has put forward. I am asking the other Members of the House – some of them are not here but, as the Hon. Attorney General said earlier, their absence could be seen as consent... I am saying that this is a no-brainer and we should all support these amendments. I rest my case.

Thank you. [Applause]

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Mr. Speaker, let me start by making the point that, as I see it, the effect of the amendment will create the conditions for the survivability of small businesses. Presently, what we have are big and medium businesses which do not stay in their lane. They compete with the small businesses. We have some multi-millionaire companies in the construction industry and other areas... My good Friends, the Hon. Bishop Edghill and the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Mr. Dharamlall, would know that when tender boxes are opened at the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB), the same companies that one would see bidding for \$400 million projects are the same names competing with the small businesses in the construction and the other areas of procurement and services.

Therefore, this Bill is a journey, as indicated by the Hon. Minister Indar, that started in 2004. Importantly, I would like to place on record in the conversation that when one reads Section (2) of the Principal Act it states what is a small business and who can register as a small business. It states:

(2) “A small business desirous of becoming an approved small business, under this Act, may make an application therefor to the Small Business Council by providing the following: a certificate of incorporation under the Companies Act 1991, or registration under the Business names (Registration) Act, or Certificate of Partnership under the Partnership Act...”

5.13 p.m.

Then it goes on and this is what I want to place in the conversation:

“...or its registration as a cooperative under the Cooperative Societies Act...”

Mr. Speaker, you would know that the Ministry of Labour supervises cooperatives. Therefore, in the new dispensation, we must ensure that cooperatives participate. Presently, they do not. Several things must happen to them. As I understand, there are 512 of them on the books, but 50% or 60% will not live because of the state they are in. We have planned to do an integrity audit of all cooperatives and credit unions in this country to get an understanding of which are sound, which are paying attention to community development and which are imposters. We will bring an end to the imposters and we will seek to support those cooperative societies that are important for the development of communities.

Section 11 of the Principal Act speaks to procurement of goods and services. The amendment is including works. It means that, at all levels of Government procurements, small businesses can compete.

It is useful, at this time, that the 20%, which we spoke about so long ago... What is important, after the amendments to the Principal Act are passed, is how we operationalise it. In my view, we cannot continue to just talk about it; we have to make it happen. We have to, in the most urgent way, ensure that small businesses across the length and breadth of this country, in all the regions, participate. We have to ensure, in my view, in the case of Government procurement, we have businesses by scales so that small businesses which are applicable in the Act will not be poached upon by medium and large businesses.

So, I support, wholeheartedly, the amendment to this legislation. I want to say that, by virtue of the Ministry I run being responsible for a category of small businesses, we want to see that category properly involved, properly represented going forward, and that it participates in 20% of Government procurement that will flow from the amendment in all of the different areas where procurement happens and would continue to happen.

So, as I have said, the journey dealing with the matter started in March, 2004. We are attempting, *via* the amendments from the Hon. Member, Ms. Walrond, to concretise this journey and make it a journey that would be successful for small and developing businesses in this country. It would allow for people to have some faith that, if they go out there and *plunge into the waters* of small businesses, they will be able to survive.

As I started, I will end by saying that the amendments will ensure, in my view, the survivability of small businesses and the development, going forward, of small businesses to

contribute to the economic life of Guyana, so that this country could develop the way we want it. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development

[Mr. Dharamlall]: Good afternoon to everyone. I think I will be doing an injustice to this exercise after that presentation by His Excellency. I want to add my public commendation to His Excellency on quite a visionary and thought-provoking presentation earlier today. I think it was one of the best speeches I have ever heard in this country.

Nevertheless, whilst I add my support to the Hon. Member, Ms. Walrond, on the Small Business (Amendment) Bill 2020, I must add some context in my seeking to commend this Bill to the House as well. There was a period in this country when Guyana was considered the shining star of this part of the world. It was a period when, whilst there were economic shocks around the region and the rest of the world, we were reputed to be very resilient and our economy was very resilient, based on the economic diversity of the businesses that we had in our country.

We got to the point of being, for almost 10 consecutive years, the fastest growing economy in the region. This happened not just by (*inaudible*), but I think by a concerted effort by successive governments of the People Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), especially between 1993 to 2014, where we saw massive growth in our country generated by small businesses. The entire economic landscape of rural Guyana changed, drastically, in that period.

I believe today is a seminal day where we are creating greater scope for small businesses. In the sector for which I am one of the Ministers responsible, along with my Colleague, Mr. Anand Persaud, if we were to extrapolate on the successive budgets previous to what we are going to have tomorrow, small businesses could now earn and dominate, especially in the regional budgets, the minimum of \$11 billion, based on historical figures. I would hope that will increase, substantially, moving forward, but it is a significant proportion. The sum of \$11 billion in small villages goes a far way in repairing the damages caused by the last Administration. We know for a fact that a minimum of 30,000 jobs were lost. Those jobs were primarily in our communities across the country, especially in rural Guyana. I believe that, given this greater opportunity and wider scope to participate in the national largesse, the evolution of small businesses will, once again, propel the economic future of our country.

Yesterday, the Vice-President, Hon Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, spoke about the importance of our policies being both pro-poor and pro-business. That philosophy, I think, is alien to the regime that governed this country for five years previous to now when we are in Government. Both of my Colleagues who spoke before me as well as the lead Minister on this amendment, spoke about the hardship measures that the last Administration placed on the private sector. More so, as the Hon. Member, the Attorney General, would say in the National Assembly, hardship measures were placed on man to mule. I think, now that we have been able to reverse those perverse measures implemented by the last Government, we could, once again, see the blooming of small businesses.

It is very important. Small businesses are part of our cultural identity because it allows for free thinking in the different type of businesses that we have in our villages and communities across Guyana, including many of the hinterland areas, including Amerindian villages. Mr. Speaker, if you go to those villages, there is a cry in every single hinterland village that business is dead, there are no opportunities for employment, that loans have been matured to the extent that many cannot repay their loans and businesses have gone into bankruptcy. Some has even led to other social ills. I think that, given this opportunity, Guyana stands, as the President said, on the platform of one Guyana, small businesses would grow the culture of our rural people.

The last Government was engaged in businesses, but it was not small businesses. So, they do not understand this philosophy. That is why they are not in the National Assembly. It is because they cannot speak about it. They were involved in massive businesses and those... **[Mr. Ramsaran: [(Inaudible)] bad business]** As my Colleague said, yes, bad business. In our part of the world or on the streets that we roam, it is called *runnings*. So, the Opposition would not qualify to speak on small businesses. We know of the different '*runnings*'.

In our Ministry, we implemented a programme called Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED). When we researched the background to SLED, as implemented by the last Government, hundreds of millions of dollars were geared for small businesses and microentrepreneurs and not a single cent could be accounted for. I would hope that as the person who...you know that famous gold band *fella* **[An Hon. Member: [(Inaudible)]]** Well, maybe, I do not know. The Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, may have to tell us whether that was a business too. That famous gold band *fella* now chairs the Public Accounts

Committee (PAC) of Guyana. I have an issue with such an individual, having been involved in the mismanagement of the resources of this country, chairing such an important body. As I have the floor, I would also join the call that the person should not chair the Committee.

5.28 p.m.

On the SLED project, I have some documents. When we go through those documents, we will take a few weeks to discuss that. I hope that during the course of the... the revelations of the names of those business that were created, of the persons who led those businesses and of the amounts taken away from poor people by those persons would be made known to the world in the few weeks. There is a certain Mr. Jones with a barber shop, there is a certain Mr. Figueira with a virtual pig farm, and there is also a certain Mr. Vincent with tens of millions of dollars and who is the point of contact for a few dozen business groups in the Rupununi of Guyana. I think there must come a point in time when those persons have to be held accountable.

I must report to you, Mr. Speaker, that we have begun a forensic audit of the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme. Those persons will be prosecuted. I hope that the country is going to be vindicated at the end of that process. We are also in a new world economic order where Guyana now is a major player on the international scene regarding oil and gas. One of the critical components of our growth in the oil and gas sector is the ability of our local businesses to participate – local content participation. I think with our small businesses now having institutionalised capacity to become credible and to become competitive, they will also play a great role in local content participation in this new sector. Even whilst we focus on this new sector, both the Vice-President and His Excellency the President, who spoke today, spoke about the importance of diversification so that the Dutch disease does not become pervasive in our country.

Small businesses, I think, are a critical mitigating factor against the Dutch disease. Again, small businesses with increase scope and opportunity [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I just want to caution whoever has a video playing that I am hearing the audio in the House.

Mr, Dharamlall: Sorry, I did not hear you.

Mr. Speaker: I just wanted to caution someone who has a video playing. I am hearing the audio in the House. You may continue, Sir.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Speaker, I do not know. I am not hearing that.

Mr. Speaker: I did not accuse you. I am just cautioning whoever has it.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope whoever that person is that they are going to... For all intents and purposes, small businesses are the pillars that are going to help us to drive economic diversity and to drive local financial independence. When I say local financial independence, I mean at the community level. As our local small businesses prosper, more jobs would be created. These jobs, naturally, are going to be jobs in our villages – the importance of job creation as a result of small businesses doing well. When we have jobs too, as a result of small businesses, there would be more money circulating within our local communities. It would not just be central businesses alone driving local and regional development. When more moneys are circulated in communities, undeniably, our country is going to grow substantially.

As I said earlier, today is quite a seminal day for us. The tremendous impact of small businesses, the domino effects that they have in the local economy... We saw the devastation that happened in Wales, the decimation of small businesses and the total collapse of the local economy in that area as a result of the closure of Wales Sugar Estate. The symbiotic effects that small businesses also have with similar as well as corresponding business enterprises... I think, very importantly, the identity that it gives to certain communities in our country... I think too, as we move forward, we are continuing to evolve and our country is becoming more first world. All of this becomes part of the implementation of the vision of His Excellency.

In relation to the removal of onerous conditions that hampers small businesses and that which creates bureaucratic logjams, especially in the approvals and permitting process in many agencies of the Government, I think as the Hon. Oneidge Walrond said, this amendment is going to level the playing field and it is going to enhance competitiveness. Because we are both pro-poor and pro-business, I would like to commend this amendment to the House. I look forward to the support of everyone. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Yvonne Pearson, I now invite you.

Ms. Pearson-Fredricks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise in support of the Hon. Minister Oneidge Walrond who brought this Bill to this Honourable House, Bill No. 13 of 2020, Small Business (Amendment) Bill, I would like to go back a little to 2003 when the Small Business Bill 2003 was brought to the House in the Eighth Parliament and was sent to a special select committee. Mr. Speaker, I wish to remind you that, in my research, I found that you were the Chairman of that Committee. You helped to shape the Small Business Act. Almost 17 years later, you are the Speaker of the House. For that, I say thank you and God bless you.

We are here now trying to amend the Act. This amendment is timely. These amendments that are now being proposed are not to increase taxes, or to place Value-added tax (VAT) on essential food items or medical supplies. We are seeking to bring relief to small businesses.

I must place my disappointment, however, that the Members on the other side of the House are absent. Maybe they did not want to face the reality or maybe they do not want to hear or to listen to us bringing relief to the Guyanese people. Maybe, if we were talking about increase in taxes they might have sat there. However, I have here a handout – *Budget 2020* – that states ‘our plan for prosperity’. This is our Government’s ‘Plan for Prosperity’. It states:

“Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation; and, Enhancing Welfare.”

This is a Small Business Act. What we are bringing here to this House, today, would help us to make this a reality for the Guyanese people. When we examine the proposed changes or amendments... I have listened to the Hon. Member, Hon. Minister Dharamlall, speak about all the things that have happened. These amendments would help us to determine who is, what is or what defines a small business. There are three criteria and, as such, one had to meet them. It is important. The rule of law is important. There must be guidelines. There must be laws to follow. Documentation is also important. It is important to prove that one is a small business following the three criteria.

I looked at the other proposed amendments and it would allow to strengthen the Small Business Council and the Small Business Bureau. It would remove the powers from the

Minister. The Small Business Council and the Small Business Bureau would have a responsibility. They have greater responsibility, I would say.

The clause that grabs my attention and gives me some excitement is clause 11 of the Principal Act and the proposed amendment which states:

“...section 11 (1) of the Principal Act to expand procurement opportunities by small businesses to include governmental works to be executed. The Principal Act provides for at least twenty percent of Government procurement of goods and services to be obtained from small businesses. Government works are excluded from this provision in the Principal Act.”

Today, we are seeking to include the word “works”. I will read what the inclusion is. It states:

“...its procurement of goods, services and works to be executed annually.”

I am excited, particularly, with the word works and I am referring to it. This would have great benefits for the Amerindian villages and communities. That is why I am excited. Now, we would be able to access contracts that would have normally gone to coast landers, as we would refer to it, or the ‘bigger boys’. Small businesses in the various villages could put itself in place by meeting the three criteria and by having the proper documentation. Therefore, we could get, from the word ‘works’, contracts within our various villages and communities.

This move, these amendments, are most timely and important to us as Guyanese. I speak, particularly, for our villages and communities in our various regions. This would help us to make this plan, as it states, ‘Our Plan for Prosperity’. This would help us to protect our people in a COVID-19 environment. We are still suffering from the effects of Covid-19. It is still here with us but we do hope that it leaves soon. This would help to strengthen our democracy and the rule of law. There must be the rule of law which we all have to admit. We would be able to benefit from incentives and we would be able to benefit from what Government has to offer, once we follow all the criteria or we meet the criteria. It would also help economic growth in our various villages and communities. Therefore, standing of living and our welfare would be greatly enhanced.

I wish to say, at this time, that I support the amendments that were brought to this House, which would greatly benefit small businesses within Guyana in our various villages and communities. I do, hereby, support these amendments that were brought to the House by the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

5.43 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Charles Ramson, to make his contribution.

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports [Mr. Ramson]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a very great pleasure to be able to rise in support of this amendment, which is being proposed by the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, Ms. Oneidge Walrond. This morning, the Hon. Member Minister of the Public Service, Ms. Sonia Parag, who is sitting right next to me, said in her speech that she had hoped that there would be no conflict coming from the other side. I too had those hopes that there would be no conflict coming from the other side in a subject matter that is important to improve the lives of people, especially, the lives of the most vulnerable. Little did I know that my hope for no conflict would turn out to be the absence of it.

This is emblematic of the disrespect that the Opposition shows this National Assembly and the people of the country, who took the time to vote for them. Even though they have voted for them to be in the Opposition, when one has been given a position and when people entrust one in a position, one has an obligation to do a good job. That is the bottom line or, as my learned Friend, Mr. Joseph Hamilton said, that is the fundamental point. Here, they display the importance they place on the job that they have been given by being absent.

This is also emblematic of the fraud that they had intended to perpetuate across this country by collecting moneys under false pretences, which is what they are doing currently. They are claiming to be Members of Parliament (MP) but, in a matter where they are expected to act as Members of Parliament and make contributions on a very significant issue, they are absent. They are not late for work. They are absent from work. The good news is that the people of this country are watching very carefully. When one does not do a good job, people lose confidence in him or her even more. I am happy that the people of Guyana are able to see the respect that is being shown to them. I also am happy that

people are able to see the attempts to bring this Parliament into disrepute.

As leaders of this country, you are expected to behave in a certain way. You are expected to set an example. Even though we believed – and we had every right to believe – that the 2015 General and Regional Elections were rigged, we came and took our place in that last Parliament. We did not disrupt the previous President's speech. In fact, I recall, deliberately, that the Leader of the Opposition then and the leader of our party, who is currently the Vice President, said to us, in no uncertain terms, that we must be seated before the President arrived. That was what it was in 2015, even though we challenged the results of the General and Regional Elections and even though I was present when the Returning Officer (RO) jiggged 26 boxes. Her name was Melanie Marshall. That elections petition was never allowed to be heard up to this day because they appealed it all the way to the Court of Appeal and it was delayed since then.

In dealing with this Bill, it is important that we trace its evolution. My Colleague, the Hon. Ms. Pearson-Fredericks, who just spoke, was right to point out that this 2003-2004 Bill was piloted through the National Assembly, which was the Eighth Parliament, by you, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member Ms. Pearson-Fredericks said something very important. She said that the Bill was sent to the Special Select Committee on the Small Business Bill 20003 – Bill No.18/2003. The reason that I pointed out it was very important that it was sent to a special select committee is because the method by which we govern ourselves is where we are able to engage with people who we do not necessarily agree with on everything. Special select committees are the means by which Parliamentarians are actually able to share and discuss ideas and different amendments to provisions in Bills. This had become a hallmark of the People's Progressive Party/ Civic, while in Government – a method of doing business.

I say this because, in the last Government, of the many times that I spoke and the many times that our Colleagues spoke, we urged the previous Government, on multiple occasions – the Hon. Member Ms. Gail Teixeira is shaking her head because she knows – and on hundreds of occasions to send Bills to a special select committee. Do you know how many times the previous Government wanted to send Bills to special select committees? It was five times. For the scores of legislation and hundreds of pieces of legislation from our amendments that have passed through the National Assembly, the APNU/AFC sent legislation five times to special select committees. That previous Government had no

intention of wanting to work with us even though we were urging that it did. I am going to show you the significance of it that came from that very Bill that was passed, which is what we are debating now.

The Small Business Act, Act No. 2 of 2004... when the Small Business Bill was sent to a special select committee... I have the Report of the Special Select Committee on the Small Business Bill 2003 – Bill No. 18 of 2003, which was signed by you, Mr. Speaker. It is important, as well, that I point out who were Members of the Committee. For the People's Progressive Party/ Civic, there were five persons who made contributions to that Special Select Committee. There was you, Mr. Speaker, who was leading the Bill, the Hon. Mr. Saisnarine Kowlessar, the Hon. Mr. Shaik Baksh, the Hon. Mr. Odinga Lumumba and the Hon. Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai.

On the other side, there was Mr. Ivor Allen, Mr. Stanley Ming, Ms. Myrna Peterkin – I may be pronouncing her name incorrectly – and, finally, Mr. James Mc Allister. These names are important, and I will tell you why. How you treat your team is a representation of how you will treat the people you intend to represent.

Remember this was in 2003 when this Bill was presented. This was 18 years ago. The Hon. Mr. Manzoor Nadir is now the Speaker of the National Assembly, supported by the People's Progressive Party/Civic as well. Mr. Saisnarine Kowlessar is now the Chairman of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) Board [Mr. Datadin: It is the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI)] Is it is the GWI? No, it is Mr. Kowlessar; he is at the GRA. Do not correct me. You are getting like the people on the other side. There is Mr. Shaik Baksh who is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the GWI. There is Mr. Odinga Lumumba who is an Advisor to the President and a Real Estate Brooker. Then there is Ms. Campbell Sukhai, who is still a Senior Minister.

On the other hand, Mr. Ivor Allen has nothing to do with the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R). He does not want to do anything in the PNC/R and complains bitterly that, in the last five years, he never got any work from the PNC/R. Mr. Stanley Ming, again, disassociates himself from the PNC/R, even though he stood by the rigging operation. I do not know too much about Ms. Peterkin, but I know about Mr. James Mc Alister. I was advised appropriately today about Mr. James Mc Alister – I would not disclose who it is that advised me. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that he was recalled from Parliament and excluded from the PNC/R

because he raised an issue about the then Leader of the Opposition having inappropriate conduct. It is important that you understand and that the people of the country understand. It is important for the young people who should have been sitting here and listening to this to understand. I know that they will listen because they will watch it online. It is important that they understand that PNC/R never takes care of its members and constituents.

In the Report that was presented to the National Assembly, there is a paragraph that I want to read to you. It is important for understanding why Bills are sent to special select committees. It states:

“The Special Select Committee on the Small Business Bill 2003, met on five occasions, from the 27th of October 2003 to the 18th February 2004, and considered the Bill clause by clause. One Clause was amended and that is Clause 2.”

5.58 p.m.

It shows that, through working together, this is where the amendments take place. One does not sit in a Chamber holding hands and singing *Kumbaya* when one is in a political frame. One is competing against the same interests, one is fighting for power but, once the election is over, one has work to do and the work to be done is when one comes here and debates, and when one comes here and sends Bills to select committees. I wanted to give that background so that you understand where it is coming from.

It is also important for me to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, and to bring to the attention of the entire House that a Bill of a similar nature was placed in this House in 2019. It was laid by the Hon. Haimraj Rajkumar, the then Minister of Business. Why it is important for me to bring it to your attention is because of the date when it was laid in this House. It was laid in this House on 22nd May, 2019, five to six months after the no-confidence motion was passed by this honourable House. It is important because we have seen and this country saw, during that period, a degree of lawlessness, disrespect, disregard and disobedience for the Constitution, which we had never seen before in this country's history. When we started to take additional measures of protest because, initially, our method of doing business was that we were respecting the Constitution, respecting the President and respecting the Offices that they were holding... That was our method of doing business. Another was that we were going to rebuild and win the next election, which we did. When Mr. David Granger as President started to breach the Constitution,

the Party, the Leadership of the Party and the Members of Parliament decided that it could no longer be business as usual. We were vindicated when there was a judgement. On the last occasion, the Hon. Dr. Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, was able to do a chronology of events and provide a litany of examples where the Constitution was breached. We were vindicated on this particular issue when the challenge to the unilateral appointment of Justice Patterson as the Chairperson of the Elections Commission (GECOM) was made after it went all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). I have with me the judgment. In the very first paragraph of that judgment, and the reference is [2019] CCJ 13 (AJ), in the very last sentence, this is what it states:

“In this, ‘the GECOM Chairman case’, the Court concluded that the process that resulted in the unilateral appointment by the President of a Chairman of GECOM was flawed and in breach of the Constitution.”

This was the first time in the history of our country where a court had ruled that the President of our country was in breach of the Constitution. We were saying this well in advance before we took this case to the court. Additional measures were taken because we realised that this President had no intention of respecting the Constitution. It is a national disgrace to see the Opposition acting this way and attempting to bring this House into disrepute. It is disgraceful to see the Opposition acting that way with placards outside when their reason for doing that has nothing to do with the President, the President’s vision or the implementation of the Government. All that they are doing is fighting for their perks, the perks that they previously received that they gobbled up like gluttons. It is a fact.

I would like to make this additional point: In relation to that lawlessness that we saw transpired between the 21st December to 1st August, 2020, we now see ‘The People’s Parliament’. Let me explain what is ‘The People’s Parliament’. ‘The People’s Parliament’ is the first Parliament, first of all, in the absence of people and, second of all, they are doing this because they are still operating in a lawless environment. They still want to be lawless. They tendered a motion, the Speaker made a ruling, whether they are happy with it or they are not happy with it, they have to stand by that ruling. Do you think when we were in Opposition, we had the majority of our cases go our way? The vast majority of our motions did not go our way. In fact, all of the representations and the amendments that we suggested were

never accepted. All they are doing is continuing to perpetuate their ideology of lawlessness and the refusal to be a responsible Opposition and leaders in this country.

It is important that I also bring to your attention why this amendment is important. From an ideological standpoint and on understanding markets, it is really important that people understand that markets are not perfect. Markets are imperfect. While I do not ever want to change the benefits of the market, one has to understand how the market works. The market works like a traffic cop. It directs the resources, it directs labour, it directs usage of land and it also directs the winnings and, because it directs the winnings, it also creates unfair advantages for the winners.

Since I am in much more contact and in the environment of sport, culture and youth *et cetera*, it is as though a young footballer is competing with an expert footballer or a young singer is competing with an expert singer. One has to be able to provide advantages for the smaller businesses because they, first of all, need the assistance. They can also be far more nimble and, by being more nimble, it creates more opportunities, it creates more employment for people and it creates more innovation, because they tend to be more aggressive. By the way, this is in keeping with the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s ideology since the beginning of time. In the beginning of our time as a party, we have always been a people, pro-poor Party.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that when the People’s Progressive Party came into power in 1992, the economy was in bankruptcy. Our debt to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio was 700%, inflation was triple digits and interest rates were about 35-40%. There was no means. Our debt surfacing was 153% so we had no money to spend and no money to invest. The People’s Progressive Party had to develop a developmental strategy. There was the national developmental strategy that started since then. The fundamental objective was to be able to have macro-economic stability and to help to stabilise the economic and financial system.

Shortly, thereafter, we were able to get the poverty reduction strategy. That is another example of a pro-business, pro-poor, pro-people approach. Shortly after that, as the world changed and as businesses started to grow – because we needed them to be competitive – there was the competitiveness strategy. Shortly after that, there was the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). I am saying this because this has been a tenet of the People’s Progressive Party in understanding that

we have to be able to make people more prosperous. To be able to do it, we must have a practical approach that allows advantages where necessary.

As the youth representative in this Parliament on behalf of Government, one of the things that we hear about all the time when we do our community engagements is how youths are going to be able to get jobs, how they are going to be able to get loans and how they are going to be able to get business opportunities. The amendments that are being made here provide the framework that will be able to see that all of those things are met overtime and, hopefully, in a very short space of time. When one sees, and it has been mentioned on a number of occasions... The Explanatory Memorandum of the Bill, in the last paragraph, states:

“Clause 3 of the Bill seeks to amend section 11 (1) of the Principal Act to expand procurement opportunities by small businesses to include governmental works to be executed.”

It allows for a number of those concerns that are frequently raised by young people who, generally, want a good life for themselves. They want to know where the opportunities are. Young people are not lazy; we are ambitious. We would like to know how we could get a better life for ourselves and not in a way where we want a handout. We want some direction, but we would like a leg up. I am confident that these amendments that are proposed by the Government’s side of the House and piloted by the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce will make the amendment and create that framework that is necessary to do that.

It does not end there. Mr. Speaker, you would know, having sat through the last debates for the Budget, that \$100 million was allocated for the Small Business Development Fund.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Minister, it would have to end there if you do not get an extension. Could someone move an extension?

6.13 p.m.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given *[inaudible]*.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, please proceed.

Mr. Ramson: Mr. Speaker, having sat through the last debate, you would know that it is not only the amendments

that are important, it is also the supporting mechanisms that are important. You would recall that there was \$100 million coming out of the last budget, where there was a small business development fund. Just today, to demonstrate how acutely attuned the President of the country is to understanding the needs of young people, how important innovation is to the economy, and that grants and loans are important for small businesses, it was a specific point which he mentioned in his speech. That is something that you would have never heard from the previous President, because he never understood his country, he never understood the needs of our people, and he definitely did not understand young people. I am very pleased to be able to stand in my capacity as the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports to lend my support, my unwavering and unreserved support, for the amendments to this Act through this Bill.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister and thank you for some of the kind words. I did not know it was 17 years already. You made me sound very old.

Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, I was just reminding myself about what Hon. Member Sanjeev Datadin said about the law being living. Thank you.

Ms. Walrond (replying): Thank you please, Mr. Speaker. As you highlighted, it as has been 17 years, but you look much better for the wear. I cannot tell.

I thank my Colleague Ministers, the Hon. Deodat Indar, Hon. Joseph Hamilton, Hon. Nigel Dharamlall, Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, and the Hon. Charles Ramson, for the support that they have given me for the Bill, Bill No. 13 of 2020, as seeking to amend the Small Businesses Act.

I would like to highlight and enunciate further what my Colleagues said. I do thank them for their support of this Bill and for raising points that I think ought to be highlighted, which is indeed that the impact of the Bill will be felt not just in Georgetown or on the coast, but will be felt in all of the regions and in the hinterland. Businesses throughout the length and breadth of Guyana will be feeling this impact. The communities will be feeling the impact, and financial resources will be seeing immediate impacts. I thank my Colleagues, all of you, for highlighting this important point.

Also, as my Colleague Minister, Hon. Mr. Ramson, and also Hon. Indar has highlighted, the Government is indeed pro-people and pro-business. This is the environment in which we

are operating. We have also, with that policy objective in mind, made steps to release and reduce the compliance and regulatory burdens on the small businesses. The Small Business Bureau and the Small Business Council, while there is a requirement for the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) compliances, the Council have taken measures to facilitate the small businesses to acquire these compliances so that the businesses are not left to face this burden by themselves. Also, we are taking steps to reduce the regulatory burden and the compliance burden on the more than 50 internet service providers (ISP) across this country who were faced with some compliance burdens under the Act. The Administration is seeking, and it has taken steps and decisions to reduce those burdens. All across this country, internet service providers will be experiencing and benefitting from reduced compliance and regulatory burdens — these are just a few examples — hence, getting internet to communities that are in such dire need. This, once again, is an example of how this Administration sees and would like to create an environment where small businesses are nurtured, supported and are given the opportunity to really thrive.

With those few words, I once again thank my Colleague Ministers for the support and I now ask that the Bill be read a second time.

SMALL BUSINESS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2020 – BILL No. 13 of 2020

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Small Business Act.”

[*Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce*]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Mr. Chairman: Before the Assembly is resumed, the particular Standing Order is 60 (11) where we have to put the clauses of the Bill itself to the whole Assembly.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: There are two items on the agenda that have to be moved by Hon. Member David Patterson. I am checking to see if the Hon. Member is online.

Ms. Teixeira: Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. You skipped an item – the Hire Purchase Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry. Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, you are in perfect order. We now move to the next item, the Hire Purchase Bill.

Hire-Purchase Bill 2020 – Bill No. 14/2020

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to make provision for the regulation of hire-purchase, credit sale and conditional sale agreements; and for related purposes.”

[*Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce*]

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Speaker, I request that the Hire Purchase Bill be moved to a Special Select Committee for consultation.

The Bill was referred to a Special Select Committee.

(iii) COMMITTEES' BUSINESS

Motion

Outstanding Work of the Public Accounts of Accounts Committee of the Eleventh Parliament

WHEREAS, in accordance with Standing Order No. 104(1), every Committee shall before the end of the Session in which it was appointed, make a report to the Assembly upon matters referred to it;

AND WHEREAS, the Public Accounts Committee, a Standing Committee of the National Assembly of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament, was unable, owing to the dissolution of Parliament on 30th December, 2019, to conclude the work that was referred to it in that Session,

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly of the First Session of the Twelfth Parliament take into account all outstanding work of the previous Committee.

[*Mr. David Patterson – Chairman*]

Mr. Speaker: We can now go to item 8, Outstanding Work of the Public Accounts Committee of the Eleventh Parliament, and to the Adoption of The Report of the Public Accounts Committee on its Examination of the Public Accounts of Guyana for the Year 2015, both to be moved by the Hon. Member, David Patterson. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson is not here, neither do I see him online.

I now call on the Hon. Prime Minister.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 2.00 p.m. on 12th February, 2021.”

[Prime Minister]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m., on Friday, 12th February, 2021.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 2.00 p.m. tomorrow, 12th February, 2021.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.25 p.m.