



**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
(2020-2022) 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*

37TH Sitting

Monday, 31ST January, 2022

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.14 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Decorum in Speech During Budget Debate

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, today we begin the budget debate on the 2022 estimates that were presented to us by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. During the past few sittings, I have had to caution Members about the use of certain words in the National Assembly. I want to remind about a few of them.

Firstly, there is the issue of reference to His Excellency the President in your speeches. I am not going to be as tolerant as I used to be.

Secondly, there is the issue of cries of shame. We will recirculate the list of words that are considered unparliamentary.

Dismissal of Motion by Former Leader of the Opposition and Opposition Chief Whip

Before I call on the Clerk to go through the agenda, let me also say that we did receive a motion signed by the former Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Member Joseph Harmon, and the Opposition Chief Whip, Mr. Christopher Jones, calling for 22 Members of the Government side to be sent to the Committee of Privileges. I have looked at the motion and I have looked at the tapes. I have also come to one conclusion, and I have been advised about another principle which I want to also use in my dismissal of that motion.

Firstly, the motion will not proceed because a *prima facie* case has not been established.

Secondly, there is, I was only reminded this morning...because I am surrounded by so many lawyers. In the House, we have many lawyers of excellent repute on both sides. Every first-year law student learns the phrase *ex turpi causa non oritur actio*, which means that you cannot bring

a legal action for your illegal actions in the first place. Based on the those two, I am not allowing that motion to go ahead.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper was laid:

- (1) The Public Health (Coronavirus) (No. 2) Regulations 2022 – No. 1 of 2022.

[Minister of Health]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2022

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2022 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2022-01-26.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2022, of a total sum of five hundred and one billion, six hundred and seventy-eight million, two hundred and ninety-eight thousand dollars (**\$501,678,298,000**), **excluding fifty one**

billion, two hundred and fifty-five million, and four hundred and twenty thousand dollars (\$51,255,420,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the presentations on the 2022 estimates. Our first speaker for today is the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to my Colleagues on the other side of the House. It is certainly my profound honour to rise, this morning, to commence the parliamentary Opposition's contributions to the 2022 Budget debate in this honourable House.

I must note, at the outset, that I was disturbed that the parliamentary Opposition was only given two working days to consider these voluminous estimates. We suspect that the Government is quite sure that *Budget 2022* will not stand up to robust scrutiny. Last year, I stood in this honourable House, and I described the 2021 Budget as vapid, vacuous and visionless. I stand here, one year later, to testify to the accuracy of that description. I do not take pride in my prognostication because I am cognisant of the biblical admonition that says where there is no vision, the people perish, and the people of Guyana are perishing.

One year later, Guyana has, for all intents and purposes, lost the battle against Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Today, as a nation of less than 800,000, these are the statistics: we have 1,166 deaths, 3,53 new cases within the last 24 hours, a total confirmed case load of 60,000, and a whopping 11,234 persons in home isolation. These are the statistics. We have a Minister of Health who is in a perpetual state of suspicion. He is never sure. He simply surmises and suspects.

Inflation stands close to 6%. It is a daily struggle for most to find one meal per day. Crime is rampant. Corruption is rife. With each announcement of an oil find, Guyanese sink deeper into despair and discouragement. What is in it for me, Charlene from behind her stall in Bourda Market asks? What is there to be excited about? Shalita said that she cannot eat oil. She said that it is a daily struggle to send her children to school and to find two meals per day to help them to focus. Imagine, she said that she has pay \$300 for a pound of plantain, chicken is \$400 per pound, fish –

Banga Mary – is \$450 per pound. She said that she is a cleaner and her husband works on a fishing boat, but guess what? He was laid off recently because his boss man said they just did not have enough fish and he had to close down operation. Shalita said that she hopes the Government does something for them in this 2022 Budget. This is what Shalita said. Enter stage right, *Budget 2022* – the most disrespectful, discriminatory and deceitful budget to ever grace the floor of this honourable House.

My late mother, God bless her soul, used to tell me, show me where you spend your money, and I will tell you what you value and what your values are. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stood in this House and told the people of Guyana that, in 2021, inflation was close to 6% and food price inflation, in particular, was approximately 12%. Yet, this Government has given to our public servants a meagre 5% after tax over a period of two years; 5%. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) refuses to give Guyanese an increase that would at least help them to meet the increased cost in food that they need to survive. That is how much they care. Show me where you spend your money, and I will tell you what you value. Out of a budget of \$553 billion, the PPP/C chose to spend \$218 billion on capital expenditure, an approximate increase of over 109%.

The issue that arises here immediately is capacity. It is well known and well established that, in the ordinary scheme of things, neither the Central Government nor the private sector has the capacity to execute such a massive increase in this programme. This is when everything is going as it should. This lack of capacity is exacerbated by the fact that we are in a pandemic and the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stood in this House and said to us that there are serious issues with the global supply chain. We heard all manner and sort of excuses that these issues with the global supply chain have affected the ability to complete Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) and the Mandela Road extension project. When one considers that the foreign component of our Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) is about 70%, meaning we have to import almost everything to get the work done, how is it that the Government intends to execute such a massive infrastructure programme within a year? It is not even in a year. It would be 10 months by the time this Budget is passed, and the system starts to work.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in reporting on Guyana's public sector investment management assessment, said this: Guyana has an estimated efficiency gap of 41%. When that statistic is applied here, what it means is that out of the \$218 billion allocated for capital expenditure, \$89 billion of that will be wasted as a result of the weaknesses in planning, in budgeting, in appraisal, in selection, in procurement, and in the execution of capital projects; \$89 billion. These are not our statistics. These are the statistics according to the IMF. We know the IMF, in its diplomacy, will not say corruption, but we know what they mean. They mean corruption. We know that we have fallen two places in two years on the transparency corruption index. We are big and we understand what they mean. Mr. Speaker, I say this to you: if this Government were truly serious about putting Guyana on a sound developmental footing, it would have expended effort on decreasing that efficiency gap to minimise wastage. They would focus on investing in our human capital and on training, and not just on training, but on offering competitive remuneration, lest we be training our people to leave.

10.29 a.m.

Given this anticipated wastage of \$89 billion, and all the issues I referred to earlier – the supply chain issues and the pandemic issues – it is highly unlikely, with the most strenuous of efforts, that this Government will be able to execute such a programme. Why not, therefore, reallocate and rearrange? We could minimise and we could prevent, let us say 50% of this wastage by doing a proper adjustment and coming to this House with a more realistic figure. If we are to take \$36 billion, which represents 6.5% of this budget, this is what we could do. We can give the 50,000 public servants a pay raise of 10% right now. We could provide free tuition for 11,000 university students right now. We could give the 9000 plus health workers an average of \$250,000 bonus right now. We can raise the income tax threshold to \$100,000 right now. We could increase the Old Age Pension to \$35,000 a month for the 65,000 senior citizens right now. We can allocate \$3.5 billion to technical and vocational training. We could provide \$2 million in business grants to 2000 qualified small businesses right now. Guess what we could do, Mr. Speaker? We could spend \$1.3 billion to upskill those 5000 plus sugar workers, to train them for a future beyond sugar instead of keeping them tied and tethered to an industry that you came to this House and said was failing. That is what we could do, Mr. Speaker. All of this could be done right now, and capital expenditure would still stand at 75%. Can you imagine the difference this would make to the lives

of the ordinary Guyanese? Show *meh weh* you put *yuh* money and I will tell you what you value and where your values are.

This Government boasts about \$25 billion in relief measures. The truth is, by and large, those measures are geared towards favouring big businesses. It appears that the Government keeps hoping that by providing all these tax breaks to big businesses, the benefits will trickle down to the poor and working class. *We fed up tell them and the world over fed up tell them* that trickle-down economics does not work. A case in point is that last year August, this Government adjusted the freight cost component of the Cost, Insurance, and Freight (CIF), the effect of which was to roll back pre-freight cost. Yet, in November, we had the highest office holder in this land begging the private sector to pass the savings on. They acknowledged that it does not work. Guess what they did? Instead of allocating properly and instead of rearranging, they continued this tax break until 2022 at a cost of \$6 billion to the poor and the working-class Guyanese. Show me where you spend your money, and I will show you what you value.

Let us forget about all the propaganda and the acrobatics in linguistics that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance performed. The reality is that the numbers do not lie. The numbers tell a story and the story that the numbers are telling is that this Government does not care. The Government does not care for the poor and working class. This is why they have no interest in strengthening the national procurement framework. I was appalled to hear the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance accuse the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) of systematically dismantling the procurement system. I sat here and wondered how much of a frolic in delusion we could embark upon.

We will remind the PPP/C Administration that it was the APNU/AFC that constituted the Public Procurement Commission (PPC), a decade after it was implemented into our Constitution. They refused to perfect the legal framework and you dare to come here, today, to tell us that we have dismantled it. You continue to systematically undermine our procurement system. It was you that appointed the head of the PSIP as the Chairman of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB), in direct conflict with the Act which states that the Chair and Deputy Chair must be full-time employees, and you dare to come into this House to say, what. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance does not get...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I did not dare to do anything, so, please.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Sir. It is the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. It is so tedious to have to say that. I do not know why they just do not make you the Minister of Finance and done. Anyway, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stood in this House and accused us of the act that they are guilty of, demonstrability guilty of. They have fired all the properly qualified and trained personnel at the NPTAB because they perceive them to have a particular type of political affiliation. He does not get to come here and engage in revisionism.

I want to turn my attention, very briefly, to this Natural Resource Fund (NRF). I note that you have made some pronouncements, Sir, on the illegality or otherwise of the actions. Mr. Speaker, I will say that it appears that you have already concluded that our actions were illegal. Therefore, it appears to me, at this time, that our appearance before the Committee of Privileges might be moot. I want to say that the Natural Resource Fund Bill received outcry far and wide from the Guyanese public. Everybody and their grandmother said to consult. Yet, the Government sought to use its one-seat majority to force that legislation down the Guyanese people's throats. With their usual propaganda, they came here, went to the public, and assured us of all types of things. They said that there will be the greatest levels of transparency and that it will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny. I am yet to hear, clearly articulated in this Budget, what projects will be funded by this money that they took out of the NRF. What projects will be funded by it? We do not know. We just know that they moved the money; we do not know where it is going and where it is. We know nothing. This is the first foray into a budgeting cycle with this money available, and they have failed to deliver their promised level of transparency to the Guyanese people. This is unacceptable. This is the patrimony of our generation and the generation after ours, and the PPP/C Administration would not be allowed to trifle with it.

We, on this side of the House, continue to maintain that the Natural Resource Fund Act, as passed by the Coalition, provided robust transparency. It provided a level of transparency that has been taken out of this current Act. I will give you an example. In the 2019 Act, we specifically stated that when it came to the annual budget proposals for projects to be funded from this NRF, a statement explaining how the withdrawal from the Fund for the next ensuing fiscal year and each of the next following three fiscal years, shall be used to finance national development priorities.

We said it because we were serious about it. We were so serious about it that we were committed to reducing it into law, Mr. Speaker. That provision has been taken out of this present Act. So, there is no duty binding this Government to put those moneys towards our urgent developmental priorities. I suspect they want to use it for budget support. I suspect that they want to use it to finance this big debt they are incurring.

Mr. Speaker, today, we stand in this House, and we cannot tell you where this \$127 billion from the Fund is going to be expended. I guess therefore, we can put the rhetoric of transparency soundly to bed. I want to turn my attention to foreign relations. I do not know where to start with you, Todd. I do not even know where to start. Look, since our...

Mr. Speaker: It is Hon. Member.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Hon. Member, Mr. Todd, I am not sure where to begin with you. I will say that, since our independence, Guyana has always been able to punch above its weight class in foreign policy because we had exemplary leadership on the global stage. We were buoyed by a well-trained cadre of professional diplomats and foreign service officers. The foreign policies of Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, Mr. Desmond Hoyte and Dr. Cheddi Jagan were clear, they were decisive, they were coherent, and they were rooted in incontrovertible principles. These leaders had similar foreign policies that were rooted in national sovereignty, in non-interference in internal affairs, in non-alignment in multilateralism, in equality amongst states, in economic independence, and in an unwavering support to the right to self-determination.

Guyana's ideals were clear, and the nations of the world knew exactly where we stood. Those glory days of Guyana's diplomacy were characterised by a professional diplomatic corp. We had a judicious mind at the helm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We had a President who possessed the powers – both *de jure* and *de facto* – to make decisions on behalf of this nation. A relatively small state was seen as a towering example of diplomacy. Today, all of *duh* gone. All the aforementioned are absent. Since 2nd August, 2020 – my Lord – our foreign policy has become nebulous and incoherent. It has become fleeting and transactional. We have seen Guyana stumble and our reputation severely tarnished on the international stage, from a senior official having difficulty pronouncing two-syllable words to another one talking about orgasms on the

international stage. Mr. Speaker, this is where we are. Our important policy announcements are emanating from foreign embassies, instead of from Takuba Lodge.

We have ships flying our Golden Arrowhead on the high seas and engaging in all manner and sorts of illegalities. This most recent embarrassment of rouge vessels flying our flag has dire implications for our nation and our relationship with allies. This Administration continues to demonstrate its incompetence to conduct our foreign affairs, maintain law and order, and meet our obligations under international treaties. What is worse is that their attempts to distance themselves from the debacle is indicative of their lack of appreciation of one fundamental principle of international law – while you may delegate a function, you cannot divest yourself of the responsibility. You see, they do not know that. They do not know that.

It is wildly known that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has been wantonly politicised and now operates at the whims, fancies and caprices of ministerial administration. What is worse is that we are not even sure if they are the whims, fancies and caprices of the Minister who is actually sitting there. Recently, there was a recall of a number of senior and seasoned foreign service officials from postings all around the world. These officers have been, by and large, replaced with junior officers without enough overlap time to allow for them to be properly mentored and oriented.

10.44 a.m.

This has resulted in a lack of leadership and in confusion at a number of our diplomatic missions abroad. We need to invest in a professional foreign service, a cadre of people who are well-trained and who can adequately promote our national interest abroad. In order to achieve this, the Coalition, whilst in office, established the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service and re-established the Foreign Services Institute in order to educate a corps of competent professional diplomats and public servants to advance our interests abroad.

This first order of business of the Administration was to shut down the College and I will ask Mr. Todd to point out to me the exact allocation for the Foreign Services Institute. The world over is aware that *de jure* Guyana has a Head of State. However, one is not assured that the final decision-making powers lie with the Head of State. One of the hazards of that perception is that such a nation is seen as a perennially weak. That scenario that I had pointed out and that backdrop that I

have painted is the backdrop against which the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance has come into this House to state these lofty ideals in terms of our foreign relations. I dare say that all of the intentions outlined by the Minister can be attempted with the most strenuous of efforts, but the chances of success are minimal due to the problematic macro structures that I have just outlined. A structured and well thought out foreign policy comprises three key things: conception, content, and implementation. All of this is influenced and shaped by the realities of the outside world. Our policymakers are therefore expected to pursue certain goals, while ensuring that the nation's self-interests are maintained and preserved.

Given Guyana's new role as a petroleum producer with whom much geo-political and strategic interests now lie, have we re-imagined our foreign policy with this in mind? In the context of a complex and a highly interdependent world, a new oil and gas economy needs a foreign ministry that is apolitical as possible and furnished with some of the best brains that the country has offer. This is arguably one of our most important Ministries and, to this end, these meetings, the knocking of glasses and the photos, the smiles, the hugs and the propagandistic headlines will not suffice. We must reignite our foreign policy imagination and we must ensure that every encounter results in the preservation of good neighbourliness.

The nation observed the visit of the President of Suriname, but this Government could not articulate the strategic interests of this meeting. There was no transparency. In fact, since 2nd August, 2020, this nation's foreign policy has been conducted with the greatest of contempt for the people of Guyana. Visiting dignitaries are not even given the opportunity to meet with the Opposition. We do not know what they are trading away, but deals are signed, and no one knows what are contained in those agreements. Everything is opaque and everything is secretive. I must say that, outside of this very credible critique that I have just offered, we welcome visits by foreign dignitaries that advance our interests. We cannot argue with any effort to open foreign missions that seek to advance our cause. The Government has said that it will focus on deepening relations with the Member States of Caribbean Community (CARICOM). We welcome this and we warn that we must guard against exuberance and eschewing our regional integration principles because we are now an oil producing economy. We should stick steadfastly to the principles which led to the creation of CARICOM.

Again, in the absence of a consistent policy and integration, we continue to sail along like a rudderless ship. Today, we demand visas for our Haitian brothers and sisters; tomorrow, we trade words with the Trinidadians; and then we come into the House and we talk about deepening CARICOM relations. There is no consistency in our foreign policy. Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity remains sacrosanct. Accordingly, there is no distance between the Government and the political Opposition on this issue. It was the David Granger-led Administration that initiated the judicial route to resolve this issue and the present Government has continued on this trajectory. We reaffirm that the border claimed by Venezuela is opportunistic, it is mischievous, it is without merit, and we are confident that Guyana will be vindicated.

In September, 2020, I stood in this House and I cautioned that we have much to gain and we have gained much by establishing ourselves as a reliable partner in regional and hemispheric stability, and that it would be unwise to depart from that. That caution remains. In September, 2020, I urged the Minister of Public Works that priority must be given to a maritime spatial plan. I urged the commissioning of a national maritime and port sector plan, which would chart the course of the development of that sector, particularly because we are now an oil producing economy. To this date, nothing. Outside of the fact that, in respect to our ports, we seem to be doing planning by fire, nothing. Nothing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have to tell you something. You need to get an extension to conclude.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Thank you, my good Sir. I do hope that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Mr. Speaker: You do not hope, but you are moving a motion that she gets five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Jones: Yes, Sir.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please continue to conclude.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I would really like to continue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will wrap up on that note. One of the many disappointing aspects of *Budget 2022* is the lack of focus on global warming and hinterland resettlement. Coastal portions of Guyana sit from 19.7 inches or 0.5 metres to 39.4 inches or one metre below sea level. Guyana is particularly vulnerable to sea level rise stemming from climate change plus the regional shifts in the height of the sea. Close to 80% of Guyana's population live in the low-lying coastal areas. Guyana's capital city of Georgetown relies on seawalls for protection. The narrow coastal plain is home to almost all the country's agricultural production, which is critical to both our food security and our exports. Climate change, rising sea levels and poor irrigation and sea defences have left the coastal residents at the mercy of the weather and the sea.

Flooding is now commonplace. In 2021, flooding destroyed billions of dollars in livestock, in farmlands and personal property. It should have been a wake-up call for this Government to act but, instead, as the waters receded, so did any sense of urgency. The time has come for our leaders to engage the population on the conversation of moving to high ground. Sir, we must engage our population. We must have a debate on the wisdom of continuing to restrict our development and major infrastructure to the coast. We must have a dialogue on housing and population planning, and we must implement programmes that prioritise hinterland development with the building of hinterland cities, for example. To continue to have massive development projects tabled, the ones you see tabled in this Budget, and which are on the coast, is shortsighted, and it is gambling with mother nature.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change said, in its 2021 report, that Georgetown is listed as one of nine cities that will be under water by 2030, a mere eight years from now. Despite this dire prediction, we see a budget presented where over 80% of the infrastructure in agricultural development dollars are projected to be spent on the coast. The PPP/C's budget has given scant regard to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is very clear that the PPP/C has no interest in ending poverty, in ending hunger, in achieving food security, and in ensuring that all Guyanese have access to primary and secondary education. All you have to do is follow the money and you will see that the Budget is not geared towards making any real and lasting positive impact in ensuring Guyana's human development.

Former President, David Granger, cautioned that Guyana cannot become ‘one nation’ if gross disparities persist between the hinterland and the coastlands, between the educated few and the semi-literate masses and between the very rich and the very poor. It cannot become one nation. The PPP/C continues to give lip service to the creation of ‘One Guyana’, whilst promulgating policies and programmes and presenting a budget that widens the gap between the rich and the poor, between the hinterland and the coastland and between the educated and the uneducated. I note that the title of the budget is, “*Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*”. ‘Our’ qualifies one which means that we are talking about the ‘One Guyana’, according to the PPP/C Administration.

In concluding, the PPP/C has demonstrated their inability to even keep their own promises. Where is the free education that they promised in the manifesto? Where is the 50% increase for public servants? Where are the 50,000 jobs, according to your lamppost manifesto? Where are the sugar estates that you have reopened? Where are the targeted cash transfers to Guyanese, particularly the elderly, the children, the poor, and the other vulnerable groups? Where are the promises in your manifesto? Why do we not see them reflected in this Budget in any tangible way? You promised in your manifesto an increase of the old age pension to \$40,000 per month. We just showed you how you can achieve that with a minutest of reallocation, but the fact is that you do not care. What happened to the duty-free zones? You said that you would compensate fisher folks affected by the oil and gas sector. Where is that compensation? The PPP/C Administration has already demonstrated to the people of Guyana who they are. They are a mafia masquerading as a Government, focused only on enriching themselves and their friends. In the end, we the people, the Guyanese people, must ask ourselves what country we want. Will we become a petrostate with weak institutions and wealth concentrated in the hands of a few elites or will we become that state that uses the proceeds from her vast resources to invest in our valuable resources – our people?

The UN Report on Human Development in 1990 stated that the people are the real wealth of a nation, and the basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long and healthy creative lives. We the people of Guyana must understand that we deserve no less. We must ask ourselves: will we continue to cast nets to arrest Guyanese people on trumped up charges or will we create safety nets to buttress against the socioeconomic collapse of our

country? This disrespectful, discriminatory, and deceitful budget clearly ignores the importance of our people.

Sir, the truth is, show me what you spend your money behind and I will show you what you value. This Budget proves, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the PPP/C Administration simply does not care about the poor and the working class in Guyana. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

10.59 a.m.

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, you know I grew up in Triumph Village, in the countryside, and I remember my grandmother used to rear a lot of what we call ‘creole fowl’. I think the Jamaicans call it ‘yard fowl’. What we had for the last 35 minutes is the fluttering and flattering of a headless creole fowl.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you are imputing something against the Hon. Member, ‘headless creole fowl’. Please, let us keep it honourable.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, I am saying that the Opposition represented in this National Assembly, as they will prove to the people for this country for the next five years, is a barnyard of headless creole fowl – headless yard fowls. What we will have in the next five days are not people addressing this Budget. We will be the immoral speaking to us about immorality, the corrupt speaking to us about corruption, and those who are incapable speaking about their capacity. That is what we will have over the next five days. It will not be about the Budget presented. They condemn every measure. They are intellectually incapable of putting a measure alongside it before the Guyanese people – not hare-brained, wild things, change that can be measured.

The Hon. Member just spoke about what we could do. The fact is that, 18 months ago, they were in Government... [**An Hon. Member (Government):** For five years] ...for five years. The Hon. Member spoke about free tuition at the University of Guyana (UG). I dare remind you, Hon. Member, that your political entity, over the period, raised the University of Guyana’s tuition fees by 35% over a period of three years. You come to this House, and you pontificate about what should be done. You had your opportunity to do that, and you squandered it. That is the reason you will grow old over there in the seats of the Opposition.

Again, the Hon. Member spoke about moving the city. In five years, the major project of this set of people, the honourable people over there, was a corrupt transacted project named the D'Urban Park, where vagrants reside as I speak to you, Mr. Speaker. All the things that could be done... Again, the Hon. Member addressing foreign relations spoke to the issue of, let me repeat, how Guyana was above its weight in the foreign service arena. I dare remind the Hon. Member, maybe she was not born at that time, or she was too young to understand, that, during that period she spoke about, Guyanese starved and could not get food to eat. They could not get basic food items in this country. I am old enough to point that out. Why do you talk about... The Hon. Member said that the power... If diplomacy in Guyana, during the years of the so-called power of diplomacy... the citizens of this country could not get food to eat. Again, the Hon. Member spoke about the issue of vision. Oh, my God. Vision! Lightning should have struck her down when she used that word over there. The most visionless Government we ever had in the history of this country was five years ago.

The Hon. Member spoke about care for the children. Her Government took away \$1.6 billion from children and utilised it to buy more food for people at the Office of the President. The nation must be reminded that that Government took away a grant subsidy to the elderly people, and she talked about pension and where it should have gone. When they came into Government, they took away the subsidy for water and electricity from the elderly people. If that was not bad enough, they added 14% value added tax (VAT) on electricity bills and water bills. The nation must be reminded that, when you come to this National Assembly, you must be honest.

The wannabe Leader of the Opposition is trying to lecture us, this Government, about how to govern; yet, they are a spectacle to the nation, incapable of even electing or selecting a Leader of the Opposition, and you lecture people about how to govern. You are incapable of deciding who will lead you. How will you govern the nation? Mr. Speaker, you do not know who is in or who is out. [**Mr. Indar:** They do not know for sure.] They themselves do not even know who is in and who is out. I bring these things to the attention of the nation so that people could recognise that, when you come to this National Assembly and you seek to criticise government policy, you must be seen in the eyes of the public as being able to present yourself as a Government in waiting. You are incapable of doing that. Unelectable!

As I said when I started, the thing about it is that, no matter how... The experience was that, when one cuts off the head of the fowl, there is a lot of flattering and fluttering, but the fowl knows that it will die very soon. The Hon. Member spoke about the issue of training of our people for the new industries. Under the APNU/AFC Government, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) was reduced to a meagre 1,300 people per year at the Board of Industrial Training (BIT). It was meagre because, when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was in Government, it was in the thousands, and we have returned it there again. You come here and you talk about training; you had five years to train. Who did you train?

I was in Kwakwani, where there were more than 100 persons in Kwakwani who were trained in TVET. They testified that it was the first time that a graduation ceremony ever happened in the community of Kwakwani. One hundred and fifty-two persons from Lethem and different regions were being trained in all different technical disciplines. Again, they testified that it was the first time a graduation of this sort was happening in Region 9, in Lethem; thanks to the People's Progressive Party/ Civic Government. Just in our full year, in 2021, we increased training at the Board of Industrial Training by over 100%.

Secondly, today, in every region in this country, there is a technical officer who supervises TVET, as indicated. Yes, for the first time. [**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** After 23 years.] I am dealing with your five years of incompetence.

On the labour front, we have expanded. As I speak to you, for the first time in the history of this country, in every region, except for Region 8, a Ministry of Labour department exists; and you care so much about workers' rights. I am paying attention to workers. The irony is that, when they are in Opposition, they become bright people, but, when they were in Government, they were the dullest of the dull. That is what is happening here. Suddenly, they are bright like lights. When they were in Government, the evidence suggests that it was blackout.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you one testimony of a young woman, one of many, from Karawab in the Pomeroon River. Listen to what a young lady had to say about training. She said:

“My name is Iona Courtman, throughout my nineteen years of life, I've never done anything that made me develop extreme dedication, until the Ministry of Labour, Board of Industrial Training programme came to Karawab in the Pomeroon River.

Throughout the four months, when it was time for class, I would wake up early, before the sunrise, do my chores, neat up my uniform and paddle in my canoe boat for twenty minutes to the training location.

Today, I am no longer a trainee, I am so grateful for the knowledge I have received and to top it off, we were not pushed aside after the training ended. My classmates and I were privileged to have the Minister of Labour, Joseph Hamilton, taking time out to come to Karawab to witness what we have done.”

What did these 11 young people do for their community after training, nine ladies and two men? Eleven young persons for the community of Karawab were able to develop a skillset in the installation and maintenance of solar systems. The community building 60x40 is equipped with electricity for the first time on a full-time basis. It allows for charging of cell phones and using of the community building for concerts and other related activities. Also, the power can be used to facilitate further training programmes such as garment construction, electrification installation, and others.

11.14 a.m.

There is the installation of solar lights at the entrance of the health centres, school compound, and the cell phone signal spot, so that persons can traverse in the night with less fear of reptiles. This is one testimony of what the People’s Progressive Party/Civic has done. As I said, we started with this failed Government with an average of 1,300 persons being trained, mostly on the coastland. Today, in every region and sub-region, the Board of Industrial Training executes technical and vocational training for the citizens of this country. In 2021, 3,086 persons were trained. When the Hon. Members speak to the issue of training, we are far and way ahead of you. You know now, and now you know. Under your tenure, we were an oil producing nation, and you did not train one scintilla of anybody to participate in oil and gas. Now you come and tell us about the kind of training we must do.

Under your stewardship... [**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** You have to come and take it back from me.] No, we want you to do some community service for the money you spent, Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley. We would not take it back; do community service. Under the APNU/AFC, we had, as a nation, oil production offshore, and this Government never saw it fit to train Occupational,

Safety and Health (OSH) officers so that they can review the operations of the Floating Production, Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessels. I could recall other people went on the FPSO vessels to hit a champagne bottle. Most importantly, they were in no way aware of how the Guyanese people's health and safety are protected while working offshore in the oil and gas sector.

I can report to this National Assembly, again, Mdm. Sarabo-Halley, that the first time an Occupational Safety and Health officer was able to grace the presence of an FPSO vessel in the Atlantic was under the stewardship of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. This is for the first time. For the first time, in 2021, 14 technical officers of the OSH Department were trained at the highest technical level and certified as ISO 45001 Lead Auditors, so that they could do inspection whether in oil and gas or any place else. That is the record. What have you done? Oil and gas came under your tenure in 2015. You never thought it important. Oh boy! Somebody just woke up.

Most importantly, the APNU/AFC Government never recognised that it was important to place on ships, which came into this country... visitation by Occupational Safety and Health officers and Labour Officers. They never thought it important. Moreso, when the Hon. Member, my Colleague, the Minister of Public Works, indicated that, because of the dynamic development of this country under the PPP/C, we are moving, or we have moved from an average of nine ships entering the Demerara River to 52 per day... [**Bishop Edghill:** Per week] Per week. They never thought those things were important.

In their last year in Government, and the population must know this, 32 persons lost their lives in job related accidents. What did they do? All they did was a lot of commission of inquiries (COI); there was nothing to remedy the problem. I can report to this nation that, in the first year under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, deaths in workplaces decreased by 16%. This is in the first year of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. That is the record. I know that, sometime in this debate, a couple of days from now, the Hon. Member and the General Secretary of the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU) will speak, and she will pontificate about labour relations. The record suggests that all the conversations she will give us is about what should be done. The only thing that has happened so far, with regard to her tenure, is her misadvising the teachers to strike.

Labour relations – Mr. Speaker, you are very much aware of these matters to which I speak. We dealt with matters that languished under the APNU/AFC Government, such as justice for workers,

because... The Hon. Member, Ms. Coretta McDonald, will come and talk about how the Opposition cares about workers. Those were matters, which languished there since 2016, to which they failed to pay attention. I can report that, for the first time and in the first year of the People's Progressive Party/ Civic in Government, we were able to recoup over \$38 million for workers that were owed to them. That is the record.

Again, with regard to labour relations, when we came into Office, there were several collective labour agreements languishing out there to be concluded. Workers were suffering. What did they do? N-O-T-H-I-N-G. The record is that we were able to broker and mediate 22 collective labour agreements in the first year of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Many of them languished since 2015. That is the record. The record speaks to 2015. There were 19 conciliations in one instance. The Demerara Timbers Limited refused to even sit at the same table with the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU) under this Government... [**An. Hon. Member:** Under the APNU/AFC.] Under the APNU/AFC Government. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I am pointing; you have to pay attention.

I will say this to the Guyanese people so that they understand. I hope the Minister of Finance and the Commissioner General pays attention to what I am about to say. The APNU/AFC Government colluded with expatriate companies to ensure tax evasion by workers. This is a serious allegation. I have the evidence. They deliberately colluded with foreign governments to ensure that workers did not pay taxes on overtime because, as they saw it, if they did that then the people would not see that they were working for a lot of money. Do you want the evidence? Call it; I will bring the evidence. Nine hundred and thirty persons were trained in labour laws and regulations. We closed 837 complaints, many of which languished under the previous Government. Do you know what is to be noted? In the APNU/AFC tenure, there were four Ministers of Labour – one per year who did nothing. There were four Ministers of Labour, and all of these things they could not do. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*).] Hon. Member, they know the Ministers.

The evidence always speaks for itself, not the fluttering and fluttering. The evidence always speaks for itself. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*).] You should ask your good Colleague whether they have a Minister, the man with the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) Programme. He would know whether they had a Minister or not. Let me say this before my time is done. I am told that the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, will be interrogating...

[**An. Hon. Member:** The Hon. Member.] The Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, will be interrogating and analysing the Budget of Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. Do you know that, overnight, I thought about this? How do you move from Mr. Frank Hope, Dr. Kenneth King, even Mr. Carl Greenidge, and end up at Ms. Juretha Fernandes? Just think about the most Hon. Member.

11.29 a.m.

That is the reason, when I started, I made the point that what we have in the Opposition is a barnyard of headless yard fowls. Degeneration... Frank Hope, Kenneth King, Carl Greenidge and Hon. Member Ms. Fernandes. With regard to the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency, of which we have supervision, during that period, the agency registered 1,171 persons who are seeking employment.

Mr. Speaker: You have to seek an extension, Hon. Minister.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Gail Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes more to conclude his presentation, in accordance with the agreement between the two Chief Whips. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister of Labour, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of the persons who sought jobs during the period through the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency, the names of some 731 of those persons were submitted for possible employment placement. One hundred and eighty-six persons were placed, and others are awaiting interview. A total of 1,554 visits were conducted to solicit vacancies for people who seek employment.

Presently, as indicated by His Excellency the President some time ago, we are about to launch a job bank where all citizens, who seek jobs, could post their credentials. All employers who have vacancies could post those vacancies so that the potential employees and employers could have interaction on this platform. That is the record. I suppose none of the four Ministers who were

employed in the five years of the APNU/AFC Government did not even think about these things. It was nowhere in their contemplation. The fact is, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, if we ever thought about when Hon. Member Winston Jordan was presenting his Budget for five years, he would have put it in the Budget document. We stand on our record, and nothing you say or do will change that. Every road that will be built will change the lives of Guyanese people. Every farm-to-market road will change the lives of the farmers and their families. Every school that we have built will change the lives of the children of the poor and all Guyanese. Every hospital that we rebuilt will ensure that the lives of our people are protected.

The Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, also known as bangles, will come here and speak about no need for the gas-to-shore project for electricity. At the same time, he would not say to us and to the nation, if we do not do that, what else to do. There is always the devoid of a recommendation. He will come and he will say no Amaila Hydropower Project but, in the same breath, he would not say, if not Amalia Amaila Hydropower Project, what else, because we have to have power. The gentleman would come, the Hon. Member, and speak to the fact that the bridge to go over the Demerara River is situated at the wrong place. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker, after spending an unauthorised \$300 million, this gentleman presented to the Guyanese people a three-lane bridge over the river. It is the first time in the history of the world... three lanes after spending \$300 million. **[Dr. Singh: \$100 million]** Yes, it is \$100 million. I am talking about feasibility study here, not the building of the bridge.

Every measure, every programme, every project, presented to the National Assembly and to the people of Guyana will change the lives of the Guyanese people. That is the record to the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I want to draw attention to contents of speeches, Standing Order 41 (7) and (8) state:

“(7) The President’s name shall not be used to influence the Assembly.”

“(8) The conduct of the President or any other person performing the function of President, Members of the Assembly and Judges of the Supreme Court of Judicature or other persons performing judicial functions shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion moved for the purpose.”

I will not even ask... If His Excellency the President is referred to as Head of State or by name, I would immediately stop the person, expunge, and then let them proceed. Our next speaker is the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. I was advised once not to go down in the gutter with politics, and I have no intentions of doing so as a young Member of Parliament (MP) and politician. The persons who advised me are sitting on that side of the House, and I trust that they would do so and advise their own Members, especially with what we just heard. I am certain that advise is necessary.

There is a popular statement that says *empty barrels make the most noise*, and what we had just now was a clueless noisy Minister who was completely off topic. We did not expect anything better. I heard him talking about the 60's and 70's, and about how people were hungry during that time. I remind the Hon. Minister that he was a part of the People's National Congress/ Reform (PNC/R), so he contributed to it if it were true. I do not know if it were true, but he was a Member, so he ought to know.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, what is the Standing Order you are proceeding with?

Mr. Hamilton: Standing Order 40 (b), Mr. Speaker. I am correcting the Hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker: No, you cannot stand on a Point of Correction, you could give someone a note. You may continue, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much for your good protection, Sir. I also heard the Hon. Member speaking about training, and that there was no consideration for training by the Coalition. Let me remind him that the night school was closed by the PPP/C, let me remind him that the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service was closed by the PPP/C, and let me remind him that the St. John's Ambulance Brigade, Linden branch, was discontinued by the PPP/C. You cannot talk about training and not put your evidence here. The Coalition has a track record of training young people, the Coalition has a track record of providing this country with young leadership. Look on this side of the House, Sir. When you look on that side, tell me what you see, and you will know who really have young people at heart.

I do not wish to continue to labour on the Minister of Labour's presentation, which was basically nothing of substance, but I rise on this side of the honourable House to make my contribution to *Budget 2022*. Before I do so, permit me the opportunity to thank the many public servants who worked hard and beyond the call of duty to bring *Budget 2022* before this honourable House. It is extremely sad that, with the current living standard in this country, no proper mention of public servants is made in this Budget. To all public servants, I assure you that, with the return of the APNU/AFC to government, your interest will be paramount, along with all the hardworking Guyanese who, without a doubt, are the driving forces of our dear land. We on this side of the honourable House understand, clearly, that the direction of this Budget is solely that of the PPP/C. Its efforts to continue robbing our country, and the fact that they have used, abused and frankly refused to put proper measures in *Budget 2022* for the public servants, teachers, doctors, nurses and our disciplinary service men and women, is testimony to the fact of who these people really are. That, simply, is because they do not care.

The best words in the English language, which is parliamentary acceptable, to describe the five hours and 15 minutes presentation of the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibilities for Finance is 'fake love'. The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh has demonstrated to all Guyanese that he is nothing more than a flimflammer. He has succeeded in his task given to him by the installed Regime to swindle the people into a public deception scheme, crafted to only loot the public purse for political monopoly over a projected rise in an infant petroleum economy. Sad is the state of our country. Many ordinary Guyanese were glued to their television sets, smart phones, radios, and other electronic devices, anticipating consideration in this Budget, because they knew that this Regime was going to bleed the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) account. The suffering of ordinary Guyanese, because of prohibitive cost of living and lack of proper consideration by this installed Regime, is not a surprise to my Colleagues and I, but the ordinary people of Guyana thought things would have been brighter for them.

11.44 a.m.

Guyana deserved a budget that should have catered and chartered the course for all Guyanese out of the poverty that the installed regime bestowed upon us. Instead, we had five hours and fifteen minutes of political rhetoric and ramblings, trying to bamboozle Guyanese by selective highlights, holistically committing the Guyanese people to a life of additional toil while the People's

Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C's) lackeys divide our national patrimony in their continued fleecing of our natural resource and the public purse to enrich themselves, families and friends. The installed Regime is all about making the rich, richer and the poor, poorer. I am ashamed to even repeat what is in this Budget for our ordinary hard-working Guyanese. Worse, is what is in it for the persons who worked hard and are expected to live comfortably in their senior years.

Had this installed Regime respected the Constitution and honoured the words enshrined in the Article 13, we, as a country, would not have been in this misery that we find ourselves in today. Article 13 speaks about consultation. Consultation is the bedrock and hallmark of all civilised societies where true democracy is practised, respected and honoured. The installed Regime continues to fake love us by talking about 'One Guyana'. How could they talk about 'One Guyana' when there is a complete refusal, from the head to the tail of this installed set of people, to just simply consult. Again, I will put the blame squarely at the feet of the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Nandlall, for it is he who has professed, on many occasions, to be the guardian of our Constitution. I must say to the goodly Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, to sit and allow this breach of our Constitution and say nothing, is saying something. You must denounce things that you are against, or one may believe that you support things you really do not.

The Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) consist of elected officials, elected by the people for the people. The Budget Circular, which emanated from the Ministry of Finance, under the hands of the Finance Secretary, spoke to the need for an established committee, consisting of the elected officials, so that the proposals from the respective regions would be that of the people and not of the dictatorial arrangement that was allowed by the head of the installed Regime – the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the Finance Secretary and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The creatures of the RDCs received the Budget Circular on 31st July, 2021. Clear guidelines were documented in that Circular. In any good governance system, where the words from the lips of the people who are in borrowed robes are 'One Guyana', the expectation would have been for these creatures to notify their respective elected Councillors and immediately switch into consultation mode to capture the requests of the people of this country.

Time constraints understandably imposed on me will not permit me to detail the disrespect and dictatorship which occurred at all the RDCs. Allow me to tell you what happened in Region 4, Demerara–Mahaica – the Region which is home to almost half of Guyana’s population. Notwithstanding the Regional Executive Officer in the name of Donald Gajraj, who is the creature of the elected Council, received the Budget Circular since July, he never informed the RDC up until a letter was written to him by the Regional Chairman in September. The Regional Executive Officer created and proposed the Region 4 budget completely outside of the knowledge of the elected Councillors of that Region. To this day, the Chairman and Councillors do not know of the proposal and were never a part of the proposal from the Region. Is that not a clear definition of dictatorship, Cde. Speaker?

The story gets uglier. The Chairman of Region 4 wrote to the Permanent Secretary, the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, the Finance Secretary and the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and also the President of this country, countless letters in the months of September, October, November, December and even January, 2022. I have all the documents here; all the letters that were written. I will submit them to the National Assembly because I am making reference to them.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there is an issue with that. Could you show me the delivery notes too for which you are saying these letters were delivered? Anyone could have a copy signed and say that this is the copy.

Mr. Mahipaul: I have the signed copies and I also have the document that shows they were signed as received.

Mr. Speaker: Great, thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: We have our tracks covered.

Mr. Speaker: I will give you back your 30 seconds.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, the Chairman expressed his disgust and that of the Council’s disgust with the manner in which *Budget 2022* was prepared and the dictatorial and direct breach of the clear instructions as set out in the Budget Circular. The Chairman of Region 4 attended a meeting with the Director of Budget, where he expressed similar sentiments in the presence of the Permanent

Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the Finance Secretary and other political appointees of this cabal. To this day, not one of his concerns were addressed. Yet, this Regime stands up with a clear and fake clean face and talk about ‘One Guyana’.

Cde. Speaker, I must ask these people – honourable, of course, in keeping with the Standing Orders, and I hope God will forgive me for calling them that because their actions are definitely not honourable – how do you sleep at nights? How do you walk with a straight face and function as though you are religiously correct? How do you, with a straight face speak about ‘One Guyana’ when your actions are focussed on more than ‘One Guyana’? In my eyes, this is hypocrisy and duplicity at its best.

As if the act to show their dislike and disrespect for local democracy by that behaviour is not enough, let me tell you some more. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance announced, in November, 2021, an across-the-board salary increase of 7% retroactive to 1st January, 2021. Every elected official in this House, including you, Sir, received that increase. Of course, our salary on this side of the House is just a quarter to that of my Friends on that side of the House. Outside of all the freeness they enjoy, they also took home a substantial increase in 2021 while the majority of Guyana got “chicken feed” pittance. Public servants, doctors, nurses, our disciplinary servicemen and women simply did not feel it like how you felt on that side of the House.

The Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons of the RDCs, Mayors and Deputy Mayors of Municipalities are fulltime officers in accordance with the laws of this country, Chapter 28:09. They are also subject to the inflated cost of living and they do not enjoy half of the benefits like what my Friends on that side of the House get. Their salaries are ridiculously small but they, notwithstanding being full-time officers according to the law, did not receive the 7% increase, retroactive 1st January, 2021.

How was it an across-the board salary increase? We, the Members of Parliament were elected by the people. We received the 7% salary increase. They were also elected by the people, and they are full-time officers of their respective organisations. Why is it that they cannot receive the 7% salary increase, retroactive 1st January, 2021? They are full-time officers and I hope that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance will correct this error

and make it right the next time, should there be. As if that is not enough to justify this Regime's hatred for local democracy, let me tell you some more. The Laws of this country, Chapter 28:02, section 28 and the Local Authorities (Election) (Amendment) Act 2018, Act No. 10 of 2018, specify that by 16th December every year, elections must be held to elect, from among the Councillors of NDCs and municipalities, a Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson, Mayor and Deputy Majors. Every year by law, this must happen. Last year it did not happen.

Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall, do you not believe it is time for you to resign, Sir? Do you not believe you have failed the people of this country as Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Sir? It is him whom I must blame because it is he who must guide, or is it just that they do not take guidance from him? Is it that the Ministers of Local Government and Regional Development are intellectually circumcised to the point where they do not understand your guidance? Is it you, Hon. AG, who does not have the testicular fortitude and intellectual aptitude to boldly speak out and speak up at Cabinet meetings? Is that how dunces they are?

Let us now look at the allocations in this troubled Budget for the Regional Democratic Councils. To further solidify my point about this double-standard Regime, the public must know the facts. For Region 1, a PPP/C controlled Region, the allocation to the RDC, under line item 6211, increased from \$45 million in 2021 to \$53 million in 2022; for Region 2, which is another PPP/C controlled-Region, it increased from \$16 million to \$20 million; Region 3, another PPP/C controlled-Region, it increased from \$12 million to \$14 million; and Region 4, the most populated Region in this country, with almost half of the country's population, was allocated a decrease from their last year number, from \$21 million to \$18 million. Is this what the 'One Guyana' is all about, Cde. Speaker? Punishing the most populated Region and restricting the ability of the elected Council of Region 4, will this achieve us that 'One Guyana'?

Sir, you corrected us in this House on many occasions, not to say the word 'shame' or to 'not cry shame'. I do not know what else to say about this wicked move. [**An Hon. Member:** Disgrace.] Perhaps disgraceful is a good word but I am subject to your guidance, Cde. Speaker. Allow me to now remind this Regime of article 147 of our Constitution. It reads:

11.59 a.m.

“Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of assembly, association...and freedom to demonstrate peacefully, that to say, his or her right to assemble freely, to demonstrate peacefully and to associate with other persons and in particular to form or belong to political parties, trade unions or other associations for the protection of his or her interests.”

That is what the law of this country states, but ostracising the people of this country who, in keeping with the Constitution of Guyana, decided to express their right not to associate themselves with the People’s Progressive Party Civic, is the definition of working towards ‘One Guyana’ in the eyes of the People’s Progressive Party Civic. Sir, I cannot say shame. I cannot say that. It is your guidance. I do not know what else to say; I really do not know.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have actually said the word twice and I am asking for it to be expunged. Be careful because if you say it one more time, I will have to use the guillotine.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know I always salute your guidance.

Mr. Speaker: But you just disobeyed it, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: Double-standard, dictatorial, devious, diabolical, dangerous, and because they do not care is what is fitting to describe, in accordance with parliamentary acceptable terms, this Regime’s behaviour towards the people of this country. Outside of this honourable House, I will use some more colourful words, and if we should ever meet, you will hear them.

Article 71 to 78 of our Constitution speaks to local democracy and the importance of Local Democratic Organs (LDOs). Neighbourhood Democratic Councils and municipalities are elected by the people in their respective communities. Basic services are provided to communities from by authorities. Under Agency 13, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Programme 134, Local Government Development, line item 6312, Subventions to Local Authorities, the figure has moved from \$207,894,000 to \$0 in 2022. I did take note of the fact that the capital subvention has increased from \$551 million to \$714 million. But the practice over the last years was one of dictatorship where the NDCs were instructed to spend their subventions on streetlights and crush and run. It was like a racket. One of the streetlights cost taxpayers \$35,000 in total and your cell phone light is brighter than the light that was erected. We are talking about

‘One Guyana, a Guyana where the installed cabal violates the Constitution, victimises the elected officials of the RDCs, NDCs and municipalities, and vilifies the people who stand up against their notorious behaviour. That is the ‘One Guyana’ this Regime is talking about.

What we have is a local government agenda that is in reverse. There is no provision for strengthening local governance and local government in the Budget that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance spent more than five hours presenting. Absolutely no proper consideration. There was no money for the Local Government Elections. Note, whenever the PPP/C is in Government, it has a strong track record of denying Guyanese their right to local governance. There is no money to support LDOs development. There is a lot for infrastructure, but there is zero for strengthening the system of local government that will alleviate the need for episodic stunts like the current clean-up gimmick that is unfolding in our communities.

Condemning this Regime’s behaviour is absolutely necessary, for I cannot, as a right-thinking Guyanese, allow my country to fall to the wayside without a fight. Equally so, I must let my hardworking Guyanese population know what are our recommendations to this *hard ears* bunch of dictators. In the fastest growing economy in the world, we in the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) are calling on the installed Regime to increase the income tax threshold to anywhere between \$100,000 to \$125,000 now. Having it at a meagre \$75,000 is a ‘because we do not care’ approach. The poor and the vulnerable are the ones that must be considered in *Budget 2022*.

Better assistance to our senior citizens, who toiled in the soil for a Guyana in which we live today, must also be properly catered for. To this end, we call on the Regime to increase the old age pension immediately to anywhere between \$35,00 to \$50,000 now; and increase the public assistance for the vulnerable to \$40,000 now. We *gat* oil money; use it wisely. Guyana must be lifted out of the nightmare it is currently in, and putting the resources where it is badly needed must be a priority. Enhancement of all the technical and vocational training centres across the country is desperately needed. Our vulnerable young people must be catered for. In doing so, we call on the Regime to invest heavily in technical education and the technical institutions of this country.

Respect the Local Democratic Organs. Stop the dictatorial communication *via WhatsApp* and allow the elected officials to function, Cde. Nigel Dharamlall. Allow the NDCs to spend their subventions on what the communities need and not what the two zealot-Ministers believe it should be spent on. This Budget has a great focus on infrastructure and agriculture, which is good on paper, but the corruption that faces these two sectors will cause you to cry. Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, a number of farmers are still awaiting their cash grant relief. Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, I gave you a name already that you have not addressed to this day.

In the public works arena, word on the ground is that the drawback is high. The drawback is high, Hon. Indar. The people whose bread are well-buttered are the ones who will praise this Budget. The people who do not have to worry as to where their next meal is coming from will praise this Budget. The people who have drivers and drive around this country on fuel paid for by the taxpayers will praise this Budget. The people who have their own personal security will praise this Budget. The people who do not have to buy a \$500 phone card or line up at a bus park awaiting public transportation in this Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic will praise this Budget. Show me where is it in this Budget that consideration, and I dare say meaningful consideration, was given to the poor and vulnerable.

The Local Government Elections is overdue. It is a constitutional requirement. Was there any mention of Local Government Elections in this Budget presentation? To my recollection, the answer is a resounding no. This Regime is not focused on upholding and ensuring the holding of Local Government Elections. The only reason is that they are afraid of the APNU/AFC Coalition. If anyone wishes to get an A grade in the course ‘public legal thievery (PLT) 111’, all you have to do is go down to Robb Street, the building just before Wellington Street painted in red, yellow and black, on your left-hand side, and ask for a membership card. If you should ever get lost, just ask the people around there where is the home of the Natural Resource Fund thieves. You will be pointed in the right direction.

If this Regime really and truly wants to consider the ordinary Guyanese people, they would increase the income tax threshold, decreased the income tax rate to the recommended numbers I alluded to earlier, and tell the public what is the salary increase for public servants and not stand for over five hours to tell us about your pathway to corruption. It was noticeable that the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stayed clearly of

recognising the significant growth and development which occurred under the APNU/AFC without oil resources, which may be the reason why the Regime now created a budget to increase corruption. This Budget has no comprehensive plan for COVID-19 and has the most inefficient measures of benefitting the ordinary Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, to benefit you, you will need an extension.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much. Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have right now a Government of mendicants where their cronies are doing well and the ordinary people are facing hell. On paper, the main Opposition in this House represents half of the country's population. On the ground, support for the Coalition is increasing, exponentially. It is shameful that no consultation was held with the political movement, which currently represents the majority. The people of this country are yearning for the return of the Coalition to Office. I say to them, here and now, hold your faith, hold the line of battle comrades, joy comes to us in the morning for an election will come again and what the PPP/C did in the 2nd March, 2020 elections will never reoccur again in this country.

Never again will there be 49 ballot boxes with votes for a political party and no documentation to verify the legitimacy of those votes. Never, again, will there be people who migrated and did not return to our country on election day but voted. Never again will dead people ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think you need to provide proof of that. As I caution, the Hon. Member, Senior Counsel, Mr. Roysdale Forde, who last year said that he was going to provide the evidence, I am still waiting on it, so I am going to ask you to withdraw that.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I will happily provide the evidence as found in the national recount centre, which I took part in and I was a counting agent. There were a lot of evidence gathered and I promise you... I honestly cannot remember you asking me for it last year.

Mr. Speaker: I did not say that I asked you. I said the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, Senior Counsel.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I will endeavour to provide you with the statement of the recount and the updated report that was sent to the Elections Commission (GECOM), which I know my political has a copy on. I wish to say, if I may continue with your blessings,...

Mr. Speaker: Yes, Sir, go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: ...that never again will we have to go through that kind of period because there will be corrective measures. This APNU/AFC takes the opportunity to call on the installed Regime to join with us and let us have a clean voters list, where the will of the people will be exercised. I have no doubt, absolutely no doubt, that after the next elections, we will be sitting on that side of the House with a majority, and they will be sitting on this side of the House where they rightly belong. I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul. Hon. Members, I think, this is a good time to take the suspension for one hour. Let us return at 1.15 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 12.14 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.28 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Please, be seated. I now call on the Hon. Minister, Mr. Anand Persaud, to make his presentation.

Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]: I rise to make my contribution to the debate on *Budget 2022* which was presented to this National Assembly under the theme: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana.*

I want to join with my Colleagues in offering congratulations to the Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance in the Office of the President, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and his team for an excellent job in presenting another historic budget to this House. This is by far the largest budget presented by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government to date. The Budget which totals \$552.9 billion is geared to tackle the transformation of our economy while continuing the

growth and development of our citizens. The Budget is also geared to create wealth while leading to tremendous improvements in the livelihoods and standards of living for all Guyanese. It aims to restore the confidence in our economy through this Government's massive investment in our infrastructure, health, education, tourism, agriculture, security, housing and other sectors.

Budget 2022 is fresh, innovative and bold in its focus. It is people-centred and community oriented. I need to rebuff the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, who has no moral authority to come to this House to lecture us on accountability and transparency. It was you, the Hon. Member, who misused funds from the young people at the University of Guyana (UG). You come to this honourable House to lecture to us about accountability and transparency. With regard to the flood relieve cash grant, let me say that thousands of farmers throughout this country who received their flood relieve cash grant are all happy because, today, they would have been bankrupted. I know when my Cabinet Colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, turn comes to speak, he will address that issue comprehensively.

Regarding the elections in the local authorities, it was A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. Do you recall what happened on 2nd March, 2022? Let me say to you, when the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) is properly constituted and it informs us, elections will be held. You spoke about APNU/AFC caring for young people, what you should have said is what the APNU/AFC Government did with the 1,972 Community Support Officers (CSOs), all of you fired those poor Amerindian people. We have restored that. With regard to this Budget, let me say to you, Hon. Members, that every public servant will benefit from this 2022 historical Budget.

I want to touch down on the Regional Chairman of Region 4. You say that he wrote many letters. I know since 26th January, all of you had problems with three letters that will haunt the APNU/AFC Government for the rest of your lives. Not many of you long from now will be in this House. Those letters are 'n' 'r' and 's'. Believe you me, none of you will get a chance to touch those moneys. Those moneys belong to the people of this country and they would benefit from it. I am sure the Opposition, APNU/AFC, parliamentarians are taking notes this afternoon from the sterling presentation of this Government on how to device a budget with good policies and plans for tomorrow, today. We, on this side of the House, believe that our future begins now, today.

The Opposition, APNU/AFC, must be ashamed of themselves when they see what is real growth and development that would take place right before their eyes. They were in Office for close to two and half years and could not understand the job they were mandated to do. They spend their valuable time playing nasty politics, stealing from the treasury to enrich themselves and instituting taxes on the poorest of the poor people of this country. When Guyanese thought that the Granger Administration had some number of shame and pride left, they attempted to steal the elections through the individuals who are now before the courts. Guyanese said never again, on 2nd March, and elected this Government, the PPP/C Government, to Office.

As seen in *Budget 2022*, we understood the assignment given by the Guyanese public and in just a short 18 months, Guyana is on the move once again. Here are some of the measures that will be implemented this year: increase in the tax threshold from \$65,000 to \$75,000, putting back over \$1.3 billion in the hands of the ordinary Guyanese people; and pensioners are to receive an increase from \$25,000 to \$28,000, in addition to the electricity and water subsidies which they are going to continue to benefit from. This, of course, is in addition to the one-off cash grant of \$25,000 which they have already received. This move will inject more than \$2.3 billion in the hands of the pensioners. The APNU/AFC barely acknowledged our pensioners while they were in Office, giving them a partial meagre sum and taking away the subsidies.

Schoolchildren will benefit from an increase, as we promised, in the uniform allowance which is now \$5,000 and the 'Because We Care' cash grant which will now be \$25,000 from \$15,000. This is an injection of \$2 billion. Not to mention the reduced taxes on freight; value-added tax (VAT) and machinery; parity in the tax treatment for local content; low-income mortgages loan ceiling; and increase in the monthly public assistance payment from \$12,000 to \$14,000, which would benefit \$18,000 persons and provide an additional \$432 million in disposable income to these individuals. Farmers and markets at the East Bank, Berbice; East Bank, Demerara; East Coast, Demerara; West Coast, Demerara; and Georgetown will be held. Supporting dialysis patients with \$600,000 per patient per year; supporting and in sensitising the banking system; \$5 billion in cost of living support; and the list goes on.

This is purposeful spending. This move is called 'prudent financial management'. It is not like what the APNU/AFC Coalition did in Office by buying a few gold bracelets and gifts for their Ministers while throwing a few crumbs to the people. Everyone will benefit from our spending. It

is our intention to build a rich country with rich people. We are striving to live an even better and progressive life under this Government. The Opposition, APNU/AFC, cannot admit but they shall pay for it sooner or later. This, like I said earlier, is a purposeful budget. Coming closer to home, this year we have made an allotment of \$5 billion to be spent on community infrastructure improvement project that will be launched in 2022. A sum of \$714 million is budgeted this year for ensuring that all Local Democratic Organs (LDOs) receive their grants from the Government. They will have to manage their resources prudently and transparently.

1.43 p.m.

They must be accountable for every dollar spent, thereby improving the services to our people. This year, we are sending a strong message to all underperforming Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and municipalities, including the Georgetown Mayor and City Council (M&CC), either shape up or face the stringent consequences. The NDCs and municipalities can no longer afford to play with our people's livelihood at the community level. The NDCs must ensure their environments are kept clean and there is not a build-up of solid waste.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is open to working with you and teaming up for the purpose of our town councils, communities and cleaning areas throughout Guyana started with His Excellency's clean-up initiative. I am calling on the Mayor to end his play of politics at the Mayor and City Council in Georgetown. The City Council is in that state because countless People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) and APNU/AFC Mayors undermined the bond that existed with central government. It is begging for more money and resources when it has not shown its testicular ability to manage the funds it got from the residents in Georgetown. I am saying that the city rakes in more than \$2 billion annually. Where is the money going because we are assisting? When I say, we, it is the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development that is assisting the city with the maintenance of roads and bridges, as well as drainage and irrigation. It is squandering the residents' money. The Mayor should not become trigger-happy but should focus on pulling the trigger in the council. Stop procrastinating, Mr. Mayor and get the job done.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, the Mayor is not here to defend himself so you will have to expunge that part. If you are going to refer to other persons who are not here to defend themselves, I will ask you to refrain.

Mr. Persaud: Last year, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration spent \$779.6 million on the Georgetown Enhancement Project – cleaning and sprucing up – for the capital. In 2022, \$399.5 million will be spent to continue this Enhancement Project. This is direct assistance from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. This year, \$28 million will be spent on the Mon Repos Market Phase Two, after approximately \$33.5 million was spent in 2021. Similarly, the rehabilitation at the Parika Market will continue this year with the aim of completing this multi-phase project, in order to have a modern commercial and sanitary facility. Additionally, we will continue to support the upgrading and enhancement of the famous and popular Parika and Mon Repos Markets Phases Two and Three at a cost of \$250 million. The markets will expand commercial access to farmers, easy access and convenience to residents, thereby creating greater income, and employment for thousands of youths and adults. The residents, vendors and customers stand to benefit from the marked improvements occurring at the marketplaces.

We will create jobs while fixing our problems unlike the APNU/AFC who locked itself away behind closed doors and lived like fat cats. This demonstrates our purposeful spending that will benefit the customers and consumers as stipulated in our manifesto. *Budget 2022* has also catered for the construction of the access road to the Blairmont Waste Management Facility. There is Phase One at a cost of \$135.2 million. This year, we will see the rehabilitation of the Rose Hall Sanitary Landfill access road at a cost of \$55 million. We will upgrade the existing disposal landfill sites at Corriverton, Number Naught, St. Ignatius, Aishalton, Matthews Ridge, Leguan and Wakenaam. This comes at a cost of approximately \$90 million. Residents will see new landfill sites at Mabaruma, Kwakwani and Mahdia for the very first time.

His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, led PPP/C Administration, has accomplished far more in enhancing the quality of life for the people at the local and regional levels than the previous Regime. The benefits will have a binding effect on the APNU/AFC politicians by providing services that matter. The PPP/C Administration does not discriminate when it comes to our people whether it is on the basis of political, social, religious, race and gender. This is for all Guyana to benefit. Some projects that will commence in Region 10 are as follows: rehabilitation of a bridge at Sand Hill in the Berbice River; construction of first street road at South Amelia’s Ward; the upgrading of fair weather road at Oronoque Drive Retrieve and Ituni/Crossman Avenue; upgrading of Wismar Hill four corner entrance; completion of Amelia’s Ward and Bamia Primary Schools;

construction and extension of Hururu and Moritaro health centres; construction of a health post at Fall Mouth; and the list goes on and on.

The APNU/AFC is trying to pull the wool, maybe pig's skin, over the eyes of the Guyanese with the banter that the Budget is not going to transform their lives. I call it how I see it. I call it bluffing because from their presentations, so far I have seen and heard, they could not have read the Budget and comprehend the language. They are coming here to kerfuffle us with sheer ignorance, deceitfulness and political buffoonery. This year, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will be working assiduously to foster strong local and regional interest in One Guyana. The PPP/C Administration will foster the process of community participation in all of our projects so the lives of thousands in our communities will be improved. We want to build stronger communities and safer homes. Recognising the health of our people which is our wealth, *Budget 2022* responds. At Region 9, as an example, we will see complete rehabilitation of the Aishalton Hospital maternity wards; the complete rehabilitation of the Annai Cottage Hospital; and the rehabilitation of Achiwuib, Rukumoto, Barabara and Karasabai health posts. This is occurring in each administrative region, which will be transformed at a rapid pace.

This People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is spearheading the effort and putting the pieces together that the APNU/AFC failed to address while they slumbered in Office. The APNU/AFC Opposition had two and a half years to recognise that their communities are not like a buffet where one could go to pick and choose.

I am turning the focus to our children. Education is seen as lasting and more valuable, and we recognised that a child cannot learn on a hungry stomach. This paves the way for the school feeding initiative because *silver and gold may vanish away, but a sound education will never decay*. I want to make mention to Mr. David Patterson that his bracelet will vanish away. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in *Budget 2022* will assist with the rehabilitation of Bush Lot Secondary School; the extension of Waterloo Nursery School and Rosignol, Blairmont and Number Eight Village Primary Schools. We will focus our attention on the extension of Linden Foundation Secondary School and Moritaro Primary School.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will continue to focus on capacity building in each Local Democratic Organs (LDOs) and municipalities. *Budget 2022* has won the

support of stakeholders, inclusive of the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA), the Private Sector Commission (PSC), the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG), the Guyana Oil and Gas Energy Chamber (GOGEC) and many others are coming on board to support. This is a progressive budget that will see the development of an equitable society for all Guyanese. I consider it a privilege and an honour to serve in a government who connects with the people's hearts and continues to strive in delivering, and strengthening the services provided at the local and regional levels. The PPP/C Administration boldly urges the Opposition to wake up and not be left behind. They are already fighting and bickering amongst themselves for jobs and posts. One Hon. Member was forced to give up the post of the Leader of the Opposition in shame and with a lowered head. The Hon. Member was dehumanised...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will expunge the word 'shame'.

Mr. Persaud: ...and punished. He surrendered after a long and hard fight. Mr. Speaker, *the race is not for the swift or fast but for those who can endure it to the end.*

1.58 p.m.

Sir, I have to compel and reason with you to join us and support *Budget 2022* which is a remarkable piece of fiscal policy that will change Guyana's future. I am optimistic that good sense will prevail and *Budget 2022* will become a reality. On 26th January, it was a peaceful day, a progressive day and this is a prosperous budget. I commend it to this honourable House. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister for the efficiency and effectiveness in the use of your allocated time. Our next speaker is the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, today I wear a black ribbon to mourn the death of democracy in good governance in Guyana. When one has a government who refuses to consult on what would be 'our first oil budget', when one takes into account that the PPP/C gave the parliamentary Opposition only two working days to scrutinise the biggest budget in the history of our country, then one can confirm that democracy and good governance are dead in Guyana.

A budget is supposed to inform the nation of government's plan in relation to the income, expenditure and how people's lives would be affected. After listening to the Hon. Minister, Mr.

Anand Persaud's incoherent presentation, I conclude that we are in a very, very bad place as a nation. Clearly, he lacks the ability and the competence to be a minister of government. Today, I stand to explain to this nation the APNU/AFC's, Coalition, vision for Guyana and to demonstrate in contrast how the People's Progressive Party/Civic fails in that regard. The vision we share is of a Guyana where we are united as a people with one destiny; a vision where no Guyanese is left behind regardless of race, sex, age, religion, geo-graphical location or which political party they support; for it is our constitutional right according to article 40 (1) which states:

“Every person in Guyana is entitled to the basic right to a happy, creative and productive life, free from hunger, disease, ignorance and want.”

That basic right which our Constitution affords us is not guaranteed in this Budget. The biggest budget ever, it is not afforded in this Budget filled with billions upon billions of oil money. It fails to properly address poverty and to put the mechanisms in place to eradicate it altogether from the length and breadth of this country in the shortest possible time. Guyana is one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the Co-operative oil Republic of Guyana with over US\$600 million already in the bank. Now, Guyana has about only 750,000 persons, not 75 million, not seven million but 750,000 persons. That means, we already have in the Natural Resource Fund close to US\$1 million for every man, woman and child who lives in this country. With access to those resources, with access to those sums of moneys, the APNU/AFC Coalition guarantees this nation that absolutely no Guyanese would be left behind when we form the next Government.

Here is a clear opportunity for us, an opportunity afforded to no other government of this country before. The PPP/C fails to recognise that. This Government is showing no urgency, dragging their feet on a national development agenda. What do they want Guyanese to do? Should they wait until the next five to 10 years? They need to put proper mechanisms in place to end poverty, right now. When Libya found oil, the pace at which it moved to eliminate poverty and to transform the lives of its citizens was remarkable. It did not build one highway this year, then build a bridge next year and tell the poor citizens that it would not receive any real benefit from the oil until another five to 10 years. It loves its country and all its people. Its government was not a bunch of selfish hustlers and thieves. It did what it had to do for all its people, even as it did infrastructural works and other works.

Mr. Speaker, if one gets married, he/she gets an allowance; when one gets his/her first child, he/she gets an allowance; Libya transformed a desert nation into a modern state but ensured that it took care of its people at the same time. This PPP/C Government is only talking about four-lane highways and the big hotels. They boast about the Amaila Falls Hydro Power plant which no one is sure how and, in fact, if it will lower our electricity rates – a project which will probably take the next 20 years for the Government to own. All of this while the ordinary Guyanese continue to live from pay cheque to pay cheque battling with the extremely high cost of living. The struggle is real; the struggle is real. We do not have time to wait. We have the money. It is not Jagdeo's money; it is not Irfaan's money. The money belongs to the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you a story. Two weeks ago, I was in Anna Regina market where I met a vendor by the name of Amrita. She was canvassing for me to buy some fruits from her and when she recognised that I was the Regional Member of Parliament (MP) who represents her and the other vendors against the wicked and uncaring PPP/C Government, she began to explain to me that she is a single parent who has four children to maintain. She was there since 6.00 a.m. and it was already 10.00 a.m. but she had no sales as yet. I bought all the fruits and vegetables that I had to get from her. She then proceeded to say to me that she voted for this PPP/C Government back in 2020 and now she is disappointed especially with the high cost of living. She could not understand why the Government who she supported wanted to put those vendors who are mostly single parent women out of a daily bread. People are suffering out there; people are suffering out there. Those who even supported this PPP/C Government are now beginning to understand who the PPP/C really are. They are a bunch of selfish politicians – selfish politician – who have access to resources that no other government had access to before but chooses to ignore the many voices of the poor and vulnerable. They are only focusing on themselves, their families and the rich.

In the Coalition's vision, with the vast amount of oil resources available to the Government, we have prepared a budget which would have taken care of all Guyanese from the womb to the tomb. It would not have been solely through cash grants. We believe that cash grants are useful and, in fact, the amounts offered in this Budget should have been much more for all Guyanese especially the poor and the vulnerable. As a Coalition, we have a more broad-based vision of a social system which takes care of all Guyanese throughout their lifespan.

When a child is born, assistance should be immediately given through some childcare package. As he/she grows through school, he/she would get all the assistance necessary including free education. That is something that PPP/C took away from the young people – free education at the University of Guyana level and a stipend which we proposed to take care of the basic needs. Even as he/she enters the world of work, retires and becomes a pensioner, a proper pension should be there for him/her to enjoy that good life while traveling into the sunset. Instead of this approach, the PPP/C Government has crafted a budget that is unfit for purpose, a budget that fails to address the core issue such as poverty but, instead, it seeks to increase the gap between the rich and the poor.

While we welcome the fact that the Government has heeded to our call to increase the tax threshold by increasing the tax threshold from \$65,000 to \$75,000 will not solve the problem of the working poor, the retail clerks, the nurses and the cleaners. It will not solve their problem. That translates into merely a \$2800 increase which cannot cover even the light bill of an average working poor Guyanese. My Party, as part of this Coalition, has proposed that the tax threshold be increased to \$125,000. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible)*] We had no oil money, now you have it so you should have increased it to \$125,000. Had the PPP/C Government listened to us, the working poor would have paid no income tax and would have had close to \$20,000 extra in disposable income in their pockets.

The APNU/AFC Coalition believes that there are a number of other mechanisms that could have been used to bring relief to the working poor. The PPP/C, if they cared about the working poor could have implemented the earned income tax credit for low income workers. As one works, one earns income tax rebates or there is also a system called ‘the earning supplement’, which aims to ensure that each worker earns at least the minimum liveable wage. Whatever amount one falls short by, the Government would step in and top up the person’s salary to that liveable amount. If it is established that the liveable wage is \$125,000 but one only works for \$100,000, then the Government tops up the person’s salary with \$25,000.

2.13 p.m.

It encourages people to join the workforce and is considered the most effective anti-poverty measure by most economists. To get the top up, one had to work. Now, on the issue of work, the

Government boasts about local content and its Manifesto promise of 50,000 jobs but the way things are going right now, it is clear that the oil industry is quickly eating up the non-oil industries. Everything is centred around oil production and the spin-off with the oil services. If these jobs are to become a reality, it will in fact have to come from the oil sector. How could Guyanese maximise on the local content opportunities when this Government has failed to push significant investments into our only premier tertiary institution – the University of Guyana (UG). Rather than increasing the subvention from last year, the Government reduced it.

On page 23 of the budget speech, paragraphs 4.11 to 4.13, the Senior Minister within the Office of... [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] You all made him the Minister of Finance, as Cde. Walton-Desir said. That Minister gloats that Guyana has the 17th largest oil reserve. He went on to say that we are producing at 120,000 barrels per day with the Liza Destiny Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO). He said come early in 2022, the Liza Unity FPSO will take it to 340,000 barrels per day. Then, the Liza Prosperity FPSO in 2024, which will further carry it to 560,000 barrels per day, and the Yellowtail carrying it straight to 810,000 barrels per day. If one multiply 810,000 barrels per day by a moderate figure, \$60 per barrel, one would get close to, or more than, US\$ 48 million.

It is due to these very precise projections and the funds that we have already accumulated that the young people expect that the University of Guyana would be transformed into an institution that would provide the requisite skills for them to take advantage of the local content opportunities available and not allow only the foreigners to grab the high paying jobs. Young people expect that while they are being trained, they would receive the much-needed assistance to carry them through. With the current growth rate of 19.9% and a projected growth rate of 47.5%, entrepreneurs, the small business people, the women and the youths expect to get the \$5 million proposed by the Coalition to set up their small businesses. Those rice farmers in Region 2, expect to see more than just the construction of one drying floor. The year 2022, should see the construction of a number of drying floors across the region. Those very farmers expect to see in this budget, significant measures to reduce the cost of fertilizer. Those farmers in the Pomeroon expect to see a drainage policy which would guarantee that they do not suffer like they did for so many months during 2020 to 2021. They expect to see the realisation of the road already drafted by the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) to be constructed on the eastern bank of the

lower Pomeroon River, which would allow farmers to easily and quickly transport their produce out of the Pomeroon River at a lower cost.

I have walked the streets of Nabaclis on the East Coast of Demerara (ECD) where I have met with close to 100 farmers in that area. Some doing poultry, pigs, others doing other cash crops like okra, bora and boulangier. The major hinderance there is the condition of the access road and flooding and so, they too expect that the Minister of Agriculture would stick to his word and fix the long overdue farm-to-market road at Middle Walk, Nabaclis. They expect that. This Government must be at a loss. The focus must be on the vulnerable communities, the poor, the vulnerable, single parents and the elderly, *et cetera*. Some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities include many in the hinterland regions, where 50% and more are in poverty. This Government is yet to explain to our first people how exactly our Indigenous brothers and sisters would benefit from our oil industry. We are yet to see any new program implemented as a result of this new-found oil wealth.

On page 66 of the budget, the Minister of Finance talks about job creation for Indigenous youths through the Community Service Officers (CSO) programme. He boasts about the increase in the numbers from 2,000 to 2,500 – creating 500 jobs. It is shameless for a minister to look at us with a straight face and tell the Indigenous people that he is creating 500 jobs. At \$30,000 per month, added to the higher cost of living and the higher cost of items in the hinterland area, the CSO jobs as classified by the Minister must be the lowest paying jobs in the entire Caribbean. It does not even address the Government's own minimum wage plan of \$65,000. Surely, our Indigenous brothers and sisters deserve better paying and skilled jobs. They deserve skilled jobs—not handouts—that would ensure they live comfortably and can even support their families. As I said, not handouts.

On page 87, of the budget speech, the Minister posited that this Government has recognise that there has been some upward movement in the prices at marketplaces for a number of food items. Upward movement? Upward movement? A number of food items. Where are these ministers living? Where are these Ministers living? The food prices took off like a rocket. Everything has gone sky-high. Poor people are punishing to put bread on their tables. As I said before, the struggle is real, but I guess they cannot see it from behind those big fences across at Pradoville.

On that same page in the budget speech, the Minister talked about relief mechanisms like lowering the excise tax on fuel. He said in 2021, he did it two times. In 2021, he reduced it from 50% to 35%, and then from 35% to 20%. He is now pleased to announce that he is reducing it from 20% to 10%. I want the Minister to know that the average driver on the road did not see any real benefit in it and did not really realise any real benefit from that. The average housewife did not realise any significant benefit from that. The Hon. Ganesh Mahipaul could tell the House that within two weeks, gas price went way back up, almost to the same place that it was in both instances. They did not realise any real benefits from those fuel cuts. It begs the question, who are the real beneficiaries from the tax cut? Is it the big boys that import the fuel? It could only be them who are realising the real benefits from this measure. We welcome any tax cut, but the Government must ensure that the benefits of those cuts actually reach those that need it the most. The housewives, the single mothers, and those hardworking farmers, they need it the most.

Mr. Speaker, if one turn to the very next page in the budget speech, page 88, one will see the Government talking about other cost of living measures and blaming the floods for the high increase. In paragraph 6.13, the Government is now talking about consulting with communities. Now, after almost one year later, it wants to do impact assessment. This Government cannot be serious. It cannot be serious about the development of our people, not in the Co-operative oil Republic of Guyana. To make matters worse, on the very next page, it talks about supporting the elderly and it boast about increasing the old age pension. I heard a similar sentiment from the Hon. Minister who spoke before me. The Government wants to move it from \$25,000 to \$28,000, and then say to the nation that—Hon. Member Anand Persaud just repeated that garbage—the old people of this country now have \$2.3 billion of disposable income. That is very insulting. This right here has got to be the greatest joke, one of the biggest disappointments of *Budget 2022*.

In 2022, we expect to pump over 340,000 barrels of oil per day. When we expect our earnings to move close to US\$ 1 billion, the PPP/C Government give our pensioners a mere \$3,000 increase. No, Mr. Speaker, no. That is not acceptable in 2022. Where is the love? Where is the care? No, without the benefit of oil, the APNU/AFC Government moved pension from \$13,000 all the way up to \$20,500. It is a shame and embarrassment in 2022, that we can treat our pensioners this way. I reject this measure in the budget. We increased the pension by over 55% without the benefit of oil. If there was not a no confidence motion to stop the progress, we would have increased that

pension further. How do you come now, with oil money in hand, only to give \$3,000, but then you can selectively give to one group, \$250,000?

In Region 2, many of the persons working on the frontline to assist in the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine drive, those from the Guyana People's Militia and others employed at the Suddie Hospital, have not been paid for months. When they enquired, they were told that the Government does not have money. They do not know if the President will approve their payment. Just last Christmas, they got nothing to take home to their families after working and placing their lives at risk, but this Government found money to pay a select group, who did not work, – \$250,000 per person. We do not mind the Government distributing any relief, but right must be right and wrong must be wrong. It is not fair. It is not fair. Guess why it did not care to pay those militia people. Guess why, Mr. Speaker. They are perceived to be APNU/AFC supporters and so their lives do not matter. The same could be said about the call to place in the budget at least 10% interim pay increase for the public servants and eventually get them to that place of 25% increase from there. This is so that those hardworking Nurses, Teachers, Sweeper/Cleaners, *et cetera*, could have more moneys in their pockets to support their pockets to support their families.

2.28 p.m.

Those measures fell on deaf ears. Why? It is because they are perceived to be the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) supporters. While this is the first oil budget, it fails, it fails and it fails. It fails to address the pillars of poverty. It fails to address the social inequality in our society. It fails to address the needs of the poor and the most vulnerable. People have lost hope at a time when we should have been most hopeful. The APNU/AFC Coalition, like most Guyanese, recognises the shortcomings of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government and...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, so that we do not fail you, we need to give you an extension of time to conclude.

Mr. Jones: Comrade Speaker, I move that the Hon. Chairman and Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. As I was saying to this House and this nation, the APNU/AFC Coalition, like most Guyanese, recognises the shortcomings of this PPP/C Government and its inability to manage our oil wealth. We are cognisant of its practice of poor governance and its inability to present a comprehensive, national and developmental plan with set goals and timelines to deliver a better standard of living to all Guyanese. May I say to the Guyanese people that they deserve more, and when the APNU/AFC Coalition forms the next government, it would certainly give them more. It would develop a national agenda that will deliver a better quality of life for all Guyanese. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, the Hon. Member, Ms. Oneidge Walrond to make her presentation.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to add my voice in support of *Budget 2022* ably presented by my Colleague, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance under the theme: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*.

Allow me, to congratulate the Minister and his team in the Ministry of Finance for the immense work that it has done in pulling together the programmes of the various ministries into the coherent and cohesive whole that we see presented before us. I also wish to take this occasion to extend my sincerest appreciation and gratitude to my own team at the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce for the work that it has done. Here, I speak not only of work on *Budget 2022*, but also on the execution of the 2021 programmes and the work that it would no doubt do to continue on in this budget year. Last but not least, I thank the entire body of public servants throughout government who worked in the various ministries to make *Budget 2022*, a reality less than one month into the new year.

The presentation and debate on the estimates are unquestionably the highlights of our annual Parliamentary Agenda. The eyes of the entire country are upon us, and I think that it is perhaps useful to remind ourselves, what these proceedings are supposed to represent. In democracies all over the world, at budget time, what there is on the one hand is a government, such as ours, which presents a programme that implements its vision and the mandate that it has been given by the

people. I should not have to say that that mandate is given through a free and fair election. On the other hand, we have, or we ought to have, a government-in-waiting demonstrating its own vision through the evaluation and deconstruction of the policies presented by the incumbent and illustrating its potential fitness to govern by the presentation of alternatives.

It is based on this understanding of democratic practice that, we, on this side of the house, usually spend much time preparing to debate our policies and programmes. We are predictably disappointed, time and time again, by our Friends on the other side who, it would appear, are either uninterested or incapable of so doing. Instead, they resort to the same tired old tropes. Time and time again, as surely as night follows day, we can expect to sit in this National Assembly and be lectured about corruption and discrimination with half-truths and innuendo. I want to delve for a moment into the issue of corruption. I wish to do this, because our government is especially concerned with the welfare of the most vulnerable amongst us, and it is well known that it is poor people who bear the brunt of the burden wreaked by the scourge of corruption.

Every dollar that is dissipated in corrupt transactions is a dollar that could have been spent providing some sorely needed service to citizens. A dollar lost to corruption could have been used to provide uniforms for school children or to fund school-feeding programmes. It could have been applied to increase pensions for our elderly and senior citizens. That dollar dissipated in corruption could have procured life-saving drugs that would otherwise be unaffordable to many people and the list goes on. It is because of its effect on the poor and vulnerable, that we have set our face sternly against corruption and it is the policy of our administration that anyone caught engaging in corrupt practices, will face the full brunt of the law. It is perplexing that some members of this honourable House, who had to face the courts on this issue, could come to the floor of this honourable House purporting to rebuke us about corrupt practices without offering concrete evidence to support those claims.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, just give me one second. Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, you are using many unparliamentary language like corrupt, which we would not tolerate. The next time I will ask you to withdraw yourself. Hon. Minister, you may continue.

Ms. Walrond: Permit me Sir, to remind the people that some of the most vocal criticisms coming from our Hon. Member and Colleague whose actions was investigated by the Public Procurement

Commission (PPC) in 2021. I further remind the House, that the Commission found such gross irregularities in the award of a contract to a Dutch company, so as to warrant the institution of a criminal charge against that Hon. Member before the courts. What did the Public Procurement Commission find? It found that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, as it then was, in trying to secure a tender for a feasibility study in the tune of \$161 million, did so by bypassing national procurement laws.

It is clear from the report of the Commission, that our Hon. Member and Colleague on the other side, hand-picked what was described in the report as an ‘unsolicited proposal’ and took it to Cabinet, once again, bypassing the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB). That Hon. Member presented this irregular proposal to the Cabinet for approval perhaps, in my opinion, to give the transaction the veneer or the cloak as one wears of legality. However, that transaction was illegal, for the report of the PPC clearly stated, according to the Act and Regulations, any contract over \$5 million for that ministry should have been administered by the tender board and not the minister. Several of the members of that very Cabinet which endorsed that obscene and grossly irregular arrangement, sits amongst us in this honourable House and accuse us about corruption for just about everything under the sun.

It is an interesting and topical aside to note, that our friends on the other side who would now have us believe that they are the champions of local content, bypassed the winning bidder, which was a joint venture with a local company, on the claim that the winning bidders were \$10 million over budget. It froze out the joint venture that included a local company to enter into this highly irregular, this grossly irregular and unlawful arrangement with a foreign company. It then turned around and paid an extra \$100 million to that foreign company. Two hundred and forty-eight million dollars, Mr. Speaker. That two hundred and forty-eight million dollars could have been used to implement programmes for the most vulnerable amongst us. Those whom it now claims to care so much about, but it did not do that. Instead, even as those astronomical amounts were being dissipated in these highly questionable transactions, our honourable friends on the other side were busy removing benefits from the poor of which I will speak of in due course.

If only the record of our Colleagues on the other side were different. If only were that record driven by a philosophy of supporting local firms, today we would have had thriving local companies. These companies could have been building expertise that could eventually see them provide

services throughout the Caribbean and indeed all over the world. However, the focus of our friends was not in building the local private sector. Indeed, the evidence of that is just the opposite. It stifled the private sector other than a selected few, through regressive, oppressive tax regime and through myopic programmes that caused the economy to stagnate. As if it were not enough, not so long ago my Colleague and Minister, the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, brought evidence to this House, of the award by sole sourcing of more than \$70 million for the supply of scales, by the then Ministry of Public Infrastructure.

Not only was the contract sole sourced, and those of us who know the Procurement Act, know that there were not even remotely reasonable grounds for justifying sole sourcing. Not only was the contract sole-sourced, but all the money, every last cent, was paid in advance to this company which is not known to be in the business of public infrastructure. Additionally, the principal of that company is a well-known long-standing advisor to the AFC and its leading members. One could read the *Jamaica Observer* of 30th May, 2015 where it stated the beneficiary of that contract made it plain that he masterminded operations that brought the APNU/AFC Coalition into office.

2.43 p.m.

A sum of \$72 million was paid in advance and nothing was delivered. We cannot see the scales, and yet it accuses us of corruption at every turn. There is an old adage which says that *if the only tool you have is a hammer, then you tend to treat every problem as a nail*. I am reminded of this adage almost every time we encounter a criticism on almost every issue, from our friends on the other side, and the criticisms of this budget are no different. The Opposition has one device at its disposal and that is the trenchant cry of racism, discrimination or corruption, and it applies that device regardless of time, circumstances and reality.

We roll out a comprehensive cash transfer programme with Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) relief grants payable to every single Guyanese household and it accuse us of discrimination and corruption in distribution. We brought out a programme for relief of persons affected by floods again, it cried corruption and discrimination. We implement a housing drive to ensure that every single Guyanese can realise the dream of owning their own home, and it accuse us of racism and corruption without a shred of evidence to support its claims.

One must ask oneself why, why is it with so much potential space for reasonable disagreement on policy, our Hon. Colleagues on the other side refuse to engage in debates on policy, but instead reach time and again for that one device that it seeks to rely on. One very much suspect that what is happening is that it is running from its record, because if examined that record would reveal why it is difficult for our friends on the other side to credibly advocate actual policy measures. It is because until just recently it was in fact, in government and it was totally within its power to implement almost anything that it wanted to if it was really minded doing it.

Let us continue to look at the record. The Auditor General examined a COVID-19 relief programme implemented by the APNU/AFC administration before we took office in 2020. The first thing to note is that instead of a conceptually simple and easy-to-administer programme, such as the one we implemented, our friends, then in government, opted for a selective programme. Most countries recognised that rapid distribution was a priority in the pandemic situations. In typical fashion, however – our friends on the other side opted for a cumbersome programme, which it appears not even it could implement. It is therefore not surprising that the Auditor General reports that out of the 11,000 plus persons found eligible for this grant, barely 1000 benefited.

We are still trying to determine whether this was corruption, incompetence or plain indifference. We rather suspect the last explanation, which is that it just did not care. Thousands of Guyanese were reeling from the effects of the worst crisis the world has seen in over 100 years. Those who should have been in the forefront of delivering relief were right here day after day, in Conference Centre doing their best to thwart the will of the people. It was displaying some uncharacteristic diligence in that effort, I must admit.

That daily display here at this Conference Centre and indeed the entire attitude of our Hon. Colleagues on the other side, reminds me of little boys playing a cricket match. There is always that one player, the one who will not give up the bat when he is out, one has to get him out about five times before he gives up the bat and that is if one is lucky. If one does not look out, he will throw away the bat, throw way the ball, storm off the field and kick down the wicket on his way off for good measure. Again, as we say colloquially, *bruk up the game* for everybody. That is our friends on the other side. Its entire team is that boy. It was out on 20th December, 2018, but it would not give up the bat. Out again on 2nd March, 2020 and several times before that, still would not give up the bat. Now, since the combined pressure of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ),

the international community and the Guyanese people forced it to give up the bat on 1st August, 2020. What we have witnessed since then is the Opposition throwing a tantrum, packing its bat and ball, kicking down the stump and trying to break up the game for all of us. When one sees our Hon. Friends , like we saw them a few days ago, attempting to paralyse the National Assembly, by disrupting the proceeding, advancing on our Colleague who was presenting the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) Bill , abusing the Parliament staff, it is nothing more than that little boy, who really cannot bat very well, who has been comprehensively bowled by the opposing team, put out by the umpires, and having no other card to play, tries to break up the game for everybody. That is the record of our good friends on the other side, it is a record of corruption.

Mr. Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Shuman: Standing Order 41 (6), I think, where the Hon. Member is imputing, what I would say, or at least, maybe lotting me with some uncharacteristic bunch.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, the Hon. Deputy Speaker is saying that you are including all of the Hon. Members over there, and he is not associated with that.

Ms. Walrond: Appreciated and accepted Mr. Speaker. All except the Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Walrond: It is a record of incompetence, and perhaps, worst of all, it is a record of indifference. It just did not care, and it still do not care. It really does not care about the poor, the struggling, the most vulnerable amongst us, for if it did, when it had the power to make a difference, it would have done something about it.

It showed this lack of caring, when it sent thousands of sugar workers on to the breadlines in 2016 and 2017. When we extended relief to those workers who were abandoned and left to fend for themselves, the Hon. Members on the other side accused us of showing favouritism and being selective. Some measures are by its very nature unique to particular groups. Just as the sugar workers were placed in special circumstances by the callous actions of the Coalition government, so were members of the Joint Services, people who place their lives on the line for all of us every

day. Last year once again, the Joint Services received its full one-month tax free bonus, which was taken away by the Coalition government. The Coalition did not care about those 2000 Community Service Officers (CSO) who were placed on the breadline. We have re-employed 2000 plus Community Service Officers, and we will, this year, employ 500 more.

Even the youngest among us did not escape the regressive and oppressive policies of the uncaring Coalition. It even took away the cash grants from school children, which we have restored. *The Because We Care* cash grant has been restored and is increasing in this budget from 15,000 to 25,000 per child and for good measure, the uniform grants have been increased from \$4,000 to \$5,000. This is its record, and the record explains why one can predict that regardless of what policies and programmes this Government seek to implement through our legislative measures in this House, our friends on the other side, will strike up the chorus of racism, discrimination and corruption, once again, without any basis in evidence.

Our Hon. Colleagues on the opposite benches cannot run on its record. It has to run from its record, because that record is a one of destruction wreaked on the Guyanese people. Its record is also one that is long on promises, but short on delivery. To this, we have only to look at its Manifesto going into the 2015 elections. The Manifesto of the APNU/AFC Coalition going into the 2015 elections, made a lot of expansive promises to the people of this country. We must make sure that we publicly examine that track record here, so that the people will have the facts which will enable them to as we say, pick sense from the nonsense.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

Our honourable friends on the other side in their 2015 Manifesto, promised to make Linden the gateway for eco-tourism development. What did they do? Nothing! Just two months ago, we toured Linden and the wider Region 10 and found problems of massive dumping of garbage at the Kara Kara lakes. The residents told us of the potential of the area for leisure and recreational tourism, and that this potential was being hindered by the dumping. We listened and found a way to assist. The 2015 Manifesto of the APNU/AFC also said that it would build the Linden to Lethem Road. Big promises, but what was the reality?

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

The reality is that it is our administration which has secured the funding from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), and it is we who are commencing works on the Linden to Mabura section this year. This year would also see the replacement of timber bridges with concrete structures between Kurupukari and Lethem, all of which will be a major boost for tourism. They promised but it is we who are delivering.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

Its 2015 Manifesto promised significant increase in old age pensions, but what was the reality? Our honourable friends took away pensioners subsidies for water, electricity and added value-added tax (VAT) on telecommunications among a whole host of regressive tax measures. We have restored those subsidies to our pensioners, we have removed VAT on data, and we have over the course of three successive budgets, cumulatively increased pensions. It took five years to move the pension by 7000 and we did that in less than 18 months. Once again, it promised, we delivered. On page 23 of the Manifesto, our friends on the other side, promised to raise the personal income tax threshold to \$100,000, I heard the Hon. Member speak about that, suggesting that we should have done that. Of course, this was not done, instead, it is we on this side who raised the threshold to \$25,000 last year, and this year we have raised it yet again to \$75,000. It is clear that they promise and we deliver.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

On page 25, it promised:

“Require that Guyanese are employed on all projects in Guyana.”

It was us who brought to the floor of this honourable House and passed into law, the Local Content Bill which requires companies in the oil and gas industry to utilise local companies and in their supply chains and to employ Guyanese in their operations. We passed that into law, cementing the reality that it promise, and we deliver. [**An. Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] All right, I will leave that one alone for others. Having dealt with the record of our friends in Opposition, and some of our flagship budget measures, I wish to bring to your attention... [**Mr. Duncan:** *(You are sabotaging (inaudible).)*] Sabotaging because I cannot see the Russians.

2.58 p.m.

I wish to bring to your attention some of the sectoral initiatives in tourism, industry and commerce. With respect to tourism and hospitality, I am pleased to report that four internationally-branded hotels have already broken ground here in Guyana. The introduction of these hotels and others, which will commence construction this year, will undoubtedly improve the quality and quantity of our room stock, and more importantly, create Russ... Sorry. [**An Hon. Member:** Can undermine if (*inaudible*)] Cannot undermine if I do not see Russians. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** (*Inaudible*)] Let her speak for herself. Let her come and speak for herself or let her come and say that to me ...create thousands of jobs during the construction phase... Let her not send the little boy to do big woman work; let her come herself. ...and subsequently will be when fully operational.

Our tremendous progress on this front makes it imperative to ensure that our Guyanese citizens are ably qualified for the imminent jobs and positions at all tiers of the industry, including senior management. We are therefore making an investment in the development of a sustainable world-class human resource development facility. In the interim, to satisfy the demand for skilled workers in the short term, we are strategically implementing short-term measures for training workers in the sector. Thousands of persons have been earmarked for training through various mechanisms, including 6,000 persons who will be trained through the Guyana–Barbados Tourism Initiative.

On the topic of job creation and employment, in the Manifesto of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, there was a promise of 50,000 jobs, and this is a promise that we are committed to delivering. In my last Budget... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Do you see where I am and where she is? Who do you think has the most things? In my last Budget presentation, one might recall that I stated our intention and commitment to develop two new industrial estates – one in Region 2 and the other in Region 10. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] She would be better off listening to me. Specific lands have now been identified and this year construction works will begin in keeping with our commitment to the people. The local business community is excited and ready to invest, and we are assured that the communities and regions will be benefit from good-paying jobs as a result.

Mr. Speaker, in last year’s Budget, \$200 million was allocated to the Small Business Development Fund (SBDF).

Mr. Speaker: While you refresh, you will need five minutes to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the Hon. Member be given five more minutes to conclude her very good presentation. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister, please continue.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Speaker, in last year's Budget, \$200 million was allocated to the Small Business Development Fund (SBDF). A record 746 business owners from all regions of the country benefitted from access to finance last year through this Fund which allowed them to start, and in some cases, continue their operations in the face of COVID-19 and for many to upscale and expand many times over. Such was the unprecedented success of the Small Business Grant Programme that this year we are increasing the envelope by 50% to \$300 million.

We channeled resources... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I would not ask them to find Russians for me. ...from the Small Business Development Fund to assist the most vulnerable amongst us. Early last year, an organisation, which represents persons with disabilities, requested the Ministry to assist them in becoming job creators, since it was a great challenge to gain employment otherwise. We then created a special training program for the more than 50 applicants. Several of these have received their grant disbursement and are now gainfully employed. This year, we will continue and expand this program.

Our vision for the small business sector extends beyond financial assistance. We understand that training and capacity building is needed. We are cognizant that marketing and accessing new markets, both locally and internationally, are important for their growth prospects. Last year, the Ministry launched the National E-Commerce Strategy with the specific intent to enhance the competitiveness and efficacy of our businesses while also facilitating emerging opportunities. You may recall, Mr. Speaker, that early last year we brought to this House and passed amendments to the Small Business Act, to fully operationalise the 20% set-off for small businesses in the Government procurement. Following from this, we have instituted a 5% margin of preference for small businesses in order to implement that set-off.

Also, within the last year we removed the requirement for bid security for contracts under \$7 million, which means small businesses will no longer be required to go to the bank or to an insurer to secure a guarantee. Banks in most cases, would only issue that bid security if a business could post collateral in the form of assets. These requirements had the effect of excluding from public procurement many small businesses which were otherwise qualified in terms of skills, expertise and experience. This burdensome requirement has been eliminated for contracts under \$7 million. The National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) has already publicly reported that this initiative has caused an exponential increase in the number of small businesses bidding for and awarded contracts.

With respect to standards and quality, with the recent passage of the Local Content Act, our business sector will need to produce goods and services at a standard that will meet the demanding requirements of international firms. The Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) will play a key role in ensuring this transition in quality improvement. The GNBS has already successfully discharged its duties in both offshore and onshore activities in our oil and gas sector. In 2021, we established the oil and gas department with a view of streamlining the activities and properly monitoring the sector in accordance with the American Petroleum Institute (API) standards, a globally recognised and leading oil and gas association.

Mr. Speaker, significant investments have already been made to train and employ additional inspectors with the addition of the Liza Destiny Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel. This year, the Guyana National Bureau of Standards will completely take responsibility for the testing of crude oil brought to surface, putting this critical aspect of operational audit and quality assurance exclusively into Guyanese hands.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in our continued efforts to build business confidence, a national standards strategy will be drafted with broad consultation nationwide, with specific focus on the construction, tourism and agriculture sectors and subsectors. You may readily see, Mr. Speaker, that through our Budget measures, past and present, our track record is one of caring; it is a record of compassion; it is a record of integrity; and we stand by and perform every word to the people.

You could also see from our record, the implementation that our record is that of competence. Simply put, not only do we promise but we deliver. It is no exaggeration for us to say that Guyana

is at a watershed moment in its history. *Budget 2022* will be truly transformative. It will be the first of several Budgets that propel us into the ranks of developed countries, with a standard and quality of living that Guyanese have dreamed of for generations. It will propel all of us if the Hon. Members on the other side of this House rise to the occasion, conquer their instinct for the ordinary, seize this historic moment and join us on the path to prosperity. I, therefore, urge all Members of this honourable House to support this ground-breaking Budget and be remembered as being on the right side of history. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramsaroop. Go ahead, Hon. Member. We are having some technical difficulties. The Hon. Member is online. I see his lips moving. Technician, could you see if you could unmute the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramsaroop?

Mr. Ramsaroop: Yes, Sir, I am unmuted.

Mr. Speaker: You can now commence your presentation, Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you, Sir. As I make my contribution on *Budget 2022*, firstly, I would like to wish everyone a happy new year with lots of prosperity. Secondly, I would like to congratulate the West Indies team for winning the Betway Series. They have played well as a team, despite a few hiccups. I have three words for the former speaker, 'tourism is dead'. I have listened to her speech and everything that came out of it, all the vision and policy, are in the APNU/AFC 2015 Manifesto. I want to thank the Hon. Member very much for adding up those policies and guidelines that the Hon. Member's side has not seen. The Government is visionless about what it is about to do in 2022. Thank you very much for bringing that forward. The Hon. Member mentioned the tax regime; that we overtaxed the private sector and we are pressuring them. It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government that put on 16% VAT on the private Sector.

We are happy that the Government is recognising the policy and the rigid policy that the APNU/AFC Government had in its 2015 Manifesto. As I continue, *Budget 2022* is no different from the others. It is just that the total amount budgeted for has been increased as we have seen in *Budget 2020: Our plan for Prosperity* and *Budget 2021: A Path to Recovery*. We have never seen this impact: We have seen billions of dollars spent within our economy but, yet, cries from the poor are endless. Guess who will get that blame, 'Mr Flooding and Mr. COVID-19'. Our budgetary allocations keep increasing, this time by 44.3%. I just read a statement by the private sector saying

that this Budget is a balanced one. I want to tell the private sector that if the people do not have money in their pockets, it will be their businesses which will suffer.

Sir, if you look at the governance framework in Guyana, it could be considered very weak and fast approaching a tipping point towards collapse. We have seen that there is a continued absence of dialogue and engagement between Government and Opposition; a high level of dysfunction and distrust within the National Assembly; a suppression of freedom of speech with Government critics being arrested under the Cyber Crime Act of 2018; a heightened sense of ‘big brother’ as police actions have become overly aggressive and intolerant in recent times. Reference is made to the killing of Mr. Orin Boston in Essequeibo. Public procurement rules are being subverted and twisted to ensure certain companies receive major contracts with little or no track records. The Hon. Member just mentioned about corruption.

3.13 p.m.

I want to tell her that it is 18 months and the Public Procurement Commission is yet to establish itself. Do you know what happened during that period? Billions of dollars have been expended on contractors; persons who are not qualified for contracts. We are seeing the refusal of the Government to entertain and listen to alternative views. The most recent example is passage of the Natural Resource Fund Act, against the cries and demands of thousands of people.

The *Budget 2022* has seen the People’s Progressive Party enjoying the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) as many feared it would do. Nothing is left for generational savings. These planned withdrawals go against the Santiago Principles, which set out guidelines for how sovereign wealth funds should be managed. We have seen during the past 18 months that Guyana’s economy was managed very poorly. As a result, we have seen drastic declines in major sectors: gold by 14.8%; rice by 16.1%; sugar by 34.7%; and many others that my Colleagues will mention as they come along. But thanks to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change, that brought the petroleum sector onboard in 2016, which sought to have rescued this economy for 2022. We have seen most of the major non-oil sectors decline and the health sector, where the Coronavirus disease is spiralling is out of control, but yet, the APNU/AFC is getting the blame. If you look at all of their speeches, you would see that 50% of their writings and words are from the APNU/AFC. Thank you, for the promotion.

Sir, I would like to turn my attention to forestry. I am happy that the Hon. Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance spoke about the sustainability of the forestry sector that tries to keep the deforestation rate below 0.05. He also mentioned in his Budget speech that US\$137 million was left in the Guyana REDD Plus Investment Fund (GRIF) untouched, that came from the Norwegians. I want to remind the Hon. Minister that it was the forestry sector operators who contributed to the low rate of deforestation by practising sustainable forest management (SFM). It was the very forestry sector operators who were affected by the devastating flooding and severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, I am asking, how much money from the GRIF was given to the forestry sector operators for losses they have incurred? There are proposals that are sitting within the Project Management Office waiting for approval. Was anything ever given to the operators? To add, now that it has been established that the forestry sector is a major contributor to the economy, it would be beneficial for the populace to know that the forestry operators have not received anything. They have written to the Government for duty free fuel, spare parts, and duty free on double cab 4x4 pickups that would be safer to travel on the interior roads; nothing.

The Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) and all those involved in forestry need improved technology; less cost access to money; increased training to access foreign markets; the creation of downstream forest products; and other forms of assistance to manage the forest resources even better than we are doing now. The entire sector that has worked so hard to get us the current low deforestation rate gets no funds directly. We are calling for a revolving fund that would be a public private partnership. This will make a big difference to all of us, especially, the community loggers who have the toughest time getting needed credit.

We have seen billions of dollars being pumped into the sugar industry that continues to fail. Why the forestry sector cannot have \$2 billion, just a fraction of that what was given to Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo)? We have seen that even the gold sector has declined, as I mentioned before, due to bad interior roads; the same roads that affect the forestry operators. I must tell you, Sir, currently, trucks are refusing to go to Issano, the location where thousands of cubic meters are left. You cannot have trucks going there; they are refusing to go because of the bad roads. It must be noted, every year we are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on interior roads. Recommendations were made, again, as to the design and materials to be used on those roads that

could be easily drained, but nothing happened. I know that the drains were in for a very long haul, but proper planning with good timing could avoid many of these road issues. Additionally, in our time, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) was on top of its game, to ensure that the contractors who had a yearly maintenance contract, do their job.

Permit me to speak about the National Forest Inventory. The sum of \$250 million was mentioned by the Hon. Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Singh. This was supposed to be beneficial for the forestry stakeholders, in that, it would have reduced the cost of doing 100% of forest inventory that is borne by the forestry operators. If we look at the estimate under large concession which we need to inventorise – those inventory blocks – over/approximately 300 that would cause them \$120 million and the \$250 million that was used to do the National Forestry Inventory, that is less beneficial to the stakeholders, we could have done two years of 100% first inventory that would be beneficial for the forest operators and the Government – whereby they would use the same data to extrapolate the rate of deforestation and also the commercial species that is within that specified area.

If we look at the Log Export Policy, in 2018 the APNU/AFC Government made amendments to the Log Export Policy to have a third-party licence to export logs, that was mentioned by Hon Dr. Singh; that sees the volume of lesser used species increased. I must acknowledge the Hon. Vickram Bharat for implementing that amended Log Export Policy that sees the forestry sector now starting to recover. I hope that the recommendations I made here are taken on board.

Let us turn our attention to agriculture. The Hon. Minister spoke about the callous shutdown of sugar estates by the APNU/AFC, but I must remind him that it was the PPP/C who shut down the Diamond, La Bonne Intention (LBI) and Wales Sugar Estates that were on the verge to collapse. I remember when Mr. Sharma visited that estate during the workers' protest, he was thrown on the police truck and taken away, just because he was reporting the truth and facts about that sugar estate, lest we forgot. What the Hon. Member failed to tell the citizen of Guyana was that those estates they promised to reopen, will never happen.

We have heard that the Government plans to set up a factory at the Enmore Sugar Estate that will employ hundreds of workers, but were boasting in this very House that they will reopen the sugar estates. The same goes for the other estates like Rose Hall. The Hon. Vice President stated there

is no timeline for when this sugar estate will be opened. We have seen over \$26 billion already pumped into this industry and it still struggles to reach its target. Now, we have seen that the target is reduced to what they could probably manage. I would like to add, and let the public know, that when the APNU/AFC spoke about right sizing the sugar industry, this very Government said that we want to close the sugar industry down. But I am happy to see today that they now realize what we were saying. The APNU/AFC Government did an extensive study before it could make that decision, including consultations with Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU). The next speaker could attest to this.

I have listened to the Government lecturing and justifying the \$6 billion that has been allocated in this Budget which will, directly and indirectly, benefit tens of thousands of families. This right here is the proof of the Government's intention and objective of holding onto GuySuCo because of its support base. I rest my case.

Sir, if I could turn your attention to the Natural Resource Fund, it seems to be having a lot of attention lately. The repeal of this NRF Act is an act of treachery to our current and future generations. Only in 2019, the APNU/AFC had enacted this Bill and made it into the Laws of Guyana that oversees the management and accountability of the petroleum fund by the Guyanese people. The principle set out in the 2019 Act was one that established a principle of good governance. When you repeal an act that is two years old to suit a new political regime, it is called a betrayal. It is either the country is bankrupt, due to heavy spending beyond its capacity, or the government needs the money to cushion a huge deficit. We have seen this where the current Regime came here twice for subsidiary budgets. They miscalculate *Budget 2021* by 15%, a sum of over \$49 billion. This country is plunging further and further into debt. We will take decades to recover if we are ever to recover. All these are signals of what will happen to the petroleum fund if we have one set of persons directing the disbursement. The amendments to the current 2019 Act are heavily politicised.

With all that has been said, this is the resource curse and how to overcome it, because we have entered into the first stage of the resource curse that many economic and all other oil export persons in the world spoke about. I recall that the Government, in its first call to repeal this Bill, stated that too many powers lie in the hands of the finance Minister. But the word "Minister" refers to a minister of government that is in power. What is important here is the removal of the oversight

committee that the APNU/AFC installed in 2019 for Natural Resource Fund Act. Under Part III, Section 5 (1) states:

“there is established a committee to be known as the public Accountability and Oversight Committee.”

This committee comprises of the Government, Opposition, civil society organisations, religious organisations, youth groups, women groups, community organisations, the bar association, and we have put in what we call local democracy, something that the PPP/C Government do not know much about, by installing a representative ...

Mr. Speaker: I do not know if you know about this, but you are allocated 15 minutes, which has just expired, and you could get five minutes as an extension.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, I ask that five minutes be given to the Hon. Member.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you can proceed to conclude, you have five minutes more.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, we had put representatives from the 10 natural regions of Guyana. We had the media and accounting body on this committee. The APNU/AFC Government had a very diverse representation of the Guyanese people to overlook the Natural Resource Fund.

The absence of this body, while putting the power in a three-man committee that I referred to at the beginning, will take us down a path of no recovery. If you look just over the western borders of Venezuela, you will see what the resource curse has done to that country. It created humanitarian crises where Venezuelans are fleeing the country because hyperinflation rages and where the basic healthcare and food distribution failed. The country has become a haven for transnational criminals. The Government has become implicated in humanitarian abuses as it puts down demonstration. All these are because of the resource curse and the imposition of policies and resources of nationalism. If one set of people controls the Fund, Guyana will be no exception to these.

All these could be avoided if we use similar models like Norway, which has grown from the poorest to the wealthiest by investing in global growth. They have invested in 73 countries around the world. They have invested in 9,123 companies in those countries and have four additional investment areas within countries on equities, bonds, real estate, and infrastructure. They call it the pension fund. What we are doing here in Guyana is to privatise everything, where the moneys will only go to a few. Norway has put its people and country first over politics. Similarly, Qatar and United Arab Emirates (UAE) have done the same by putting the people first. We are putting friends and family first.

3.28 p.m.

This resource curse is not a prophecy, Sir; it is a warning to Guyana. We could overcome this through foresighted investment and smart policy. We could use this newfound wealth to build a secured, stable future for our people. Our oil wealth could make the country into a model for the rest of the Caribbean and South America, as stated by a known economist, not those economists who are paid – what we call intellectual mercenaries to say that our Natural Resource Bill is transparent.

Finally, Sir, if I could turn your attention to Region 4. I must put on record that there was no consultation done or recommendations from the councillors from the Opposition side in preparation of *Budget 2022*. It must be noted that this Region is being governed by the Opposition. This a deliberate attempt to control this Region and ignore the will of the people. Local democracy is dead. We have seen that the \$5 million Government subvention was removed from under the RDC and placed directly under the Ministry of Local Government where the NDCs are now being given a hard time to access this and directed by Ministry where to spend the moneys.

There are 17 NDCs in Region 4, and out of these three – Cane Grove, Haruni and Lamaha – are being given \$450,000 to help with administrative work. If you are speaking about one Guyana, democracy and equitable distribution of resources, why only these three local organs are given special treatment? Drainage in this region under the APNU/AFC was done by local personnel where the moneys will be circulating within the communities. From 2020 to 2022, this has been replaced by machinery with very high cost – almost triple – and now being cleaned twice yearly. Hence, you could not understand the reasons for flooding.

In conclusion, for us to have one Guyana we must work together, distributing the resources equally and stop discriminating our people. *Taak am and do am ah* two different thing. I thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member for effectively using your time. We now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Seepaul Narine, to make his presentation.

Mr. Narine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I commence my presentation by saying boldly that *Budget 2022* is yet another manifestation of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government's commitment to improve the wellbeing of the Guyanese people. It represents another step in fulfilling our commitments to the electorate. This budget is wide-ranging and I am convinced it has placed present and future generations of Guyanese at its centre. Undoubtedly, it demonstrates the PPP/C's unyielding commitment to unlock our country's potential and improve our peoples' lives. During these debates, I am sure we will hear much more. I dare say, given its scope, time will be insufficient to address all of what *Budget 2022* envisages. I am not worried about that, as the PPP/C Government is not one long on talk, but one focused on results.

In the delivering of improvements to our people, we, from this side of the House, are not like my Friends in the Coalition. We live up to our expectations and deliver on our promises. As a trade unionist, I pay keen attention to the improvements *Budget 2022* offers working people and their families. I can say without hesitation that our people have much to look forward to. Indeed, there are challenges, and there will always be, but *Budget 2022* tackles these challenges frontally bringing relieve to our people in many forms.

The Budget attempts to reduce the cost of living and, at the same time, improve workers disposable income. Given nowadays realities, these are needed and welcome initiatives. The hike in the income tax threshold to \$75,000 monthly represents a 15% jump. This improvement means that no worker at the public sector minimum wage will be required to pay taxes. I repeat, no worker, none at all, at the public sector minimum will pay taxes because of its Budget. This initiative alone puts \$1.3 billion in the pockets of our workers. I recognise for our workers who subscribe to life and medical insurance, these premiums are now exempted from income tax. This is a further \$1.1 billion in our people's pockets. For our ordinary people, their interest payment, accruing from their mother's

savings at the back, will now be exempted from withholding taxes. This is a testament of the Government's commitment to the ordinary working people.

In recent months, the question of cost of living has attracted much attention. The Budget noted these hikes were largely related to global circumstances; they are simply beyond our control. This did not daunt our Government. The PPP/C Government has developed innovative measures to mitigate the present-day realities. Such initiatives confirm where the heart of the Government lies. It is unlike what prevailed in the era of the Coalition, when everyone feared that new burdens would be placed on their backs. This budget is progressive. It is progressive, I emphasise. I am heartened to see sustained efforts being made to eliminate the legacy of burdens bequeathed by the Coalition when it was in office. This is a nature of a caring Government, one which has the interest of the people foremost.

The efforts of the Budget to continue to mitigate as best as possible the effects of the cost of living is indeed welcome. Extending the cost of freight adjustment is one such tangible measure. It demonstrates that though we remain a small developing country, caught in the throes of international crisis, we are making steadfast efforts to spare our people the effects. This is commendable and points to the caring nature of the Dr. Irfaan Ali led Administration. This should not surprise anyone. The PPP/C, whenever in office, has always sought to protect our people. I welcome the further reduction of the excise tax on fuel which seeks to bring further relief to our people. I certainly expect that these savings cost of billions of dollars will be transferred to our people. Indeed, it was with them in mind, I believe, the Government pursued these initiatives, and our people have a high expectation.

The establishment of farmers market is another notable feature of *Budget 2022*. These meetings of farmers and consumers are a win-win arrangement. I look forward to the early establishment of these markets which will bring reprieve to our beleaguered farmers and our exploited consumers. The restoration and now improvement in the schoolchild uniform grant allowance is yet another win for the Guyanese people. Through *Budget 2022* the aggregate sum jumps nearly 60% this year. It is a triumph for our children and their parents; it ensures more of our children get the support they require and deserve. The Budget went on proposing the distribution of tablets and flash drives to ensure that task of education is delivered and received by all. It was the Opposition, when they paraded the corridors of power, that snatched away the schoolchild grant, leaving our children

empty-handed. The nation must be reminded of this. I know the emphasis the Budget has placed on safeguarding the vulnerable and elderly. Certainly, improvements in both old age pension and public assistance, together with other initiatives of *Budget 2022* will help those in our society.

At this juncture, I recognise the efforts of the Government to assist those receiving dialysis. I have learnt of the hardships people in this situation are encountering. For Guyanese, this policy is simply commendable as it brings much relief. I commend the Government.

Budget 2022, I believe, has not missed any area of national life, every man, woman and child will gain from *Budget 2022*. This is the nature of the PPP/C, which ensures that development is all round, and no one is left out. Indeed, those who crafted *Budget 2022* had a difficult job, they had to balance today's challenges with tomorrow's opportunities. Indeed, despite formidable difficulties I am of the view that they did a remarkable job. *Budget 2022*, while keeping an eye on today, has laid the framework for a sound tomorrow. We should all be excited for what this next chapter of national development brings. Our young people, our next generations of Guyanese, have a lot to look forward to.

Speaking about young people, I recognise significant sums earmarked for training of our youth to take up opportunities in the oil and gas sector. These opportunities come as the implementation of the Local Content Act commences. That Act, I contend, represents a significant win for our Guyanese workers and ensures that they rightly benefit from our natural wealth. It also seeks to right the wrongs of the lopsided agreement signed by the Coalition Government – my Friends on the other side of the House. The new legislation opens many doors of opportunities and, together with the Government training programs, many of our young and not so young people will further contribute to the development of our great nation. I recognise that is not all. Our people, now more than ever, have opportunities to become highly qualified. Indeed, this is in keeping with the objective of maturing [inaudible] Guyanese develop Guyana. The Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) program alone is providing opportunities to thousands of Guyanese. Undoubtedly, many of the naysayers who had labelled such an initiative as a pipe dream are now surely embarrassed.

3.43 p.m.

As I said earlier, the PPP/C Government and its Party are focused on results and not idle chatter. As someone who has been connected to the sugar industry, for a long time, my contribution to this debate would be incomplete, should I not spend a few moments to address the developments in the industry. Just last Saturday, I saw our Colleague, the newly elected Chairman of the PNC/R, the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, reportedly contending that the industry requires a broader assessment. I felt that my sight had deceived me, when the PNC/R was in Office it said then that it had no time for that sort of examination. It said that those who wanted such examination should do it themselves. I was there; I heard it with my ears. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, was also there.

To educate my young Colleague, the assessment that the Hon. Member touted has already been completed and is publicly available. *The Study of the socio-economic impact of the closure of GUYSUICO sugar estates on sugar workers in Guyana*, supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) concluded:

“A key overarching factor that played a very important part in the livelihoods of laid-off persons and their communities, and in the prospects that they had after the closures, was the sheer dominance of the sugar estate in the economy of the communities that surrounded each estate. The incomes, the rhythm of life of individuals and the communities, the aspirations of families, the opportunities that existed for alternative employment, the types and successes of business ventures, the services available in the community – every single thing seemed to depend on the functioning of sugar estates. Ostensibly, if a sugar estate were to close, its effects would be not just be felt on the livelihoods of immediate workers and their families, but it would affect the entire community.”

I saw, not unexpectedly, the Coalition in its usual partisan self, denouncing the Government's continued support to the industry. At the press conference, last Friday, they said the moneys should be used to retrain workers to move out of the sugar industry. They should be the last to talk after they heartlessly closed the estates and put more than 7,000 workers on the breadline. They trained just 130 workers and 67 that is less than two per cent of those they sent home. The Hon. Members from the Coalition are talking about retraining. Our Friends on the other side, except the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, of course, continue to charge that the industry is not moving forward. Had the Hon. Members decided to show up last Wednesday when the Budget was being

read, they could have been washed in the fountain of wisdom and avoid putting their feet in their mouths. Had they been present, they would have known that sugar is on an upward trend.

Mr. Speaker: You have reached your time allocated. You will need five minutes to continue that upward trend.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, may I ask your permission for the Hon. Member, to be given five minutes?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, thank you. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Mr. Narine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They would have learned that efforts to repair the damage they inflicted, while in Office, have seen the industry reducing its annual losses. When they were in Office, they continued to be irresponsible with our people's business. Much of what is being done in the sugar industry today was told to the Coalition when they were in power. Myopically, like many other areas of national life, they chose to ignore genuine advice. Emphatically, I must say that under the PPP/C Government, sugar has a bright and secure future. Continued investment, by the Government, will bring the industry initially back to breakeven and eventually to profitability. Unlike the Coalition that is known for tearing down, the PPP/C is known for building up stronger and better.

I conclude by commending the Government on what clearly is an impressive budget. Undoubtedly, it is the product of the collective efforts of the entire Government. I also wish to express congratulations to my Colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his team at the Ministry of Finance, who must have spent many hours to refine and fine-tune *Budget 2022*. Indeed, *Budget 2022* will consolidate our gains, bring us closer to our ambitions and build a stronger Guyana for all of us. Mr. Speaker, I commend *Budget 2022*. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Narine. I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Ronald Cox, to make his presentation.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise this afternoon to make my contributions to *Budget 2022*, first of all, permit me to express New Year greetings to all Members of this honourable

House and all Guyanese. I trust that this year will continue to be one where we encourage each other in this honourable House to be of fairness and impartiality.

Mr. Speaker, before I commence my actual contribution to *Budget 2022*, I want to respond to a few things said before by a few speakers who spoke before me. The Hon. Minister, Ms. Oneidge Waldron, in her presentation, was very proud to condemn what she called ‘corrupt practices and dishonesty of the Coalition while in Government’. I wish to remind the Hon. Minister that it was her who sat here in this National Assembly and held a Holy Book to swear in contradiction of our constitutional mandate. Additionally, it was the same APNU/AFC who kept the Hon. Member, as a public servant, to work for the Government and, in her doing so, she stymied the work of the Coalition as a public servant.

Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister Ms. Teixeira, you have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: Under Standing Order 40, the Member is imputing on the image and reputation of the Member which is totally in order in this House. The reading of *The Bible* has nothing to do with what is being said. The Member is out of order, Sir and he should be warned about it.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am sure you are crafty enough to be able to say what you want to say in a more parliamentary language.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am, like all other Members of this honourable House, guided by you. Thank you.

Budget 2022 presented under the theme: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building One Guyana* has much promise and expectations from the people of Guyana, coming against a myriad of problems outlined by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Foremost amongst these problems are Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the discomfort associated with the numerous variants, not only in Guyana but globally.

Secondly, there is the rise in food prices and the inflationary pressure associated with the rise that rendered some households impotent in their capacity to make ends meet and to provide a basic meal for families. It is with this in mind that I call on the Government to consider, more

importantly, measures that will see the working class having more disposable income to cater for their every need. It is by no accident that the citizens of this country looked forward with much anticipation to *Budget 2022*. I can tell because, after the reading of the Budget, I met with some Members who I consider to be ordinary working-class people and they are disappointed that *Budget 2022* lacks the vision as the ordinary man sees it. It may have a vision as some of my Colleagues on the other side of this National Assembly has so much posited, but the question is: is it really beneficial to the working class who are Guyanese? Those are the ones we must be responsible for meeting and answering their questions.

I wish to turn my attention to education at the regional level. First of all, the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) initiative is no doubt a programme that we should welcome and it must be commendable. What is not commendable is the manner in which the implementation and the application process are being done. The discriminatory nature is what we are against. We call on the Ministry to ensure that things are put in place and persons are given the equal opportunities. As the Government would boldly say 'One Guyana'. If we continue with a discriminatory nature, then we are not promoting, One Guyana. Certainly, the people of the Indigenous regions are at a disadvantage.

Mr. Speaker, since you mentioned the 1,000 or 2,000, I will address the issue immediately. This Government boasts, in 2021 the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance claimed that the Government expended a total of \$115.6 million towards the training of 420 Community Support Officers. This figure represents an approximate total of \$275,238 for each individual trained. The same Minister, notwithstanding the increases in the cost of transportation and other factors, is proposing to this very House that the Government will be training 4650 CSOs for a cost of \$60 million or \$92,300 for every individual.

3.58 p.m.

Paragraphs 4.195 and 4.196 of the *Budget Speech* clearly speaks that. The expectation is that there would have been *a light at the end of the tunnel* but, we question, how could one be budgeting less to trade more when one should be budgeting more to train more? What exactly is being done to our Indigenous brothers and sisters? I also recognised that computers and tablets would be given to teachers and students in schools. The question is, these predownloaded devices, how effective

will that be when almost all homes in remote regions of Guyana lack electricity and, of course, internet access? This Administration boasts about Information Communication Technology (ICT) but, yet, we are to witness a much needed change in the technologically disadvantaged communities in Guyana. I call on this Government to effectively monitor the implementations of policies in the remote areas. I am not condemning the policies outlined in the Budget. I am saying that the policies do not effectively address the needs of those who are at a disadvantage and here I am speaking of our Indigenous communities. I trust that the Minister of Amerindian Affairs will try to convince us otherwise when her time comes to speak.

Since this Government boasts about their love for the CSO programme, it was the APNU/AFC Coalition who increased the stipend for the CSOs from \$20,000 to \$30,000 while in Government. Three budgets after, this present Administration failed to increase it by five dollars and yet they claim their love for the Ingenious people of Guyana. I call on the Ministry and the Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, to quickly address this much needed issue. I know that the Toshaos have also been calling for an increase in their stipend. Imagine, the Toshaos who have to supervise the CSOs are receiving the same stipend equivalent to the CSOs. This is the biggest budget when oil is what everyone is talking about. In the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall's, pronunciation 'I-le' and, yet, they cannot seem to increase these hard-working Indigenous brothers and sisters stipend. That is not good.

The expectation is that there would have been some sort of relief as the Guyanese people look forward to what we call the biggest budget. Having sat in this House for almost five hours listening to the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance – I do not know why they just do not name him the Minister and done or the assistant to the real Minister – Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, outlying the Government's plan and programme for Fiscal Year 2022, I am amused at the aloofness and contempt for the small working class exhibited in this Government's approaches, especially at a time when cost of living and difficulties in attaining basic needs are rampant. It goes without saying that if the people have a problem, we in this honourable House, as representatives of the people, should find a solution to the people's problem and that is what we need to do. Having said this, I call on the Government to consider at least a 10% increase in the salaries of all public servants – all public servants. I do not wish to remind my

fellow teachers about the Ministry of Education and its laziness in actually engaging the Guyana Teacher's Union (GTU) to address this salary issue.

This brings me to a number of questions that I would like to ask the Government. Is this Government serious about progress? Is this Government serious about real development? Even more fundamental, is this the caring Government who we have been bombarded by the media and in the media? I would like to believe so but the evidence does not convince me. Indigenous and Hinterland Development – I wish to turn my attention to health. Last year, we called on the Government to make provisions for improved access to healthcare. I am pleased this year to say that after my request last year, Imbotero will now have a health hub for the first time in the history of the Community [**An. Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible)*]. You were there for 23 years and you did not do it. Do you expect the Coalition to do it in three to four years? For you to do it now, after 28 years, is obviously welcoming.

Before we go on, I want to speak a bit about what is happening in the region. The Mabaruma Regional Hospital is being upgraded to what we call a smart facility. I spoke to some patients, just last week, [**An. Hon. Member (Government):** You cannot go there.] I heard remarks that I cannot go there but I do not want to go there and a lot of persons do not want to go there because it is smart in a sense that the services are not smart but the people who are working there are smart. They are the ones who are bring smart because if one goes there, one has to spend all day and cannot access friendly services. The question is, 'where is the smartness'? This is what we call failing competence. I am not blaming Central Government here; I am not blaming you, on the opposite side here, for your non-intervention in actually addressing the issue in the region. That is what I am blaming you for.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please, how you blame me, but I would want to give you five minutes if someone would move a motion?

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I so move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Please, look again who you are blaming.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Do I have to address the Hon. Members through you?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Cox: Thank you. The much talked about COVID-19 pandemic and the management in the region, recently, I recognised that the Hon. Minister of Health was on record saying that people are fetching their dead relatives are not true. I want to remind the Hon. Minister of Health that in a previous article, he apologised to the families after fetching the dead child. How could the Hon. Minister contradict himself by saying that it did not happen and it is not true? It is true; the evidence is there. He apologised and we welcome the apology anyway. After that, there were instances where persons were fetching – not their dead relatives this time – the caskets to put their dead relatives in.

I want to touch on another scenario when a patient died after reporting to the Mabaruma Regional Smart Hospital with a blood count of five. The patient was kept there for two more days – a blood count of five is emergency – medevac – and, eventually, the person died just because of negligence.

Public Works – I wish to thank the Government, again, because in their Budget this year \$25 million is budgeted for road works in Matthews Ridge. I am not pleased that a community that is engaged in large scale mining. The sum of \$25 million is a drop in the ocean. What could be done with \$25 million for roads in Pork Kaituma and Matthews Ridge? It was under APNU/AFC that one could have taken 30 minutes from Port Kaituma to Matthews Ridge or 45 minutes to Baramita. One could go there now and take three to four hours because it is back to the state it was pre-2015, Hon. Minister Mr. Dharamlall. You are the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, nice words.

In closing, I am proposing to the Ministry of Education that provisions should be made for all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) for teachers who are living in far-flung communities just as is done for the departments of health and public works. The cost of transportation for these teachers is way more than half of their salaries and provision like those will greatly assist them, so I am calling on the Hon. Minister to make that intervention. Another intervention I wish for is access to internet for teachers who are now online at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) training programme. The online programme is also good. I have a lot of teachers at my school who are on the programme. What is not good is that they have no access to the internet and they have to use their

personal data which is roughly \$5,400 weekly. Do the mathematics. When you boast about a policy, you have to look at the disadvantages as well. Do not just boast about the commitment from the person who were actually engaged in your programme. They are making these sacrifices more than you on the Government's side.

Budget 2022, though it may not be the best, there are things which certainly a few or a minority welcome and those are the private sector. The private sector would benefit a lot. They welcome *Budget 2022* as is, obviously a repayment for them and an intervention in your campaign strategies before. I want to call on you to actually let *Budget 2022* reflect a representation for the working class like all other Guyanese who if you go on their *Facebook* pages, you will recognise that they are not pleased that *Budget 2022* has not really met their expectations. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, to make her presentation.

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contributions to *Budget 2022*. *Budget 2022* is under the caption: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. Before I address *Budget 2022*, I wish to make a few comments.

4.13 p.m.

I listened, this morning, to the first speaker the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir. The speaker said:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

I totally agree with that. I am saying that I agree with that because the APNU/AFC had no vision – no vision. From 2015 to 2020, the people perished. The people perished. As we walk around now, people are talking a different language. They are saying that they are glad that the People's Progressive Party/Civic has returned to Office. They are glad. They listened to the 2022 Budget. Just a few days ago, during the debate, one Hon. Member on the Opposition's side said that we are going too fast, *mash we brakes*. I remember that clearly, *mash we brakes*. Today, the Hon. Member said that we can do so much more. The first speaker said that we can do so much more and that we can do it now. We are trying to do so much more and we are trying to do it now, with *Budget 2022*. That is what we are trying to do.

There were so much that has been said. The first speaker said that numbers do not tell lie. I agree; numbers do not tell lie. The APNU/AFC fired 1,976 of our young Amerindian people – numbers do not tell lie. The \$10,000 were taken away from the children – numbers do not tell lie. There were over 5,000 sugar workers left jobless – numbers do not tell lie. The \$US18 million cannot be accounted for – Where is it? – numbers do not tell lie. According to the Report of the Auditor General 2017, \$65 million cannot be accounted for in the Ministry of Indigenous People’s Affairs – numbers do not tell lie. Now, they are telling us and scolding us, we, this Government, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, under the leadership of His Excellency, Dr. Irfaan Ali, on all sorts of things about *Budget 2022*. What we are trying to do is we are repairing the damages that they have done to this country. That is what we are doing, repairing the damages that were done to this Guyana.

What we are trying to do is what we are saying ‘One Guyana’. Our motto is: *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. We are saying that we want a ‘One Guyana’ and we are saying that we are going to be ‘Steadfast Against All Challenges – All Challenges so, bring the ‘Challenges’. We are going to be Steadfast, bring the ‘Challenges’. We are going to be ‘Resolute In Building Our One Guyana’. This includes everyone, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. We are going to do it under the leadership of His Excellency. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic is back in the driving seat and we will do it. There were all of the talks about poverty and that we were living in a nightmare. Yes, we were living in a nightmare and we are waking up now. We are waking up and, I guess, the Members on the opposite side of the House just came out of their slumber.

Mr. Speaker, do you know something? I saw my Colleague had the 2015 manifesto. I was supposed to bring it but I forgot. In 2015, they had all the answers in their manifesto, but when they got into Office, they forgot. Now, I sit here and I listen about how we could do so much now; this is what they can do, if they were there; and that they will be back, but they will remain there. They will remain there and we will listen to them. Yes, we will listen to them.

I remember the slogan ‘a good life for all Guyanese’ that was said by the APNU/AFC. What was not said was that you would have the ‘good life’ but under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. That is what we are trying to do. With *Budget 2022*, we are trying to bring the ‘good life’ to the people, the ordinary people – peoples are included. Regarding the whole talk about this is a private sector budget, we have to understand that the private sector is important. Every Guyanese is

important to the development of this country. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Okay. Suddenly, the Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, knows all about the Community Support Officers (CSOs) and Amerindian villages. I would like to say to Mr. Holder while \$30,000 per month may not be much for us or for him, \$30,000 means a lot when one is in a village. Again, I would like to say that \$30,000 was taken away from the people. It was taken away by the APNU/AFC. How are they to cry now and say that it is not enough? Of course, we are looking to see, in the future, how we could put something else to it. We are trying to extend now to have some more. There are 500 more young people who would now receive \$30,000. What should we do, increase the salaries or the wages on those who we have and leave out 500? No. We spread it so that more people could benefit. That is common sense.

There is all of the talk about the Amerindians, poverty and what not in the 2022 Budget I wish to say that we will benefit from every sector. My people, the villagers, the local people and the ordinary people will benefit. In the APNU/AFC's manifesto in 2015, they promised to address the Amerindian land titling issue and they promised to do it in keeping with international standards. I guess when they got there, they forgot what international standards were. They forgot what was said. However, on return to Office, the People's Progressive Party/Civic had started to address those issues. As we stand here today, in five villages, from 2020 to a few days ago, those land issues were already addressed. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to read. In *Budget 2022*, under Amerindian and Hinterland Development on page 65, paragraph 4.192 states:

“We are committed to ensuring that Amerindian and hinterland villages are economically empowered, first and foremost through the land titling programme and secondly through development of the village economy. We are also committed to ensuring that all of the country's best educational and training opportunities are as available to our hinterland brothers and sisters as they are to those on the coast. And, we are committed to ensuring that the quality of social services delivered to all villages is improved markedly.”

There is the word “commitment”. We are committed to do these things to address the outstanding land titling and demarcation. We are committed to do that and it will be done because it has already started. This Government will continue and not promise, as was done by the APNU/AFC – promises and more promises. They have failed and when one fails one sits in the back bench. Village economy – we do not live in the past. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] No. We do not live

in the past. We look at mistakes; we move on; and we do better in the future. That is exactly what this Government is going to do.

Education – We are going to... I must not say ‘we are going to’, because we have started. Many of the young people in our villages are already part of the GOAL programme. I would like to say that in my village, through internet service in this COVID-19 environment, nine of our young people can stay in the village and do their courses at the University of Guyana (UG). That is development; that is moving forward. They will be coming to a close in September and I am quite sure that they will be graduating with honours. What does one call that? Development, moving forward, empowerment; that is what you call it. [**An Hon. Member:** ‘Steadfast’.] Yes, ‘Steadfast and Resolute’.

In building the village economy, we are committed. Programmes have started and we will continue economic progress in our villages. We will not be left behind. We have seen it; the same opportunities on the Coastland are now taken to the Hinterland. We will further develop with a special focus on the young people and on the youths, training in every field. You have heard from the Hon. Minister, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, this morning that those training will be going to the villages. Is that not development? Is that staying behind? That is giving the Indigenous people equal opportunities for all. We are committed to ensure that quality social services are delivered. This is what the PPP/C is all about, our Government. No longer will we be left behind. Let me turn my attention to agriculture and food security. When we talk about agriculture, we have lands. Amerindian and hinterland development...

4.28 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, one would need an extension to tell us about that.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for your permission to allow the Hon. Member to speak for five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: The Amerindian and hinterland development will now be supported. Livestock and hinterland communities are expected to be delivered. We would be part of the livestock rearing, the aquaculture and the new venture such as the soya beans. There is a bright future for us because we have land at our disposal. We have land. There is a budgeted sum in the 2022 Budget to address hinterland development. We are not going to stay behind. Under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, we are going to progress. Under the programme where there was no equipment, we would also benefit. We have benefited before, and those benefits will increase in the form of tractor, other implements, plants and fertilisers, if needed. We will benefit from those programmes and projects. These are exciting times.

Agro-processing—we will also venture into new areas. Agriculture—we have the land and now we have a government that cares about the Indigenous peoples, and it will expand every area possible so that real development could come to our Indigenous peoples.

Education – as I said before, we are part of the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) project, we have also developed our schools and our children are more comfortable. Even in this Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19) environment, special care has been given to ensure that our children's safety comes first. As we debate *Budget 2022*, there is so much that we would benefit from as a people. There is so much. I want to say, we are looking forward to greater heights and we are looking forward to moving up economically.

In the area of health. We also would be benefiting from more health facilities in our villages and there are a number of other benefits that I could go on and on about. However, I would like to say on behalf of the Indigenous peoples of this country, we will move forward, and we will experience what real development is all about. In the field of education, agriculture, social services and in every area, we will benefit.

We say thank you to His Excellency, Dr. Irfaan Ali, and we will be part of all the future developments. To our friends on the other side, we are extending a hand. Come on board, let us work together and let us move Guyana forward. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause.*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Opposition Chief Whip, the Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones to make his presentation.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, my good, Sir. Comrade Speaker, let me quickly respond to the immediate past speaker who mentioned the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) did not bring a budget to the House. I want to remind the Hon. Member, that after the passage of the no confidence motion in December, 2018, the Coalition Government could not bring another budget to this House. As well as, the Hon. Member, Ms. Oneidge Walrond who stated:

“...we only give moneys to 1,000 citizens...”

Sir, it was as a direct result of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) refusal to come to the National Assembly to give support to the Government of the day, so it could enact an emergency fund to provide same. The blame needs to be laid squarely on the feet of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

Budget 2022 – ‘disrespectful’ is the word I want to use. I am grateful for the opportunity provided to me by the Members and supporters of the APNU/AFC who went out to the polls back in 2020 and placed their confidence in the Coalition Government because they too are of the firm belief that inclusionary democracy is the way to go. For that, I commend the Hon. Members of the APNU/AFC, the AFC, the People’s National Congress Reform (PNCR) the Working People’s Alliance (WPA), the Guyana Action Party (GAP) and the National Front Alliance (NFA).

Budget 2022 that before this House is the largest budget totalling \$552 billion under the questionable theme: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*, whatever ‘Our One Guyana’ means. Sir, in actual retrospect, this means, steadfast against all who are not PPP resolutely in building Pradoville No. 4, and giving to our friends, contracts while the average Guyanese suffer, also known as (aka), a disrespectful budget.

Comrade Speaker, let me say off the bat that *Budget 2022* is disrespectful to the intelligence of the Guyanese people. Sometimes in life, more is not always more. *Budget 2022*, which increases government spending by more than 40%, will only add to the current steady rise in the cost of living on poor Guyanese. This budget is full of big, bold promises and spending, but it is very obvious how little it caters for to the working and the poor Guyanese of this country. Given that, this will be the first budget to directly include oil revenue and we are deeply disappointed in how

these self-proclaimed builders of Guyana have once again showed utter disregard for the average Guyanese, hiding behind fancy rhetoric, baseless projects and in a plan of utter untruths.

It is very obvious, that this is another budget for the boys. How could it be that in a fast growing country in the world, the tax threshold has only increased from \$65,000 to \$75,000, which is only \$2,800 more in the hands of some of the lowest income workers? It is disrespectful. The People's National Congress Reform advocated that it moves from \$65,000 to \$125,000. This means workers making \$125,000 would have \$17,400 more in their pockets and not a paltry \$2,800. If prices on some food items are doubling, should the tax threshold not respond to this? It was in this same House where an Hon. Member stated *they know what they know, and what they do not know, we seek expert advice.*

However, based on its performances, it is evident that even its experts do not know what the Government is doing, which is no surprise to us on this side of the House. This one initiative would have helped so many working, poor, and young people, by ensuring they have more money directly in their hands. The nation is getting richer, but the people are getting poorer. This same neglect is reflected in the way the budget deals with the University of Guyana (UoG) students. How can it be in a budget that has massively increased, the funding for the University of Guyana has remained almost the same and in the middle of a pandemic too. In fact, the nation is spending a far smaller portion of the budget on the University now, while it is trying to distract us with the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship.

A university degree is vital for so many of our youth. Let us not close this opportunity for lower income families, who may not even be able to take out a loan. The APNU/AFC calls once more for the University of Guyana to be made free, immediately, and for students to receive a stipend which could assist with expenses such as internet, accommodation and travelling. We must stand up for the nation's youth. It was during the elections campaign that we saw on almost every lamp post across this country, scrolls reading '50% increase in wages and salaries', but apparently, it was a figment of our imagination. We were told by an Hon. Member of this House that it was photoshopped. We rather suspect in the near future, we will be told that the one that read, 'the University of Guyana will be free', was a typographical (typo) error.

Sir, when one contrast this with the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), with yet another billion-dollar pay out to GuySuCo where production targets have been cut by almost a third... Does the PPP/C intend to lay off a third of the workforce or cut GuySuCo pay by a third? We think not. How can that industry produce less and less, but more and more funds are thrown at it? How can we do this while not honouring our constitutional duty to the university students, who are entitled to an education? I say again as I did many times in this House, that once is an accident, twice is a coincidence, but three times is downright disrespect. In *Budget 2020*, it did not address the increase in salaries for public servants. *Budget 2021* did not address the increase for public servants. *Budget 2022*, the largest budget ever, and to use the words of the Hon. Member, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall, ‘*how the country got hoil*’, and yet still not an increase to public servants.

This budget is disrespectful to the pensioners of this country. These are the men and women of whom shoulders we stand on here today. These are the people who laid the foundation of this country, but this Administration, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic in the largest budget ever could only allocate to our pensioners, a paltry \$3,000. It is disrespectful and to take into consideration, the honourable pensioners in this House, the Hon. Member, Mr. Robeson Benn, the Hon. Member, Mr. Mark Philipps and the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira. How could we do that to them who have been in the field and in the forefront for years? Sir, but you see this increase...

Mr. Speaker: You left out the Hon. Speaker.

Mr. Jones: Well, Sir I do not think you may like what comes next, but I recognise you too as well. The honourable pensioners of this House will have no issue with \$3,000 being given to them because the People’s Progressive Party/Civic pensioners, on that side of the House, live in a bubble completely oblivious to the plight of the pensioners of this country. The Public Servants—my good Sir, *Budget 2022* is most most disrespectful to the intelligence of the public servants of this country.

4.43 p.m.

One would feel that there would be adequate compensation, but year after year, budget after budget, nothing upon nothing in it for them, and you ask the question, what have the public servants done? What have the police men and women and the soldiers of this country done to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic? Three successive budgets and no allocation to the public servants of this

country. What have they done? In the Hon. Minister's presentation to this House, the Hon. Ashni Kumar Singh, stated on page 14:

“Mr. Speaker, our Government remains firmly committed to improving the lives and livelihoods of all Guyanese. In 2021, a 7 per cent across the board increase was paid to over 50,000 public servants...”

The Hon. Member is speaking about 2021. This is equivalent to a husband and wife or a couple in a relationship, and today happens to be the wife's birthday, and the husband says to the wife, *babes you know last year when it was your birthday, I took you to Cheese Please, or babes you know last year when it was your birthday, I told you I love you.* That is essentially what the People's Progressive Party/Civic is saying to the public servants of this country. It gave you 7% last year, this year, you are good enough, take what you got and shut up. That is essentially what the Government is saying to the public servants of this country, and it is disrespectful.

Comrade Speaker, we quickly move to youth. *Budget 2022* is most disrespectful to the youths of this country. On page 61 of the budget speech the Hon. Minister stated:

“...the estimated size of the 14-35 years age cohort is 280,501, over 36 per cent of our population.”

He further stated:

“...we have budgeted a sum of \$841.3 million for 2022.”

This sum allocated for youths of this country is a paltry sum. In reality, it is a sad excuse for an allocation. We could do better than \$845.1 million for the workers. In fact, when one does the division, this \$841.1 million divided by 280,501 is a meager \$2,900 that the People's Progressive Party/Civic is giving to every youth in this country. It is gross disrespect in an oil producing country. According to the Hon. Member, Nigel Dharamlall, we got *hoil*. This amount could barely give one two Bar-B-Que tickets from Odessa Primus, who would be having a Bar-B-Que on Sunday in 'B' Field Sophia. That is all one could get from this sum. I do not blame the Hon. Member, Ashni Singh, he is the mere messenger, I blame the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, who is absent in the House today. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Charles Ramson Jr, time and a time again has proven his...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, one has to be careful these days when one ascribes presence and absence because he is on virtually.

Mr. Jones: My apologies to the honourable gentleman. Hello, Charles. The Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson Jr, time and a time again has proven his unpreparedness for his position. Two years and nothing worthwhile has come out of the ministry since his installation. Instead, what we have seen is *lef lef* leftover projects. For example, the multi-purpose sports facilities in regions 2, 6 and 10 are *lef lef* projects; the community ground enhancement, it was under the APNU/AFC Government that the figure moved from \$1 million per ground to \$5, \$10, and \$14 million dollars respectively to the community ground, another *lef lef* project; the works currently on going at the gymnasium on Mandela Avenue is another *lef lef* project; and of course, the National Cultural Centre (NCC) seats is another *lef lef* project. The Hon. Minister have to be very careful because he may soon be dubbed the ‘Minister of *lef lef*’.

What has happened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson Jr, much touted sports policy? What has happened to the youth policy? What has happened to the cultural policy? We see the honourable gentleman and hear him so often on television and radio touting these things, but they are all nothing more than fluff. The proof of the pudding is in the eating and now there is nothing to show for his two years in the seat as Minister of Culture Youth and Sports. I want to stick this in quickly, they say you must give *Jack his jacket, and Priya her skirt*, not the Hon. Member, Priya Manickchand, but you must give *Jack his jacket*.

The Government has appointed several young ministers, and we give recognition where it is due, we see these young ministers out and about, putting forward policy after policy. We may not agree with their policy, but we give them an ‘e’ for effort however, when it comes to the Hon. Member, Charles Ramson Jr, all we see is Gucci photos being taken on Facebook, and not what is...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would have to give you ‘t’ for time. Someone needs to move an extension for you.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Speaker, I move for the Member to be given an extension of five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Chief Whip, you may continue.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, my good, Sir. One has not seen any of this coming out of the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports, which is one of the most vital ministries of any country. I call on the Hon. Vice President to take the necessary action. Bring back the Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira and the Hon. Member Dr. Anthony, because I could attest to the documents, I have seen in the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports under their stewardship.

One would believe that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports... We may have to rename that Ministry to concerts and football, because it appears that is the only thing the honourable gentleman knows of. Perhaps, we may need to rename it, the Ministry of Concerts, Kashif & Shanghai. The sad reality is that we have an empty front man at the helm of one of the most important ministries in the country, but unlike what we have seen coming from his Colleagues, he leaves much to be desired.

It would appear that the Hon. Prime Minister took the Hon. Member, Charles Ramson to Camp Ayanganna, but it appears the only thing the honourable gentleman learnt, is how to mark time, left, right, left, right in the government boots. It appears as well that he has taken the Hon. Member Oneidge Walrond there too, because they sound like a broken record when they come to this House. Budget presentation after budget presentation, and this is what they put to this House, during 2020, the APNU/AFC and recount, elections and so forth. We are in the second year, get on with the business of the work that has to be done in your respective ministries.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. I have in my hands the two budget presentations as presented by the Hon. Member, Charles Ramson Jr., and when one read these two documents for the years 2021 and 2020, it has nothing about policy development for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. All it speaks of is the APNU/AFC. I think in this document, I see the former Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), his name is listed here more often than one sees policies for culture, youth and sports. Unfortunately, it is a waste of time, and it must be corrected. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports is one of the most important ministries, and if the Hon. Minister cannot '*do de wuk*' as we would say, he would need to take a back seat. We, in the APNU/AFC, hereby recommend that the Hon. Minister Charles Ramson, be removed from the Ministry and placed with someone who has the competence to lead the Ministry.

In closing, Article 13 of the *Constitution of Guyana*... This has been repeated *ad nauseum*, speaker after speaker and budget after budget. I could take Members all the way back to when the Hon. Member Winston Murray and Deryck Bernard were in this House and they kept pleading with the then People's Progressive Party/Civic in office that it needs to ensure that aspect of constitutional objections. Article 13 speaks about every person having that right to be consulted. We on this side of the House represent 50% of the population and we must be part of a consultative process in putting together this budget. The government has every right—if we supply it with 10 pages—to disregard it, thereafter. Then, it would have the benefit of saying that it consulted and give us the opportunity to provide to it....

When it comes to the resources of oil, none of us in this House have the experience, but combined, we would be able to put together policies that would push the developmental process of this country forward. At the end of the day, when we leave these chambers, each and every single one of us are Guyanese. We are not PPP, APNU/AFC, PNC and so forth, and that is why it is important. Once again, I call on the People's Progressive Party/Civic to allow Article 13 of the Constitution to be enacted. We are a young nation, we have found oil, and let us ensure that the resources from that goes to every single Guyanese, irrespective of ethnicity and irrespective of their political persuasion.

Cde. Speaker, unfortunately, I cannot support *Budget 2022* in its current form. As I mentioned before, in my interpretation, it is most disrespectful to the intelligence of the Guyanese people. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones. I now call on the Hon. Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister, Mr. Kwame McCoy, to make his presentation.

Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister [Mr. McCoy]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, what we have witnessed, so far in the budget debates, generally and specifically is a manifestation of a group of people who are badly bruised, battered and brutalised. Certainly, the 2020 general elections have created traumatic experiences for the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), who was booted out of office. What you have secured as a result of that experience is a brain concussion or aneurysm and it is all showing up here in the presentations that we have witnessed so far in the 2022 budget debates.

I heard the last speaker, the Hon. Christopher Jones...It is about the group who tends to play on these sounding words that is *oh* the budget is disrespectful to people, *oh* the budget did not do this and *oh* the budget did not do that.

4.58 p.m.

However, moneys that were budgeted for the peoples' welfare and development in this country, that very Hon. Member under the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) Programme ended up with portions of that money for himself, along with many others on that side and that is what is disrespectful. It is disrespectful and one must wonder what did the soldiers and the police do to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) that it withdrew from them the one-month tax free bonus that they were getting for so many years under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. It is approximately \$3,000 on the tax threshold multiplied by 12 months for the entire year. It is another effort to put more disposable income in the hands of people across Guyana.

We had done it; we are doing it and every single measure adds up to more money for people in their pockets. It is not just about a tax threshold increase. It is also about all the other measures. It is about what we have done in the first place, in our first budget cycle of 2020 – remove those 200 burdensome taxes that the Opposition placed on the backs of poor people in this country. We removed them and freed up more disposable income for people. What we have done in our measures was to make sure that we pay attention to what were the hardships faced by the people of this country. From 2020, we have given the cash grant for every household. We have given back to our pensioners, by restoring the water subsidy and electricity subsidy. We made moneys available and if the Opposition forgot Public Servants, at the end of the year, were given moneys too.

In 2021, and like we would do in 2022, is pay attention to the welfare of the people in this country. We love people and we love every single Guyanese in this country. We have demonstrated that since coming into office in 2020. We have demonstrated through an abiding love for people because every measure that one sees in these budgets that we have put forward so far, is about people. It is not about making any one of us on this end rich. It is about making our people's lives better, how we put food on their tables, how do we help their children go to school, how we help

them to build a house, how do we help them with a university education and how do we help them with an online education. That is what it is all about. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** How?] I will tell you how. In this country we have to recognise that development is not anything magical and to get development, it has to be incrementally done where steps and measures that are contained in this budget and the previous budget would get us from one point to another and from the other point to another point. That is what development is all about. [**An Hon. Member:** What is your point?] If you only had your hands... All morning, I heard we have oil money and I know that is what bothers that side a lot. The fact that it cannot put its hands on the oil money and as God has it, he knows what he does and the change in 2020 was certainly for the better because God knows if it mistook the US\$18 million signing bonus as a gift what would have happened with the oil money. *Oh, Lord*, what would have happened with the oil money. I could imagine and it would have been a tragedy for the people of Guyana. However, as we have been all the years, a government that first, understand the needs of people and we take the needs of every Guyanese into consideration. We made programmes, policies, measures to address those problems and needs and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, before I proceed to enlighten Members of this August House on the other side – of the aisle of course – on what real and palpable development looks like and why it would remain stupefied and appendage to those very seats over there where it sits at the moment... For countless years the Opposition will remain there.

Please, allow me to congratulate you and your noble staff for defending and upholding the sanctity of these hallowed halls in the face of the unprecedented lawlessness and the *ghettoism* from those who would be much more suited to providing service on animal farms eschewed even by our local farmers. Your courageous stewardship of this National Assembly, Mr. Speaker, would be studied and referenced by students and Parliamentary scholars alike across the Commonwealth, well into the future. The People's Progressive Party Civic rescued this nation from its slippery slope of depravation and chaos at the hands of the Coalition '*povert-ment*', not Government in 2020, – all of Guyana. We rescued this country in 2020 from the '*povert-ment*', the vast majority of our regional neighbours, our international partners and the progressive community of nations exhaled and exclaimed gargantuan sighs of relief.

Our steady, decisive application of visionary leadership from day one, has steadied the sinking ship and circumnavigated Guyana back onto its transformational path. From the emergency rescue of *Budget 2020* to the repair and restoration interventions of 2021, we in the PPP/C have brought our country to the cusp of where she needs to be in her new wealth-generating dispensation. Once again, the citizens of this country are at the centre of our national budget. Once again, people's empowerment for national transformation and transformation itself, have become the hallmarks of the halls of governance of this country.

Thanks to our humble hands, our hardworking and visionary team. The short and painful days of sanctimonious gangsterism are behind us; the days of aimless aloofness, visionlessness, arrogance, and downright ineptitude depravity that paraded the greedy green walls of power between 2015 and 2020, have been exercised, and the sails of hope of our beloved Guyana have set a sail with the \$552.9 billion course across our 10 -administrative regions. This will effectively lay the foundations for the prosperity and the solidification of our nation's trajectory towards growth among the league of nations changing for a better course for a better world.

Throughout these presentations the tale of the fox who could not get the grapes because it is sour will become vividly applicable by my friends and political foes on the other side. We will witness unabashed desperation, pointless banter, and the usual disruptive behaviour unbecoming and unworthy of elected leadership, but we will not be dissuaded. We will not be daunted, neither will we cower to its desperate machinations, as it struggles to retain some semblance of relevance in these hallowed halls that it shamelessly desecrates over and over. The Opposition will employ frivolous and wicked tactics in an attempt to distract the nation from the desperate and awkward power grab parade, forcing its way to these Chambers in its characteristic schoolyard bully-boy fashion.

It will try all that it could to distract from this people-centred transformative budget as a means of masking its own spectacular failures that are being made more obvious by the day. As people begin to open their eyes and realise the dreadful mistake of putting an incompetent, self-serving and unfit group of people as the APNU/AFC into office which saw them going through five miserable and long years. In spite of the schoolyard shenanigans, our erudite genius of a Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, my Friend and Colleague has delivered, yet again, a budget for the ages. Dr. Singh has given us a budget that reaches to the core of our nation's heartbeat, to answer her yearning for

the revolutionary energy that will catapult her onto a new path. A path that our forefathers dreamt of; the path that leads to individual empowerment for every Guyanese; a path that leads to family fulfilment; a path that leads to community development, and that same path that will deliver national transformation.

Budget 2022 will provide world-class education to another 6,000 or more Guyanese through our Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) Scholarship initiative. It will create the means to homeownership for another 10,000 or more Guyanese and it will deliver unprecedented levels of social services to every citizen across the country. The education, health and productive sectors will be reinvigorated this year with resources that will allow my Colleague Ministers to imagine to new heights and lay the pillars that will carry the weight of modernity.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[The Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

With regards to infrastructure, the urban and rural landscapes of our country will undergo significant realignment and expansion in the build-up process for a new and modern Guyana. No new taxes—a hallmark of a caring government; raising of the income tax threshold – a hallmark of a caring government.

5.13 p.m.

Reduction of excise tax on gasoline, a hallmark of a caring Government; more money for the pensioners, a hallmark of a caring Government; more money for school uniforms, a hallmark of a caring Government; more money for school children, a hallmark of a caring Government; more money on a monthly basis for public assistance, a hallmark of a caring Government; more money for dialysis treatment, a hallmark of a caring Government; more money for small businesses, a hallmark of a caring Government; and the list goes on and on. It would be remised of me at this juncture, having listed some of the people centred measures for my long-term Opposition Colleagues in those benches, not to illustrate a few of the clearest examples that highlight the night and day difference between the People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) and friends and the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) on this matter of caring Government.

Year after year, for five long years, the PNC-led 'hover-ment' imposed taxes upon taxes on the poor people of this country, piling them up one after the other like an albatross around people's neck; water tax, data tax, road tax, food tax, clothes tax, farm tax, wash bay tax, chicken foot and plantain chip tax, curry and roti tax and all the taxes one could imagine that one could lump on the backs of poor people was as a result – not excluding black pudding tax. This is why we stepped up and rescued the people from the green tax demons that were possessing this land. We were focused and were forced to act on the people's behalf and cut their term short with a big fat no-confidence motion because the people wanted it. This was because one more year of green tax, albatross around people's necks, and our women would have been delivering green babies that looked like tax. We had to rescue the situation because it would have gotten that bad.

Even their own supporters they punished. Do you remember? A lot of their supporters they punished. Let us just look at what they did in Linden. The strong and proud people of Linden were completely abandoned by the petty and vindictive policies of then Government, and the Mr. David Granger Administration and its acolytes, simply because a few of his comrades from Linden gave him the middle finger on his planned policies. Do you remember that? It was just before he assumed Office in 2015. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Granger held that petty grudge against the entire town, and you know that the story goes on and on. The people of Linden suffered terribly because of that situation. Where did the PNC/R led Coalition got over 15,000 votes? That was in Linden. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** It was 19,200 votes.] I am talking about 2015. Nevertheless, do not let me get distracted by the Mahipauls and the whomever they are. In return, the only reward Mr. Granger and his PNC/R acolytes, Mr. Aubrey Norton and the likes, were willing to offer Lindeners for the five long years, was an insulting marching order to go and plant breadfruit and they were a caring Government. You were so caring, *yea*.

Most interestingly, the five years of vindictive punishment for Lindeners went by unabated and unchallenged, as the so-called leaders from Linden who surrounded Mr. Granger in his power circles; Mr. Norton, Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira and Ms. Valerie Adams-Sharpe-Patterson-Yearwood, all did absolutely nothing to get Mr. Granger to change his vindictive uncaring stance towards Lindeners. Perhaps, they were in agreement with him. This is because his Empowerment Advisor, Mr. Norton, launched a national evening education intervention programme, which never

saw the light of day, in his own backyard, Linden. Even Mr. Norton thought that the people of Linden were undeserving.

Let me remind the people of the ‘scaring scover-ment’ A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) and what they really were. The PNC-led Housing Minister, at that time, Lindener Ms. Valarie Adams-Sharpe-Patterson-Yearwood... Do you see how many names she has? Do you know what kind of people have all sorts of names? She built five scrawly houses for Lindeners from her whole tenure as the Minister of Housing, and never afforded a pack of seeds, as much, to any Lindener when she became Minister of Agriculture, while the vocal youth, poor-people and activist ...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, the Hon. Chief Whip is rising.

Mr. Jones: I note the Hon. Member is stating Ms. Valarie Patterson-Sharpe, who is not in this House to defend herself, with some stinging allegations too.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Minister, I would have to ask you to withdraw those comments as the persons are not present in the Dome to defend themselves.

Mr. McCoy: I will make sure that I delivered a copy of the tape to her, Mr. Speaker. As soon as the PPP/C Government returned to power, the call centre we opened...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, we were guided by the Hon. Manzoor Nadir in this very Chair that...

Mr. Mahipaul: (*Inaudible*)]

Deputy Speaker: Mr. Mahipaul, I can speak for myself, thank you. Any Member per the Standing Order, who is not in the Dome to defend themselves, cannot be spoken of. I would ask you to withdraw those statements.

Mr. McCoy: Mr. Speaker, I stand guided. I made reference to a term of the APNU/AFC under the Housing Ministry where nothing was absolutely done for the people of Linden. I stand by the fact that nothing was done for the people of Linden. I stand guided for the rest of my presentation. As soon as the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government returned to power, the call centre we opened before 2015 in Linden, which they closed and left empty to rot for the five years, was

restored with more than 100 persons becoming employed in our first year, with dozens more to be employ this year. That is the hallmark of a caring Government.

This Budget which caters to the needs of all the people of Guyana, including Lindeners, will rehabilitate the entire Linden-Soesdyke Highway. Again, a hallmark of a caring Government. This Budget will give Linden a new multi-million dollar industrial estate – the hallmark of a caring Government. This Budget will expand the hundreds of acres of soya bean cultivation, currently, underway in Region 10. It will construct hundreds of affordable houses for Lindeners – hallmarks of a caring Government. It will facilitate the construction of a multi-million dollar steel factory, a cement factory and, of course, construction of the first leg of the Pan American Highway, which will run through the mining Town – the hallmark of a caring Government. This Budget will facilitate the construction of a five-storey modern mall at Soesdyke. It will pave the way for the creation of a brand-new city on the Linden-Soesdyke Highway and bring the Linden-Soesdyke corridor into the national transformational focus like never before – the hallmark of a caring Government.

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.]

This Budget will open the eyes of the people of Linden and every other part of this country. Guyana is ours and the people of Guyana belongs to all of us. We are committed to working hard in every single way and on every single day to make sure that we bring development to the people of this country.

No more will the people of this country entertain an APNU/AFC Government. They went through five long hard years. For many, it was a serious mistake. It was a serious regret on their part. All of us on this side, with the people of Guyana and the other citizens of this country, will continue to educate them and keep them abreast of all that we are doing and to remind them of what they did not do. It is so funny that it is only now that you all sit on those seats over there and that you recognise that so much could have been done with the opportunity that you had and that so much needed to be done. You had five years and those five years went wasted. All focused on just a few. That is what upset so many Guyanese. The PPP/C, nevertheless, is here to make sure that we could work with our people and have developments on a steady basis, so that people of this country could live their true potential and we could see a real developed Guyana. This Budget will demonstrate,

unequivocally, that the PPP/C Government is the caring one, hands down, caring for all the people, creating employment for all the people, empowering all the people, and opening up economic opportunities for all Guyanese.

Allow me now to talk about the Public Affairs Department within the context of the transformative Budget. I am sure you would appreciate the realities that the fulsomeness of all these moving parts in our active pursuit of national transformation would create along the governance continuum and, as such, I am equally persuaded that you would agree that such realities necessitate more efficient and effective management of our public affairs and communications in general. For these very reasons, the Department in the Office of the Prime Minister continued and concluded a comprehensive capacity and competency review of the State Information and Media Services in 2021. It commenced the hardest process of retooling our agencies and up-skilling our personnel to better deliver services to the people, in the context of an advancing society.

To this end, in 2021, the Department, in collaboration with the Industry and Innovation Unit in the Office of the Prime Minister, delivered information and communications technology training to some 550 youths in Sophia, Enterprise, Hauraruni, Laluni, Lusignan, Ruimveldt, St Cuthbert's Mission, Silverhill, Better Hope, Wales, Agricola, Windsor Forest, Enmore, Amelia's Ward, Timehri, and several other communities along the East Coast and West Bank Corridors.

Mr. Speaker: For you to go along to conclude, you would need five minutes extension, Hon. Minister.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be granted five minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, please continue.

Mr. McCoy: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. The engagements were extremely successful at equipping those participants to better engage with their Government and their communities and will, therefore, be scaled up to reach larger swathes of the country this year.

5.28 p.m.

The process of reorienting the State media away from what was the sycophantic whims and fancies of the failed former Government and its band of propaganda cheerleaders back in 2015-2020 to a more professional autonomous approach, to public communication service, also began in the earnest last year. We engaged more than 100 personnel in expert industry capacity building sessions, while we realigned the operational structures, accordingly, and that will continue to happen during 2022. The task of building a network of direct communications interphase between the Government and its citizens also got underway in 2021. We will expand this and there are several regions in which the programme will go so that we could help our citizens and our people get Government information and information on our development and our development prospects at every level, because it is important for the people and in keeping with the constitutional requirement.

This year, as we implement the largest and most transformative national budget to date, the Department of Public Affairs will focus on the adaptive creativity paradigm of the State media. We will come into sharp focus because it is important that we continually work with the State media to provide training and to be able to give them exposure, practical and other levels of exposure, so that we could create the best professionals in the State media. We are broadening the scope of the information, coverage and reach, even as we seek to make the daily programming more dynamic. The State media programmes will become more adaptive to social trends and dogmas.

I now come to our flagship undertaking for 2022. Already, and in a few weeks, we will fill the void for the world class industry skills and qualifications across the local spectrum with the introduction of the media and communications academy in collaboration with the world-renowned online platform Coursera. Through the academy's continuous media education window, registered learners will be afforded the opportunity to gain international certification and elevate their profession profile to accredited specialist or expert practitioner, based on successful completion of prescribed cycles of learning. I am confident that this facility will quickly become a game changer in the local industry across both State and private media, as we seek to upscale, further professionalise and transform the 4th Estate into one that is more responsive to the evolving digital future and the national development agenda of our country.

Guyana could ill afford rampant, wild-west disinformation schisms and schemers running on leaded opposition gasoline, seeking to derail progress, divide our fragile society, and destabilise our fledgling democracy. The public affairs of this country must be managed in a way that safeguards citizen's fundamental freedoms, while, at the same time, protecting others from the vagaries of misused and abused freedoms like we see on the Opposition side, those freedoms that are devoid of the crucial element of responsibility. We cannot and will not sit idly by, Mr. Speaker, while alternative, designer-facts and deceptive machinations of loose-cannons and mad men run amuck in fulfilment of narrow-self-fulfilling, destructive, and unpatriotic agendas. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, all the relevant and applicable laws of this country will be upheld and enforced without favour and ill-will, to protect the stability and integrity of our hard-earned democracy.

In 2022, we will seek to make the management of the public affairs and communications sector of this country everybody's business. We will forge ahead with our programmes to build the 'One Guyana', against the backdrop of a caring, all-inclusive approach to governance, bolstered by our unprecedented transformative agenda that benefits all the people of this country, every single Guyanese. With those words, I thank you and commend *Budget 2022* to the National Assembly.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, we have two speakers remaining on today's list so we will take them to conclusion and adjourn. Our next speaker is the Hon. Member, Mr. Haimraj Rajkumar.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy indeed to be given the opportunity to share my views on *Budget 2022*. This \$552.9 billion Budget presented to this House by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh on the 26th January 2022 under the theme: *Steadfast Against All Challenges Resolute in Building One Guyana*, is the largest Budget in our country's history and will be partly financed by withdraws from the National Resource Fund. It is touted to be a Budget designed to create wealth and improve the livelihood of all Guyanese and to facilitate infrastructure development all across Guyana. As I examine the presentation of the Hon. Minister, I found that there is hardly anything substantial for the ordinary Guyanese citizen to help improve their livelihood and to help create wealth for themselves. This Budget is like the previous budget – it is a private sector-oriented budget with little support for the private sector.

There is no dispute that the cost of living has been increasing on a daily basis. The price of basic food items has increased tremendously. It is forecast that this steep increase will continue well into 2022. In December, 2021, chicken was \$340 per pound. Now, it is \$440 and in some places \$460. Price for fish has increased. Eggs were \$800 per tray, now it is \$900 and sometimes \$1,000. Plantain in Essequibo, please Your Honour, is now \$200 per pound and, in some places quite higher. The price for fruits and vegetables have doubled. Things are expensive; people are finding it very difficult to survive. In an attempt to reduce the cost of living, the Hon. Minister proposed to have monthly farmers' market in different locations in Demerara and Berbice, where consumers will benefit from buying directly from the farmers. How practical and how many persons will be able to benefit from this activity? How much relief will this bring to the consumers? I am no economist, but my common sense tells me that this measure will not have the effect of reducing the cost of living or have any effect on the lives of ordinary people.

Reducing the excise tax on gasoline and diesel from 20% to 10% is another method proposed by the Hon. Minister to help reduce the cost of living. This will surely reduce the price of fuel by approximately \$65 per gallon. Will this reduction benefit the consumers in any significant way? Will the ordinary man pay less for transportation? Will the mini-bus operators reduce their fares for the school children? Will the cost of electricity be reduced? We all know the answers to these questions. These answers are resounding nos. These measures will not, in any way, significantly impact the reduction of cost of living for our people and in any way improve their lives. The Hon. Minister announced that this Government has set aside the sum of \$5 billion to mitigate the high cost of living in 2022. There is no clear indication as to what this sum will be used for. People are asking, will it be used to give loyal supporters of the PPP/C under the guise of flood relief or other similar grants? Or, is it a slush fund to be used by the Government at its convince?

The Hon. Minister has indicated that this year, the monthly public assistance will be increased from \$12,000 to \$14,000, an increase of \$2,000. Old age pension will be increased from \$25,000 to \$28,000, an increase of \$3,000. A far cry from the \$50,000 that was promised during this Government's campaign. Uniform grants are increased from \$4,000 to \$5,000; an increase of \$1,000. How could this meagre increase improve the lives of our elderly and vulnerable? According to the Hon. Minister, it will provide additional disposable income for them. The income tax threshold has been increased from \$65,000 to \$75,000. These measures according to the

Minister, again, will provide additional disposable income to the citizens. No doubt he is telling the truth. But, what impact would these little and meagre increases in their salaries affect? The high prices for food, the citizens are left in a quandary since their money cannot do to buy the things they need. They may have a little more money in their pockets yes, but with the increase in the price of goods, their ability to purchase would be greatly reduced.

There are at least 30 persons in the Essequibo who requires dialysis treatment. One of them called and expressed their gratitude for the \$600,000 assistance from the Government. He told me that he had a discussion with the other patients, and they wanted me to raise this question in the House please. The question is, why did the Government not invest in a facility that offers this dialysis service on the Essequibo Coast? In their opinion, it would cost the Government less. It would be more convenient for them and more economical because they would normally travel to Georgetown twice weekly for treatment and incur expenses in accommodations. These persons are calling on the Government to establish its own dialysis facility in the Region, which will employ, of course, citizens. This is what the people want and we are asking the Government to deliver. The money is there, but it is channelled in the wrong direction.

The Guyanese workers are once more disappointed. We have listened attentively to the Hon. Minister, waiting to hear for an increase in the wages for public servants this year. It is acknowledged that cost of living has skyrocketed and the cost of living is projected to increase in 2022, yet this Government has not even considered an increase in the salaries for the hard-working public servants to cushion the effects of the rise in cost of living. The sum of \$552.9 billion is budgeted to be spending this year and this Government has not considered anything towards increased salaries of our hard-working public servants. We have the money. What is the excuse now? Why not give the public servants the increase that they deserve at this present moment? This is the third budget presented by this Government. The university student and potential university students are still waiting on the promise made to them by this Government, which is that they will make education at the University of Guyana (UG) free again

5.43 p.m.

Our university students are calling for relief too and they are reasonable. They are calling for a reduction in the fees if the Government cannot afford free university education at this time. What

has happened to the Manifesto's promise that this Government made for the debt write-off for students with outstanding loans? Will this also be another promise which will not be fulfilled by this Government? Mr. Speaker, we have the money, let us have university education free again.

In my 2021 Budget speech, I made a call on the Government that, in addition to the cash grants, Government should consider giving tablets to those vulnerable children, especially those living in the hinterland. I am pleased to learn that the Government will now be providing 11,000 tablets with flash drives loaded with teaching materials for those students. My hope is that those vulnerable students, especially those living in the hinterland, benefit from this exercise. Tourism has and will continue to make significant contributions to our economy. We must not forget the tremendous efforts by the APNU/AFC Coalition Government to successfully market Guyana as a tourism destination. We must remember that, in 2019, Guyana, under the APNU/AFC Coalition Government, won six tourism awards, including the #1 Best of Ecotourism. Destination Guyana was well established.

Mr. Speaker, the Government must encourage and support the development of regional tourism destinations in all the regions of our country. This will give our visitors an opportunity to visit other communities in our country and have those communities benefit directly from the spending of our visitors. The protection of our consumers' rights is essential during these difficult and challenging times. Consumers must be protected from being sold defective and unwholesome goods. The Government through the Competition and Consumer Affairs Commission (CCAC) must continue to ensure that consumers' rights are protected by making them aware of their rights through seminars and radio and television programmes. There should be established in each region, a Consumer Affairs Help Desk where aggravated persons can be advised on how to have their issues resolved.

We must ensure that products of high quality are offered to our consumers. The Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) must continue to work towards this end. I was pleased to learn of the enforcement of the 31 compulsory national electrical standards approved by the APNU/AFC Government, whereby inspectors from the Guyana National Bureau of Standards removed sub-standard electrical products from certain supermarkets. Mr. Speaker more needs to be done. Much more of these operations need to be carried out in other parts of our country. Government must

provide more resources so that similar exercises could be carried out in all our regions on a regular basis. We must safeguard our consumers from sub-standard products.

It would be remiss of me not to raise some issues facing the citizens of Region 2. The residents living between Queenstown and Supenaam are complaining bitterly about the quality of water supplied by the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI). The water is untreated and has a high iron content. These residents want to enjoy the supply of treated water as is available on other parts of the coast, but, sadly, this has not been addressed in *Budget 2022*. Our main road has started to deteriorate and cracks and holes are starting to appear. Mr. Speaker, *a stitch in time, saves nine* and we are calling on the Government to put into effect remedial works immediately before the road gets worse. These are the little things that we on the Essequibo Coast expected to be addressed in *Budget 2022*. It seems that this Government has taken us back to our *Cinderella status*.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot conclude without saying something about our rice industry. Rice, as we all know is the backbone of Region 2. Many farmers suffer tremendously from the excessive heavy rainfall and resulting flooding in 2021. They were grateful for the flood relief received by only some of those farmers. There is great dissatisfaction among those who genuinely suffered from the effects of the flood and to date, for some reason or the other, they have not received any relief. It is rumoured that several persons received relief far exceeding their losses. Some received a substantial amount without suffering any loss at all. The farmers are disgruntled. All is not well with the rice industry in Essequibo. The cost of insecticides, weedicides, fertilisers, and labour has increased. Fertilisers now range between \$9000 and \$10,000 for a bag. The farmers of Region 2 are renewing their call for the Government to fulfil the promise made to them, which was to reduce the cost of fertilisers and other chemicals using this industry.

This Budget is indeed the largest presented in our country's history to date. This Budget has failed to bridge the gap between the poor and the rich. Our people deserve better. This Budget may have a plan for vast infrastructural development but sadly, it lacks the capacity to create wealth and improve the lives of ordinary people. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member Mr. Faizal Jaffarally to make his presentation. Mr. Jaffarally is the final speaker for today.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support *Budget 2022* as presented by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. Allow me further to congratulate the staff at the Ministry of Finance for presenting to this House a well-crafted budget.

Before I continue, the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, spoke about article 13 – consultation. I want this honourable House and the Guyanese people to note that there was a wide range of consultations for *Budget 2022*. Mr. Cox spoke about the APNU/AFC increasing the stipend of the Community Support Officers (CSOs) but I want to remind the Hon. Gentleman that it was the APNU/AFC that dismissed the 1900 CSOs. We heard the call for the increase in Old Age Pension, but in five years the APNU/AFC gave an increase of \$7000. In 18 months, the PPP/C gave \$7000. I want to remind you that it was the PNC/R at that time that introduced the means test to prevent our senior citizens from getting a pension. Many of you would recall if they went to your home and found a boulanger tree, you could not get the Old Age Pension. So cruel were those people.

The year 2021 has been a very difficult year for us in Region 5 because of the massive flooding that we had in that region – greatly affected. We did not throw up our hands and say, ‘So be it’, as the APNU/AFC would normally throw their hands in normal circumstances. We responded on a short-term and medium-term basis. The 2022 Budget will see a more long-term response to the difficulties our farmers face.

In the five years that the APNU/AFC was in Office, they destroyed every section of the Region 5 community – whether it was business, agriculture, or tourism. In five years, 217 businesses closed in Region 5. I am happy to report that in less than 18 months, 73 new businesses were established in Region 5 and created an additional 420 jobs in the areas of commerce, agriculture, tourism, and construction. Certainly, when one drives along the West Berbice road, one will see the construction industry blooming. Every day a new building is going up. It is because of the policies and programmes of the PPP/C Government. As I said, article 13 was implemented during this process of consultation. I recalled when the business community asked for a meeting, I took the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, and they were loud in praise for the policies and programmes because they saw this Government as encouraging private businesses. This is important for this country to grow. One of the requests was – the need for some reduction in taxes for pickup vehicles. The 2022 Budget caters to that.

We are a Government that listens to the people. We listen to the people. When our Ministers of Government and Members of Parliament (MPs) visited communities, we listened to the people. When they raised their concerns, we listened then came back to Cabinet and discussed it. Look at the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme and how successful it was in Region 5 because people such as the Hon. Minister, Ms. Sonia Parag, Ms. Priya Manickchand, Ms. Susan Rodrigues, and Mr. Anand Persaud visited the communities and explained to the people how this programme can benefit them. I am happy to report that nearly 400 young persons in Region 5 are now benefitting from the GOAL project. There are 400 young people in various areas.

Agriculture has been the backbone of Guyana's economy. Region 5 has the largest acres under Agriculture cultivation. Despite the shortcomings, the heavy rainfall ...I want to thank our Ministers who responded in the short term by providing foodstuff, medical supplies, and water to all the communities that were affected. I recall the Hon. Ministers, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha and Mr. Nigel Dharamlall going into communities such as Buxton, Lichfield, No. 41 Village, No. 42 Village, and Trafalgar and distributing hundreds of hampers to those people who were affected right across Region 5. I recall Minister Ms. Sonia Parag and myself going through the waters in Burma. Mr. Persaud went there and distributed hampers. Then, we distributed the Government's cash crop relief, where every farmer – I can testify – who was affected, benefitted from the Government's cash crop relief. Every farmer that lost benefitted.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture said that we were once the breadbasket of the Caribbean. In five years, the APNU/AFC destroyed that. Nobody had any trust in us anymore. They destroyed the title that we had as the breadbasket of the Caribbean. In less than 18 months because of the Government of Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and the Ministry of Agriculture led by Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, we are once again the breadbasket of the Caribbean. In Region 5, you will see the installation of a 200 [inaudible] pumps at Trafalgar. Go and check it out there. There is the construction of the Onverwagt access road.

5.58 p.m.

There is the construction of the farm-to-market road on the right bank of the Abary River. In 2021/2022, in Region 5, the Ministry of Agriculture will be spending the sum of \$2.2 billion to rehabilitate and improve the infrastructural development in the agriculture sector.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development: all the streetlights that the advisor on petroleum, it was... [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Petroleum jelly advisor.] Petroleum jelly advisor. She removed all the lights from the communities of Region 5. We do not discriminate. I am happy to report that all 10 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) are now fully lit with streetlights across Region 5. Because of his involvement...the Minister going to the community... and there is always an issue of solid waste disposal. *Budget 2022* caters for the Blairmont area to be upgraded.

The APNU/AFC, as I said, did nothing for Region 5. There must be some sense and pride to have been in Government for five years. What are your achievements? I was trying to think of something that you achieved, and I came up with two or three, perhaps. One is the distribution of house lot letters. In 2020, you distributed 5000 house lot letters. The Hon. Ministers, Collin Croal and Susan Rodrigues, were in Region 5, and they were bombarded with these letters. You collected the people's money barefacedly. That is a criminal offence. You should be charged.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what are you charging me for?

Mr. Jaffarally: They should be charged for collecting people's money under false pretence. Hon. Ministers, Collin Croal and Susan Rodrigues, went to Region 5, and we were able to find house lots, real house lots, in Balthyock Housing Scheme; 300 house lots were distributed in Balthyock Housing Scheme. At Experiment, presently, we have four contractors working to develop over 600 additional house lots in Region 5. The 'honourable member, brother James', is not here but she knows about those letters. This Cabinet and this Government of the PPP/C are concerned. We believe that we must provide goods and services to the residents of our country because we do not believe in thieving elections. We do not believe in thieving elections. We believe in going to the polls and people must elect us democratically, as they did in 2020.

Potable water: could you imagine that, in a street next to the People's National Congress (PNC) Office in Rosignol, for five years, 27 residents were *bamming* at that door to get potable water? One meeting with the Hon. Minister Rodrigues and we were able to have the distribution pipe laid. Similarly, at Moraikobai, an Amerindian community, we have upgraded the water distribution system. The Hon. Member, Mr. Vinceroy Jordan, from Region 5 is not here. He was once the Manager of Guyana Water Inc. (GWI), and we all know the destruction he did in that community.

The Hon. Ministers, Mr. Deodat Indar and Mr. Anand Persaud, went to Zorg-en-Hoop, Blairmont, a village which is a stone's throw away from Ithaca, and 20 families could not have gotten electricity for five years. If you look across to Ithaca, every home was lit with electricity and every lamp pole was lit with electricity. These were sugar workers, ordinary people. They went to meet the petroleum advisor, the former Member of Parliament (MP), Jennifer Wade, because she was the big thing in the area. Do you know what they were told? Move *yuh* house. These people had transport for their lands, and they were asked to move. This is the kind of Government the people of Region 5 faced under APNU/AFC. With the intervention of Ministers Indar and Anand Persaud, in less than a month, they got connected.

The people of Fairfield suffered. They received severe damage because of the collapse of the seawall. The Hon. Member Patterson is not here. Minister Edghill had to intervene and save that community. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** Government began in 2015, man.] You were in Government when these things happened. The APNU/AFC Government, whether you are Afro-Guyanese or Indo-Guyanese, once you are poor, they have no care for you. I remember the issue at Number 41 and Number 42 Villages. Afro-Guyanese rice farmers who received their title, legal document, went to the former Leader of Opposition when he was the Minister of State. They went to the former Attorney General, Mr. Basil Williams. They went all over to get a remedy. They came to me. I encouraged my good colleague, the Hon. Attorney General, to meet these people. He met those people, and we were in Opposition. He represented the case in court and the people won. I want to say this: those comrades are not PPP/C supporters, but this PPP/C Government does not look at who you support. Once you have an issue and we can deal with it, we deal with it. Recently, teacher Joy, the Millers, the Samuels, and the Johnsons came to me and said, Mr. Jaffarally, when the PNC people come to Number 41 and Number 42 Villages and Lichfield and they talk about Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo and the PPP/C, it is racism they are bringing to our communities. We had an issue. We went to them, and they did not respond. We came to you guys. They came to us, and we represented them.

Mr. Speaker: For you to continue in this meeting, sir, you would need an extension of time.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask for the Hon. Member to have an extension of five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Jaffarally: The APNU/AFC had a community meeting at Number 41 Village and 11 persons turned up – four from Ithaca and three from Hope Town. [**Mr. Nandlall:** (Inaudible) bus, Granger bus.] The Hon. Attorney General spoke about the buses. They had two buses. [**Mr. Jones:** Where are the buses now?] Where are the buses now? They are parked. [**Mr. Jones:** Exactly]. What I am saying is that two buses cannot provide service to school children. They start at one end, pick up someone else and they park at the other end. They *bruk* down and that is why they are parked.

Ministry of Health: A brand-new hospital at Bath Settlement is in the 2022 Budget, which will provide greater health care delivery for the people of Region 5.

In education, I am happy to report that Region 5 has 811 teachers at the nursery, primary and secondary levels, and 80% of those teachers are trained and qualified to deliver quality education to the children of our community. This is because of the intervention of the Hon. Minister of Education. She did not throw up her hands, despite the pandemic. The results of the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) Examination and the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) results are above the national average of Guyana in Region 5. The top students are no longer coming from Georgetown as it used to be. They are coming from the rural communities because the resources that are made available in the education sector are divided across the regions so that every child can receive quality education. [**An Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)] Well, we will have a new hospital there now.

In 2022, under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, we will see tremendous amounts of infrastructural development – roads, drainage and building – in every NDC, whether it is Seafield/Tempie, Hamlet/Chance or Rising Sun. We will see tremendous development across the entire region. It is because we, as a Government, govern for all the people Guyana. That is why we are running with the ‘One Guyana’ campaign. It is because all of us belong to Guyana. I would like to encourage the Hon. Member to join with us, because he has already been put aside by the PNC, and let the PNC join with us to develop Guyana. We need to work together; we must work together. There is a time for politics, ‘honourable member, Mr. James’, and there is a time when we must work together. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Where is the

Opposition Leader?] They have not consulted on that as yet. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 1st February, 2022.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I move the adjournment of the assembly to 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday 1st February, 2022.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. The House now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m., Tuesday, 1st February, 2022.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.11 p.m.