



**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

38TH Sitting

Tuesday, 1ST February, 2022

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.11 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

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Speaker (1)

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+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

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+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
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+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
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[Absent]

Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P.,
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Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
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(ii) A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)

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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 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 January 26, 2022, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution requires that the expenditure of each of the Constitutional Agencies listed in the Third Schedule of the Constitution be financed as a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund determined as a lump sum by way of an annual subvention approved by the National Assembly after a review and approval of the Constitutional Agency's annual budget as a part of the process of the determination of the national budget;

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73 :02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2022 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

AND WHEREAS the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021 provides that the amount that the Minister with

Responsibility for Finance shall request the National Assembly to approve, and the amount that the National Assembly shall approve, as the withdrawal from the Fund for the next ensuing fiscal year shall be included in the annual budget proposal and shall not exceed, for that year, the ceiling calculated in accordance with the said Act:

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 Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lump sum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2022 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of eleven billion, seven hundred and twenty-nine million, eight hundred and forty thousand dollars (\$11,729,840,000) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2022.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$126,694,310,000, equivalent to US \$607,646,570.98, to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2022 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: The first speaker today is the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan.

Mr. Ramjattan: [*Inaudible*] to this Budget debate 2022. Allow me, at the commencement, to express my disappointment at the utterances of Members of the Government's side who have that distinctly unsubstantiated and unjustified belief that government in Guyana seemingly commenced in 2015. One would never get the impression that there was government before. They have also left the expression with *all and sundry* that, in the period 2015 to 2020, absolutely nothing happened. They are also giving the impression that short of everything ought to have been done during that period. Allow me to express my gratitude to Members on my side who rebutted those false accusations so eloquently yesterday, and I rather suspect they will so do up to Friday.

As is normal in any budget, there are a number of statistics about growth rate, fiscal measures, percentage growth, overall fiscal deficit and external reserves and all of that. I have to commend Dr. Ashni Singh for doing that which is normal in the course of a budget presentation. He did it well, although I must say that on a certain statistic regarding fishing, an 11% increase, it does not feel that way. Having spoken to fisherfolk and some trawler owners, it could be a manufactured statistic, but I will give him the benefit of the doubt.

This Budget, in my opinion, however, is sadly reflecting how oil will become dominant in this economy to the marginalisation and minimalization of the non-oil sector. This is as striking as it is dangerous. Oil is exhaustible, it is a wasting asset, and in a few decades, it will come to an end. We have to always fall back on the non-oil sector. We must be cautious, therefore, to prevent the revenue curse, the 'Dutch disease,' as we call it. We must prevent that from ever happening, as we know it has happened in our neighbouring country, Venezuela. As shadow Minister of Agriculture, I want to give a reminder to some of my colleagues across the floor as to some of the highlights during that 2015 to 2020 period concerning agriculture. They will come here and say that nothing happened, that we did nothing, but I am glad that they are continuing with even the rightsizing of the sugar industry. Nothing for Skeldon, but they have started now to talk about Blairmont, Albion, and, of course, Uitvlugt.

I want to say that in relation to this matter of flooding, Guyana's first Cutter Suction Dredge to clean out falls was bought by our Administration. Twenty-two coastal pump stations and two major sluices were built. In Region 2 there were seven, in Region 3 there was one, in Region 4 there was nine, in Region 5 there was one, and in Region 6 there

were four. In relation to water catchment areas in Region 9 for cattle and vegetable farmers...they said that we did nothing for the Rupununi. There were eight harvesting systems: two at Marawaha, two at Annai, two at Rupertee and Shulinab, and one at Aranaputa. We brought in Guyana's first amphibious excavator in the East Demerara Water Conservancy (EDWC). If I were on a platform outside, I would have said, after each one of this, 'don't stop the progress.' In the Intermediate Savannahs, 17 kilometers (km) from the Tacama to Ebini road was constructed with three concrete bridges, and on the last occasion, Hon. Member Zulfikar Mustapha said that nothing happened under our Administration.

Guyana's first state-of-the-art toxic chemical storage facility was constructed in 2015. There was a chemical residue laboratory for food safety in 2019. We recommissioned a newly equipped Pesticides and Toxic Chemical Control Laboratory – it is a certified laboratory – in 2019. By the way, this Administration has inherited that, and so shall it be. At the National Agriculture Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), there was the first turmeric factory at Hosororo, Region 1. Yesterday, we had the Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks, giving the impression that nothing happened in these Amerindian areas. There was mangrove expansion. Regarding the mangrove expansion, we had destruction from them, just because of certain friends and families, at Regions 2, 4, 5, and 6.

The New Guyana Marketing Corporation (New GMC). They used to *cuss us up* for the plantain chip factory. There is that at the Parika processing plant. It produces the excellent Hana plantain chips. Farmers and agro-processors' market days were created under our Administration because that was what we found to be very important and significant for our farmers. There was a new head office for the New GMC, the same marketing corporation, at La Bonne Intention (LBI). In fisheries, the first observation, monitoring and control surveillance vessel was commissioned. For rice, there was a new head office at LBI and approximately a 20% increase in hectareage or increased acreage from 151,000 to 178,000 hectares.

At the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA), a very important institution, Mr. Noel Holder informed me, and I have verified it even with people over there, that there is Guyana's first ever duck egg hatchery at 8,500 chicks per day. In 2017, we introduced the Black Giant... Mr. Hamilton talked about 'yard fowl' yesterday. We introduced the Black Giant birds, a breeding programmes that helps, especially in the interior areas, with meat and eggs. It was adapted for

grazed ranging. There was Guyana's first animal nutrition laboratory, total mixed rotary feeder and upgrading of the Ebini Research Station in preparation for the Intermediate Savannah's development, and it cost about \$400 million.

At the Hydromet Department, there was the Water Quality Laboratory, Guyana's first, in 2019. There were 21 new automatic weather stations as part of the climate change adaptation policy.

Billions were spent on the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA). You know that, Mr. Speaker. They know that too, that the Administration, APNU/AFC, spent millions on the NDIA.

Billions were spent on sugar before it was rightsized. In our first 36 months, we spent \$1 billion per year just to keep the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) surviving, but they felt that we must, like them, pour money into that which is so unprofitable and is a black hole. That is what is going to cause huge problems. It was not only the \$36 million; we spent a lot more by virtue of a bond since August, 2019 or thereabout. What we have now is a second severance being paid. They are saying that we did not run it properly. The Diamond and LBI sugar estates were closed down by them, and workers got one severance payment. When they closed it down, they gave one. When we rightsized – not closedown – you have them giving two. That is what will build the resentment in this country. You have a certain base support that comes from sugar, and that base support only, you feel, must have the cash transfers and the cash payments.

What we have here as a budget, I must say, has a lot of flaws. I could understand that because of the inherent fact that the same players are coming back, the same policies, corruption, and the transfer payments that are very opaque.

10.26 a.m.

If you listen to the speakers on the other side, you will get the impression that there has been transformation. There has not been any transformation. I have asked on several occasions: if you are transparent, why do you not put on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture, all those people who got the flood relief? Put their names, put their addresses, and put the amounts that they got. That is transparent government. They do not want to do that because corruption has started again.

My good friend, Mr. David Armogan, from Region 6 indicated that he was going to call an investigation. I understand the minute he started that...what investigation

you must call. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** *And it done right deh.*] And then *it done right deh. Yeah, right deh it done.* It is the same thing with the cash grant. Why can you not publish the names of how many people got the cash grant? It is because there is obviously what is called paperwork that would have ensured that cheques were paid or cash was paid, but you do not want to do that. [**An. Hon. Member:** The Auditor General (*inaudible*)] The Auditor General would not find how many people did not get. So it is important, for accountability and financial scrutiny, that it be placed on the website in relation to all these matters.

They came up with a piece of elections amendment. They want the Statements of Poll (SOPs) to be tabulated and put on the website. We agree. We are not going to disagree with that, but you should also agree to put all the money you are giving away to your friends, families and favourites on the website too. Democracy does not only mean winning an election; it means good governance and good governance means transparency. Good governance means being allowed to scrutinise, especially the country's moneys. All of that information ought to be made public and ought to be made accessible.

I want to say that, just as how we never did it, a heavy reliance has been paid on contingencies during the course of the running of the economy by the Ministry of Finance. In the years 2017 and 2018, we never came here for any contingencies. We came for contingencies for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) in 2015 and 2016. They have a cavalier approach to spending. They do not plan it out. If they wanted to give the sugar workers severance payments, they could have planned it out since January of last year. They did not. They came here for Financial Paper No. 1, Financial Paper No. 2, Financial Paper No. 3 and then Financial Paper No. 4. That is what is called bad, bad planning.

With these new economic times we have, there has hardly been any planning in relation to a minimum wage that is going to incorporate that big money that we have. [**An. Hon. Member:** You were there before us]. We did not have the money. We created the platform for you to get the money, and we expect that you are going to give the working class. The PPP/C always boasts that it is a working-class Government, but the workers cannot get a minimum wage. We have, today, a *Jagdeoit* PPP/C as against a *Jaganite* PPP/C of yesteryear. It has now resulted in a *Jagabat* kind of an arrangement. When you have US\$600 million, and now, the Canadian Oil and Gas Exploration Company (CGX) has found oil, lots of other ExxonMobil wells are finding oil... It

is important to understand that it is all our property and not your property alone. You must go and tell the sugar workers because we are asking, and I am requesting here that there be a minimum wage of \$100,000 across the board.

Today's food prices, at a minimum, are about \$50,000. Today, rent or a mortgage or maintenance for your house – they are talking plenty about house lots and housing and all of that – is about \$30,000. The utilities come up about \$8,000 a month. School supplies or transportation is \$4,000. Clothing – if you want some clothing – is about a minimum of \$5,000 a month. Transportation is \$8,000. Medicine and health or if you are healthy, recreation, is a further \$5,000 a month. It will come up to \$110,000. That is the basic minimum. How much is enough might be very subjective, but it is important that when this menu of items is calculated in a basket, it comes up to about \$100,000. Why not, with all that money, have at least some plans for it? But no. They would want to say that we cannot have that.

There is need for planning. That is why we have to understand a very important point. Climate change will be here with us, and we have to stop all this kind of juvenile infrastructural work as against resilient infrastructural work. We have to have experts who will tell us that not with the next flood... like in 2005...all these infrastructural works will collapse. We have to start thinking. It is like a new green deal we are talking about. Rather than do that and ensure that there is the best of experts, we see their friends, families and the contractors... Now, they have gone and done away with the 2% tax for contractors. That is the kickback we are talking about. That is a big kickback. When we were in the Administration we found out. That is why we brought in Mr. Statia. These people did not pay anything. As soon as Mr. Statia came in and he started the enforcement of the tax laws, you saw our revenue stream under that head, taxation, mount. It is important to know that all the contractors who will now not pay the 2% taxes are using our roads. By the way, I understand they are the lobbyists to knock out the excise tax for the Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) that is 2000 cubic capacity (cc) and more. They lobbied the Government. [Mr. Mahipaul: The four-wheel drive.] The four-wheel drive.

Taxation and the payment of taxes is one of the duties of every citizen. The Arthur Chung Conference Centre, the road out there and the hospital, all were built by a revenue stream that generally comes from taxation. It is not over taxation, but you cannot under tax people, especially these contractors. You will have tremendous inequality in this country. That is what has come back into play and that is

what will come back to haunt this country. Let me reiterate a passage that I think I had quoted, some time ago, about the construction industry. It is from *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* by Mr. Paul Collier, who we brought here, immediately after we found oil, to give us some advice. He is one of the foremost authorities from the Oxford University.

“...Corruption has its epicentres...

...where much of the loot is deposited. Among the companies that pay the bribes two sectors seem to stand out: resource extraction and construction...”

Then he goes on:

“...corruption in the construction sector has been a dirty secret. Transparency International decided to bring it to greater prominence by devoting its *Global Corruption Report 2005*...”

That is why we have gone down two grades in the last corruption index.

“...Construction has all the ingredients conducive to corruption: each project is a one-time-only thing, and so cannot readily be priced. There are so many uncertainties in execution that it is not possible to draw up what economists refer to as a “complete contract”...”

He goes on with a whole chapter and talks about construction. He is talking about exactly the PPP/C here. I had quoted this before. Good governance is also something he mentions.

“...Why is bad governance so persistent...”

This is at page 66 of the book:

“...One evident reason is that not everybody loses from it. The leaders of many of the poorest countries in the world are themselves among the global super-rich...”

You can check them over there. They like things the way they are. It pays to keep their citizens uneducated and ill-informed. That is why they want the people of Albion to just cut cane and cut cane and cut cane. They do not want to smarten them up. Unfortunately, the senior public officials from the...

[*Technical difficulties were experienced.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, just give me a few more minutes. We suffered a lot of damage in the control room on 29th December. Yes, Hon. Member. The problem happened at 10.38. a.m. It is now 10.41 a.m. I will give you back your three minutes.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, I want to state that this reminds me of a time before when whenever I got up to speak, they blanked me, especially on the National Communications Network (NCN), and they started playing something called *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It was an instruction from the Hon. Vice-President, Dr. Jagdeo. That is the kind of treatment, I have come to learn, will come my way on these occasions. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*).] Yes, I understand NCN does not carry any of the speeches of Members on this side, but that is the resentment that you are playing with; you do not know.

10.41 p.m.

I had to bring attention to these points, because the PPP/C wants to run roughshod over its rivals. This is supposed to be a rivalry, not an *enemyship*, but you want to create and provoke *enemyship*. That is a recipe for riot and could result in what is called a reproachable ruination of this country. It happened in Syria and Yemen, and it happened in other countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. We should not go there. They are motivated by this desire to just blank one out. They do not want to have engagements with the Leader of the Opposition. They do not want to talk to Members, committees, and a whole host of other things. As a result, we are then sprinting into a calamity if we do not halt it. Mash brakes! Mash brakes!

I heard their comments in the press and I heard their comments here. The PPP/C must not stop until the Opposition is buried, that is the line they take. The PPP/C must not stop until the Opposition is buried; it is a chokehold they unrealistically suppose they have and want to feel that their honeymoon period continues. This justifies their continuing chokehold. As I said, Hon. Prime Minister, you have to learn to engage with us. When we said that we want to talk about the Natural Resource Fund Bill No. 20 of 2021, which you are amending, you did not even give us a space. I do not know how much more time I have, but I want to say that it is important that they understand...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, to give you an idea, you have eight minutes more.

Mr. Ramjattan: We would have to halt the corruption, we would have to engage, and we would have to have lots more nonpartisanship, especially in the context of an oil economy. There is a lovely line in the opening of the famous Charles Dickens novel, *A tale of two cities*:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...”

That resonates so poignantly and so piercingly, concerning our times here in Guyana, that I feel compelled to apply with a modification in our country, now, knowing what is happening in 2022 in our beloved country. It is the best of economic times because of that oil, but it is the worst of ecological times because of what is happening in the world.

The Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, is too bright a fellow, and a colleague, to not understand that is very important. Oil having been found, production agreements having been signed, and now the windfall of millions and billions unimagined, only seven years ago, makes the best of economic times for Guyana, especially when we have more than oil. We have a country that has cultivable lands, millions of hectares, forestry, fishing and all of that. To have that windfall at a time when so much is happening on the global and local levels... a very dismal picture is painted. Only last year, as happened in 2005, we ended up with devastating floods, with untold loss of property and livelihood. We ended up with huge losses in rice, in sugar, in every other crop, in forestry and in livestock too. This is the own admission of the Minister of Finance.

Spare me some time Mr. Speaker, because I want... the dismal picture is painted at page 789 of the Budget speech. It is important, having found that fossil fuel which would make us rich... Scientists now tell us that, by burning it, it induces climate change. We Guyanese and citizens of the world could suffer what is called, as they say, a sixth mass extinction. Our planet is in peril, and all the more because we are six feet below sea level, and it is important that we must not suffer. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in its report, stated that we are going to have escalating climatic events, frigid winter temperatures, snowfalls, devastating floods, prolonged droughts, horrifying wildfires, deadly category four and five hurricanes [**Brigadier Ret'd Phillips:** Not in Guyana.] Mr. Prime Minister, are you serious when you said not in Guyana? In 2005, we had it here and last year we had it here. That is why they called for flood relief and everything else. Sugar, rice, livestock, poultry... and you are telling me not in Guyana, please.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the three minutes on the original time allocated is up. We need an extension for you to continue.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Mr. 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. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Ramjattan: That is why we have to start studies and reports to plan for these events. What is the use of having so much money, knowing that the ecological times could come to harm us, and we have none of that here? All their planning in relation to ecological events would be flood relief, and a discriminatory practice as to who get the flood relief. At some point, we have to start a decoupling from a fossil economy. Is there a plan to meet these life and death challenges in this Budget? There is none. If expressions and statements in this Budget are scrutinised thoroughly, I have to conclude that this plan is in deficit. There is no planning at all on this important matter. What this Budget does is that it has a fascination with big numbers. It is the biggest Budget ever. That is not going to take us out of the harm's way in which we are presently.

The frightening reality we must confront, especially being so challenged by our geography and our climate, must mean that our minds must be concentrated, and our people must be led to put aside differences. We started a green policy, and you cursed it. It was better than your Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), but you just deleted that.

I remember, in 2005, people then, who agreed on very little with each other, put aside their differences to make a difference. That we were remarkable in that regard must instruct us that we could be united on important matters if we want to. These good economic times and bad ecological times is such a time that we should get together and save ourselves. Even if we do not want to save ourselves, we must ensure that we save our children. We, and I speak here about myself and probably you Mr. Speaker, are in the *october of our years*. Let us allow the saving of our children for the future. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Let me just ask someone to test the microphone at the Opposition end. Sergeant at Arms, could you just check the microphone? Thank you. Hon. Members, just to inform you that there was a slack cable under the desk of the Chief

Whip, and things are all working now. Our next Speaker is the Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, Minister of Agriculture.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will respond to all of the misinformation and half-truths that were just peddled and regaled in this House by the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan.

Before I do that, first of all, let me congratulate my distinguished colleague and brother, and his team for bringing to this National Assembly... and formulating a Budget which is robust, dynamic, comprehensive and transformative. This Budget addressed the socio-economic transformation of Guyana and will build a fortified 'One Guyana'. This Budget would drive economic expansion, increase productivity and enhance competitiveness. This Budget will be remembered in history as the Budget which propelled the Guyanese economy into unprecedented development. Unlike the Budget from the APNU/AFC, which had no substance, this Budget will start the economic transformation of our country.

We just heard a lot of a misinformation, and I want to correct the Hon. Members. This here is the august body that formulates laws. When we come here we must be very truthful. You are talking about climate change. What did the APNU/AFC do for climate change? You all bought 12 defective pumps from India and brought it to Guyana. You paid 75% of the money, and the pumps are inoperable; the pumps cannot perform. You bought fire engines to do pumping work in the drainage area. That is the achievement of the APNU/AFC Government. I want to be very serious.

10.56 a.m.

The Hon. Member just said that my brother and colleague has manufactured information in the fishing industry. Probably, the Hon. Member is not living in reality. Although we have issues in the fishing industry, we have seen the increase in catches for the latter part of last year. I want to quote a reputable processor in the fishing industry. I want to say this publicly, the largest exporter in the history of Guyana told me last night that production increased from 400,000 pounds to 1 million tonnes in January.

The Hon. Member talked about the Plantain Chips Factory. The Plantain Chips Factory, when we took over, had six employees doing nothing because the equipment that they had bought was the wrong equipment. That is why the

Plantain Chips Factory was not functioning. That is the achievement of the APNU/AFC Government.

The Hon. Member talked about the facility in Region 1, Hosororo. Let me tell you that the facility is incomplete without a boiler, and it is not operable. We have to make that operable. When you come here and talk about achievements, you must talk about the facts and what is taking place. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** Talk about the sugar estates] I will talk about the sugar estates just now. I want to take umbrage of what the Hon. Member said just now. He talked about flood relief. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] Listen. He also said that we have distributed to our families and friends. First of all, I want to say that thousands of farmers in our country were provided with flood relief. That is why we were able to bring back production to standard and up production in six months for the agriculture sector.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I have here in my hand more than 570 villages which have received flood relief from the Government of Guyana. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible* the people.] I will say which people. The PPP/C has friends in all corners of this country, if you call them our friends. We love to have friends. I have here in my hand a testimony. The first one I have here is from your people – the Chairman of the International Decade for People of African Descents, Mr. Vincent Alexander. Do you know what he said? He wrote to the Director General and he said:

“Please accept IDPADA-Gs appreciation for following through on the commitment of the Ministry of Agriculture...”

...to provide flood relief to our Members.

Mr. Speaker, we have friends in this organisation. We have here a letter from the Victoria Community. I want to read it for your understanding, and for you to know that we have friends and supporters in every corner in this country. Hear what they wrote, I will read.

“Dear Minister Mustapha M.P.

RE: Appreciation for Assistance

Victoria Community Development Council in collaboration with the Victoria North Farmers Group would like to formally thank you and extend to the Ministry of Agriculture & Government of Guyana for the assistance that we received during the flood”.

These are the friends of our friends – farmers in these areas. I have here ... [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] It is hurting you all. You feel that you all own a set of the population in this country, but not anymore. They are coming to us because we helped them. Again, I have here:

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

“Dear Mr. Mustapha,

We the Farmers of Ithaca Community and the Ithaca Cooperative Society would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali and the Minister of Agriculture for the timely intervention with the cash grant...”.

These are our friends in Ithaca. I have here again...

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I will go through each one of the letters. Do you know why? It is because you are accusing people in these communities that they received flood relief wrongfully. I will be going back to these communities to tell them that the PNC/R and the APNU/AFC accused them of receiving false flood relief. I will go and tell them. Listen again.

“The Village of Seafield and members of the Rainbow Generation Farmers Group suffered greatly during the recent floods we lost our crops and animals. We were relieved to hear the president say the government would give us the flood relief cash grant. We collected ours during the region 5 distribution and it has helped us so much as to get back to the fields and start back our farming.”

This is Seafield. We have friends in Seafield and we have supporters in C Field. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] I will give copies to the Hon. Speaker so that you could see them. Publicly, I am raising this so that the people in these communities will see that we are making the representation for them in this National Assembly. Again, the Farmers Group of Belladrum Community extends appreciation to the Government and the President for giving them relief. It is hurting them. They cannot take it anymore. They are feeling it. It is stinging them so they cannot take it anymore. It will hurt me if a man goes to Bloomfield and Port Mourant and say that they got support... the APNU/AFC. It is hurting you all that we are getting the support of the people of this country. This is the ‘One Guyana’ that the President is talking about. The ‘One Guyana’ will be built under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. [**An Hon.**

Member: (*Inaudible*) It is hurting you all. It is stinging you; you cannot take it.

The Siparuta Farmers Group sent their appreciation to the Ministry and the President. The Farmers of the Zion Methodist Church and the Central Methodist Church Group are very grateful for the assistance that they received from the Government during the recent floods. These are our families and friends. The entire country and all its citizens are all our families and friends. That is the 'One Guyana' that we are talking about. You cannot take it anymore. There is the Orealla Farmers Organisation. Here we have Region 3 – Den Amstel. The Chairman of the Water Users Association wrote and thanked the Government. I heard the Hon. Member spoke yesterday about Nabaclis/Victoria area, the Golden Grove/Victoria area. We have the Golden Grove/Victoria Farmers Association thanking the Government for the flood assistance.

Cde. Speaker, I could testify and, probably, the Hon. Member is correct that the PPP/C Government has families and friends right across this country and in every corner of this country. We will have no apologies for assisting these farmers.

Just now when the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, spoke, he talked about corruption. Probably, this Member does not remember what happened during their tenure. Do you remember the gold bangles? Do you remember the laptop? Do you remember the selling of firearm licence? Do you remember the D'Uban Park scandal? Do you remember the bedsheets story? Do you remember the drug bond scandal and so many scandals in this country? The scandals have cause you all to be over there, and you will remain over there for the rest of your lives. Not in your lifetime will you get back into Government again. What you all have done to this country is to destroy the entire country. We are now rebuilding.

The Hon. Member said that people think that the Government started in 2015. Of course, the Government did not start in 2015. The squandermania and the decline started in 2015. The destruction of our country started in 2015. We had people who never worked. The Ministry of Agriculture was running auto pilot in 2015 to 2020, like many other Ministries and many other areas of government. When you come to this honourable House, you must come with facts. Do not come and make general statements. Come here with the facts that will show what you are doing or facts to highlight it if it is true. Do not come with statements that are false. [**Mr. Duncan:** What is the price for sugar?] What

happened to the Guyana Chronicle \$5 million? You are talking so much. The police will start that case very soon. What happened to the US\$18 million bonus? You all wanted to take it as a gift. Imagine that. The chief financial officer of a country said a bonus was a gift. [**Mr. Duncan:** Talk about sugar.] I now come to sugar.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

Do you remember this document? Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something. The Hon. Member would have had a hard time in school. Do you know why? Every year, since 2020, I tried to remind him about this document. The man head is hard. *He na tek on dis ting in hay*. I want to read it again. Why are you not listening to me? This here is a Volume I Report... [**An Hon. Member:** Have you opened any estate?] ...I will tell you about that just now. Just listen and learn. This here is a Commission of Inquiry Report Volume I. This was commissioned by the APNU/AFC Government. Someone reminded me that the former President Granger commissioned this. Do you know what he said? The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, always like to use the words 'right size'. Listen to the right size. This here states:

“Every Government has an obligation and commitment to all the people of the country. Optimal use has to be made of the limited resources especially where poverty is no stranger to society”.

It went on to say:

“The COI does not recommend the closure of any estate. Financial support will be needed, and this should be provided by the government on a timely basis”.

This is what the PPP/C Government is doing. What we did was we went, and we saw the estates that were closed. You all slaughtered and closed the estates. The destruction that took place under the APNU/AFC Government... They feel that we have a magic wand that we could just touch the estates and say 'open estate'. That is the man. When you do not think, and when you do not know what is happening in an area, do not speak about it. You all destroyed the estates, you all destroyed thousands of peoples' lives and you all are feeling that we have a magic wand. We will touch the estate and say open estate, open, like an *open sesame, open*. That is what you feel.

11.11 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you. I would like to give an example of one estate. When we went to the Rose Hall Sugar Estate, what did we meet? We met an abandoned cultivation overgrown with bushes that had an abundance of old canes which were abandoned since 2017 and were of no value. That means that we have to do re-tilling, we have to do replanting, and we have to ensure that we have time to have enough cultivation so that we can have cane, and for sugar to be produced at that estate. We are in the process of doing that. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] That is their argument now, but that is the reason they are over there. Do you know why they are over there? It is because they felt that canecutters and sugar workers were not people that they could have done anything and run roughshod over them and dismissed them, broke up families, destroyed communities and felt as if they were doing something good for the people of this country. Not again. As stated in the Budget speech, we will never abandon our responsibility to the sugar workers and the workers of this country. That is stated in the speech of the Hon. Minister. I could go on and on and tell you what we met when we went to these estates. We are in the process of reopening these estates and we will be doing it in phases.

I would like to make this point. One comes to this House shouting, brawling, fighting up and saying do this and do that when one does not know anything. That position cannot be tolerated here. There is a man shouting at the top of his voice when he never saw a canefield in his life. Has the Hon. Sherod Duncan ever been to a cane field? Does he know what cane is? Has he ever gone to a cane field? Right. He does not know what is happening. That is the fact.

I have not started my presentation yet. I have not started my presentation because I have to respond to the misinformation and the untruth that were presented by the Hon. Member just now. They feel that they are cleaner than Caesar's wife. They come into this House and say that they are incorruptible when they are over there corrupted. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] Comrade, we know about the bangle, we know about the bedsheet, we know about the birthday gift, we know about the drug bond scandal, we know about the D'Urban Backlands project, and many more. What do you think? If you were doing good, would you have been over there? If you were doing good for the five years, would you have been over there? The people saw that, in 23 years, the People's Progressive Party/Civic moved this country. They tried to give you a chance to see if you could do anything, but you cannot do anything. Do you know how you all are behaving? Let me tell you. When you are in Opposition, you

have all the answers for all the problems under the sun, and when you come into Government, you become brain-dead. *Ya* brain gone; it is dead. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** When will you speak about agriculture?] I will speak about agriculture, but I have to respond to the misinformation that was peddled.

The Attorney General is here. He is now trying to recoup our moneys for the defective pumps that you purchased – the fire engines. The man bought fire engine pumps to pump drains. Imagine that – fire engine pumps to pump drains. We will continue investments. This year, another \$6 billion is budgeted for the sugar industry. When we invest another \$6 billion, we will create more jobs. Tens of thousands of jobs will be created and we will help tens of thousands of families. We will be putting more cash into the village economy and thousands of people will benefit, not only the sugar workers but people who live in the community and who depend on the sugar industry indirectly. We will continue to support it and we will continue to support all other industries in this country.

The Hon. Member said that we did not put much funds into the non-oil sectors, but who closed the sugar industry? Who brought agriculture to its knees? When we took over Government, Guyana would have lost its place as the spokesperson for agriculture in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Never in history. Since the formation of the CARICOM, we have always spoken on agriculture. When I became the Minister of Agriculture, CARICOM was crafting a food strategy for the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Do you know who was heading that? The Minister of Agriculture from St. Vincent and the Grenadines because Guyana was not doing it. Do you know what we are doing now? When we got into Government, at the first meeting of the CARICOM Heads of Government, our President rescued that position and, today, he is the lead spokesperson on agriculture in the CARICOM. This is not a fluke. What happened? We have visionary leaders. Do you remember that the former President and now Vice-President crafted an initiative called the Jagdeo's Initiative, which has been adapted by CARICOM? Those are the visions that we are speaking about. We are not speaking about plantain chips and cook-up rice and dog food industries. You were a dog-food Government creating dog food for the people of this country, and telling the young people to cook dog food. [*Inaudible*] that they had gone to a dog food Government... speaking about agriculture.

I would like to touch a little on the rice industry. I know that my time is going fast. I have to deal with this misinformation that was peddled by the Hon. Mr. Ramjattan. The rice

growing industry is expected to grow significantly this year by almost by 25%, according to projection from the Budget speech. This is testament to our rice farmers being steadfast against the challenges of COVID-19 and the May/June flood of 2021. Over the next five years, we predict a tremendous increase in annual rice production. The rice industry has been making valuable contributions to our country's economy. We saw, under the APNU/AFC, that rice production had started to decline, and less acreage came under cultivation. Do you know what? When we came into Government in 2020, rice farmers had to pay \$15,000 per acre for drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges and land rental. We brought that back down to \$3,500 per acre. With that one measure, rice farmers were able to save almost \$1.6 billion back into their pockets. We removed the value-added tax (VAT) on agricultural inputs and agricultural machinery and the cost of production went down. That is the way to run an industry, not to tax people, not to put increased fees and place burdens on the backs of farmers. We removed all the burdens that were placed on the backs of the rice farmers of this country, and, today, the rice industry is prospering again. The rice industry is moving *by leaps and bounds*.

We are introducing new varieties. Only last year we launched a new variety called the GRDB 16. Do you know how that is doing now? That is moving the national average from 39 bags per acre to between 55 to 60 bags per acre. That is the variety we are speaking about. Right now, we are working to introduce another variety called biofortified rice. Do you know what that is? That is very nutritious and will be very healthy. The zinc supplement that doctors order patients to buy, we are now growing it in that rice. That biofortified rice will attract lucrative prices and preferential prices. We are now in the third trial and, very shortly, that will be introduced. As long as the results are good, we will start giving farmers to plant. Guyana is the only country in the CARICOM that will plant that variety of rice.

We will invest another \$49.5 million for provision and installation of a pre-cleaner and rehabilitation of a seed paddy facility at Onverwagt, in Region 5, to increase seed paddy production from 9000 to 50,000 bags per crop at the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary- Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA). The MMA-ADA is the largest rice cultivation area in our country and we are preparing. Likewise, we will be expending another \$20 million to purchase a seed drying facility at Black Bush Polder where over 600 farmers will benefit. Those are the things that we are speaking about. Last year we built six new drying floors. This year, we will continue to build another two so that

farmers can have access to dry their paddy. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** You have to go (*inaudible*)] We will get there.

In 2017, the former Minister of Finance spoke about drones. He was probably a fan of flying things at that time. Drones were not implemented in this country. We are now doing that. That is the technology we brought to the rice industry. In November of last year, a farmer in Golden Fleece used drones to commence spraying. Imagine 135 acres of rice which would have taken three days with three persons to be sprayed was sprayed in half of a day by the drone. This year we will be purchasing a drone for the Rice Research Station so that we can have that technology there too. We are modernising the rice sector. Likewise, we are also modernising the flood resilience of our programme. It is a priority of our Government to modernise and upgrade infrastructure to advance water management as strategically guided by the revised Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030. In *Budget 2022*, focus will be placed on expanding and strengthening drainage and irrigation systems to improve drainage of agricultural areas with \$13 billion in drainage and irrigation. To this end, \$1 billion will be invested for the urgent acquisition of equipment needed to enhance flood protection and operation capacity.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will need an extension to conclude.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to request an extension of five minutes for the Hon. Member to conclude his presentation. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the D&I system will be modernised this year. We will continue to do large projects that will have an impact on our country, like the Hope Canal. Do you remember the Hope Canal? It was visionary. Again, that was the Hon. Jagdeo and the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government's vision to create that canal. We will be doing canals like those in Regions 3, 5 and 6 this year. We will start those works so that we can mitigate flooding in our regions and prepare for climate change. Those are projects that will help the agricultural sector advance and move forward. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*) outfall.] The Hon. Member is speaking about outfall. What did they do at De Edward? They built a sluice and commissioned the sluice without an outfall. When we got

into Government, we had to build the outfall for the water to run out. That is the vision of those people over there – those Hon. Members. We will continue to do a lot more projects in this country to improve the D&I structure. The Hon. Member mentioned a number of pump stations. I cannot think of any pump station that they built which is functioning. All those pumps that they put in, as I said, were fire engine pumps. We should have named them two things, dog food plus fire engine government. That is the term we should have given to them. As I said, today, Guyana is chairing the ministerial task force. We have prioritised items and commodities that we are pursuing.

11.36 a.m.

We have already started the trial run with the corn and soya beans. This year, we will continue to expand on that. Last year we started with 125 acres. This year we will continue to expand it to 2,700 acres so that we could move this process forward.

For the feed industry in our country, we have imported close to US\$30 million annually in feed. In another three years, we want to be self-sufficient, and another two years from that to be a net exporter of corn and soya beans. That is the vision we are talking about. Those are the policies that change people's lives and improve our country.

It would be remised of me if I do not mention this project, that is the Agriculture and Innovation Entrepreneurship Programme. This is a Programme that was launched recently by His Excellency, the President. This initiative stems from the President and People's Progressive Party Civic unwavering support for young people and their needs. We are not telling them to go and cook dog food or cook-up rice or make pepper sauce or breadfruit chip. We are putting people where they could work and earn and also people who are qualified. As I said, this initiative is also tied directly into our Government Manifesto, which has become a policy of creating job opportunities for youths in Guyana, especially our young women.

As I am speaking here now, works are ongoing on the shade houses that we are building – almost 300 in this country. Young graduates from the University of Guyana, the Guyana School of Agriculture, and other young people who represent the country itself and from every single background, are there working so that they are in this initiative to build the 'One Guyana' that we spoke about, and the President wants to build. That is the way we are equipping our young people; not for them to cook dog food. I could go on and on. The

Agriculture sector will be robust. As I said, the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute will up its activities this year. The sum of \$1.27 billion is budgeted for NAREI to expand production. This year, we are looking to increase onion and Irish potato production so that we could produce large quantities for domestic consumption and ease the food import bill of our country.

With regard to the livestock sector, I received a message from the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA). I could say that I received a message from GLDA. They told me that the GLDA hatchery was done before 2015. Do not come to this National Assembly and be untruthful. They just sent me this message and I am saying it publicly, it was done by the PPP/C Government and they are taking credit for it.

With agro-processing, we are moving rapidly. We are having agro-processor facilities built in all corners of this country – Regions 1, 6, 9 and every other corner. We are giving equal opportunities to people across our country. Over the last year, 42 new agro-processors have come on board and we have increased the items to 292 new products in the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (New GMC) shop. We could go on and on.

As I said, we are moving apace with livestock developments. We are trying to do a plan for the food traceability system. The Hon. Member made mention about the Food Safety Authority that they formed. It was never working. Now, this year, we are putting things in place to make it work. Nothing worked under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. They had nothing to show and that is why they are over there in the Opposition.

As I said, also what we will be doing this year is putting mechanisms in place to improve the fishing sector. We will be improving the aquaculture sector, and at the same time enhance fishing in the marine sector, where we will introduce marine cages to the fishing sector for the first time in history in this part of the world. As promised, there is enough room in this Budget to move the process forward.

In conclusion, I want to say that the Budget is the tool to move our country to prosperity. We start the channalisation this year and this will transfer Guyana. We will have a new Guyana. We will have a Guyana that will be inherited by the entire country's population, where people from every single sector, where people from every background, and where people of all sections and strata of society will inherit this

Guyana – ‘One Guyana’ to prosperity. Thank you, very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams to make her contribution.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stand to offer my contribution to the *Budget 2022*, I wish to respond to the speaker who spoke before me, none other than the Hon. Minister of Agriculture.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture is a disappointment. The Hon. Member is the Minister of Agriculture responsible for the sugar industry; sugar that has received a whopping \$6 billion of this Budget and he barely had anything of substance to say on this industry. The Hon. Member resorted to insults instead of outlining a proper plan for the \$6 billion they are asking this House to approve. The truth is they do not have any plan. They are simply stringing along our brothers and sisters in the sugar industry and keeping them tied to an industry they have admitted is all but dead.

I would also like to ask the Minister of Agriculture what has happened to the production of onions, potatoes and spices, and for example, turmeric in Region 1? Have they abandoned that project? I did not hear any plans that they have to talk about those productions. I would ask the Hon. Minister to visit Enterprise and he would see how feasible is that dog food selling. Please do not insult the Guyanese brothers and sisters who are selling dog food for a living in this country.

The Budget is presented under the theme: “*Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*.” It would be remised of me not to bring to your attention some of the disparaging and derogatory remarks made on the female Colleagues on this side of the House by the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton. Although I am not comfortable in echoing or repeating the words uttered, referring to our female Parliamentarians as headless...

[*Technical difficulties experienced.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, try another microphone at the desk. I stopped the clock at 11.36 a.m. my time. Let us give the technician a chance to see what the problem is and fix it. [Pause] Go ahead Hon. Member, we will add back the four minutes of interruptions that we had.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Mr. Dharamlall: (Inaudible)] If you have to interrupt anyone

speaking, always say excuse me, please. I will repeat, although I am not comfortable in repeating or echoing the words uttered by the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, referring to our young Parliamentarians as headless, fluttering and flattering creole fowls is totally unacceptable. It does not have to be this way. I wish to remind the Hon. Members that this is the highest forum in this land where we ought to engage and empower our women Parliamentarians to become the very best version of themselves, amidst the unique challenges that they are facing. What message are we sending to our young women, especially when we throw remarks at a young aspiring Indigenous woman with more than one Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) subject, whom I have no doubt could be the next Minister of Finance and a prudent one too. The indigenous youths are listening and watching. The world is watching too.

11.41 a.m.

Let me, therefore, introduce to this House the fearless, feminine and fabulous women on this side of the House. With that said, allow me now to focus on the biggest and the worst budget of the three budgets ever presented by the PPP/C Administration. Development is a long-term progress, not a short-term process. The Government has embarked on spending an addition of G\$167 billion than last year, and whilst the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance has announced measures here and there in the budget, it lacks clear purpose, it lacks clear priorities and is absolutely not people-centred. I say this because the ordinary citizens of this country are still asking, what is there for us in this budget, the biggest budget ever? The working class was eagerly waiting for the announcement of increase in their wages. The pensioners were glued to their radios and televisions to hear if there was anything like a cost-of-living allowance for them or a relief allowance. You know why, Mr. Speaker, it was touted not only as the biggest budget ever but the best, because of the inclusion of our first oil revenues in this Budget. Budget time is not about standing up for more than five hours reading from a 99-page booklet. Budget should be about the transformation of the lives of the citizens against all challenges and, like the theme rightly says, building ‘One Guyana.’ Therefore, the Guyanese populace expects the Government of the day, sitting in the epicentre of unprecedented change and challenges, to provide a guiding hand and steer a course that continues to bring prosperity in the midst of uncertainty.

Crafting a budget should take into consideration the data received after reviewing and analysing the previous budgets.

They could then use it to their advantage to prepare a more people-centred budget. We must be cognizant of the fact that plans change as delivery proceeds. Hence, the Government will have to shift the way they think about budgets. Like plans, budgets will change as implementation unfolds. I am, therefore, recommending to the Minister to further increase the personal monthly income tax threshold to, at least, \$120,000, as against the proposed figure of \$75,000. It is clearly understood that in any communication aimed at winning the hearts and minds for transformation, action speaks louder than words. I, therefore, have no doubt that the goodly Minister will consider this recommendation which will put more disposable income into the pockets of our taxpayers.

Hinterland Development: You will agree with me that education is the great equalizer, and it is the key to reversing hinterland underdevelopment and provide employment, especially for the indigenous youth and all the youths who are living in the hinterland regions. It will unlock opportunities for all and help to provide the skills for development. Hinterland students have demonstrated that once given the equal opportunities, that is equal educational opportunities, they are capable of the best performances as anyone else in this country. Hence, I am calling on the Minister of Education to ensure that this Budget caters for a new secondary school to be built at Jawalla or Kamarang, to benefit the students in the Upper Mazaruni. The lone Deserey Caesar Fox Secondary School is now over-crowded and is unable to accommodate the new intake of Grade 7 students and teachers, especially during the pandemic. More so, as we welcome the drop in the student to teacher ratio to not more than 15 to 1 at the nursery level, and 20 to 1 at the Primary and secondary levels, we will definitely have to create more safe spaces for the implementation of this measure. To be safe and feel safe are two terms that go hand in hand when looking at the safety of our children and teachers. Many of our schools in the Hinterland are still far from being described as safe due to the absence of access to potable water, functioning sanitary blocks, well equipped sick bays, and inadequate furniture, just to name a few.

I will also echo the sentiments of my Colleague, Hon. Member Ronald Cox, in asking the Minister of Education to provide modes of transportation to our students and teachers in the hinterland, who have to travel distances by air, land and water to attend school. Bring back the David 'G' boats and buses, and include all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and the four-door pickups and extend the removal of 10% excise tax on these vehicles, not only to the business persons but to our

hinterland teachers, nurses, doctors, and all other public servants who reside and serve in the remote areas of this country. You could rename them as 'BJ boats', you could rename them 'BJ buses' or 'BJ pickups'. We must provide transportation for our children and teachers nationwide.

It is also expected of this Administration to provide access to internet service to all our hinterland schools so that they could be on par with their counterparts on the coast and around the region. Providing the students and teachers with downloaded tablets and laptops or flash drives will not have a real impact if there is no source of adequate electricity and internet services. It is time that all our learning institutions in the hinterland and coastland be powered with solar systems.

Ethics, transparency and accountability are the three basic attributes of public life. When we, on this side of this House, oppose and criticise the measures of the Budget, it should not be seen as a recalcitrant Opposition or sullen hostility and expression of pseudo logical reasons. We are merely doing what we are mandated to do as representatives of our constituents. Neither I nor anyone in this House is here on his or her own merit. We all are elected representatives and must be accountable to our population. Hence, we will oppose not just for the sake of opposing, but we are here to oppose, expose any form of corruption or discrimination if there is any, and eventually the people of this country will have no other choice but to dispose of any Government that does not have their needs and interest at heart. Therefore, we cannot continue to treat the representatives of the 49% of the population as zero, where is the 'One Guyana' that we are talking about? Where is the inclusivity of all the stakeholders of our national development? The PPP/C must never again fool themselves that only they can plan by themselves and exempt the Opposition and expect the Guyanese to wholly and solely accept the Budget as presented.

I also concur with my Colleagues to increase the stipends of the Community Service Officers (CSOs) and the Toshaos to at least the minimum wage of \$60,000. The first people of this country must be treated with dignity and respect. I would urge the Ministers of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education to look seriously into the welfare of our children in the hinterland as it relates to their health, their education, their social welfare. It bleeds my heart to have learnt about the child in the Rupununi who lost his life to a snake bite after trying to get medical attention at more than two health centres. Is this how we care for our children? Then to add insult to damage already done, the parent had to fetch the dead body of his child to the burial site after waiting for hours at the

Mabaruma Hospital. Where are we heading in this country? I ask the question, are we better off in the last 18 months than we were five years ago? The answer, at least from the Indigenous population, will be a resounding no.

11.56 a.m.

Even as we welcome the wells completed in Jawalla and Kamarang in Region 7, and many others that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance mentioned in his speech, the people of Waramuri are asking me to remind the Minister of Housing and Water of the multi-million-dollar water project that he promised them in last year's Budget. Hon. Minister, Mr. Croal, please ensure that the people of Waramuri are served with potable water as anybody else, like any other Guyanese in this country.

I continue to hear about the CSOs whom we fired when we came into power. I must repeat that it was the PPP/C's intention not to continue that programme. It was their intention not to continue the cash grant of \$10,000 to our children in the hinterlands. However, we are happy that the CSOs are once again attached to several entities in the hinterland. My concern is, however, where is the aspect of training for these young people? The Hinterland Employment and Youth Services (HEYS) programme, which we had brought under the APNU/AFC, had a sector for training. In addition to the \$30,000 grants they were given, they were also given a cash grant of \$50,000 to assist them in starting up their businesses.

The people of the hinterland will be very grateful – the youth population – if they are included in the training for the oil and gas industry. I will await the Minister of Amerindian Affairs' presentation to hear what percentage or how many of our young people in the hinterland will be included in the aspect of training for the oil and gas industry. It is not only for the oil and gas industry but in many other areas – Heavy Duty Machine Operators and Welders. [Ms. Teixeira: What did you do?] I continue to hear, "what did you do". Do not live in the past. You are in the driving seat, and you should use the past experiences, learn, and move this country forward – 'forward ever, backward never'.

I must remind this House that the Community Service Officers who were employed – if you call that employment... Ms. Pearson-Fredericks also noted that they are grateful for the \$30,000. Of course, they will be grateful because they have no other choice. They will be grateful for the \$30,000. That is why I am asking this House to increase

the stipend from \$30,000 to, at least, the minimum wage of \$60,000. That will be of great relief, especially so since these young people are not being paid monthly. They receive the stipend every three months. [Ms. Teixeira: That is your accomplishment as a Minister. You built a hotel in Kamarang.] I will not go down the road to answer the Hon. Member. It is as if I should not be the owner of a guesthouse or a hotel. I do not have a hotel at Kamarang. That is what the young people, the Indigenous youths, always comment about. Is it because you are Indigenous that you cannot own a hotel, you cannot own a farm, you cannot own anything in this country? The people themselves will judge. It is the court of the people that puts the government up and it could also bring the government down.

In conclusion, I, therefore, must say that this Budget in its present form is not people-oriented; it is not people-centred. Unless we listen to the population of this country, include their priorities, include their needs and interest in this 2022 Budget, that they are expecting to benefit from because of the inclusion of the oil revenues, I, as a representative of them, will not approve the Budget in its present form. The process of debating the budget, of scrutinising the budget, and approving the budget will be a waste of time if the needs of the people are not included. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your attention. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, I think this is a good time for us to take the suspension for lunch.

Sitting suspended at 12.03 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.22 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members, please be seated. I now call on the Hon. Member Mr. Alister Charlie to make his contribution.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to offer my contribution to the debate on *Budget 2022*. From the outset, let me say that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, did an excellent job in putting together this Budget, which paved the way for the continued development and transformation of our country this year.

It would be remiss of me if I did not also recognise the diligent work of the staff and all the technical personnel who also contributed to the creation of this masterpiece of a national fiscal plan for the year 2022. It was a commendable job, despite the duplicitous rhetoric from the deceptive

APNU/AFC Opposition, whose bellicose diatribe is laced with sanctimonious utterances of praises for their totally self-serving leadership style, that sent this country's socio-economic paradigm plummeting into devastation and near bankruptcy.

It is public knowledge that the visionless Coalition Administration did absolutely nothing for the people of the country in the five years they had control of the Government. Instead, they were like a demolition gang, wrecking all that the previous PPP/C Government had built, including a sound economy that they had inherited. Their few accomplishments were the continuation of projects for which the PPP/C Government had laid the groundwork, created the framework, and accessed the funding. As a matter of fact, they re-structured the PPP/C's visionary conceptualisation – such as the upgrade of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) – that brought less benefit to the nation at significantly higher costs. One cannot help but wonder what went on under the table. I speak directly to the Hon. Mr. Patterson.

They did not realise a single promise they made to the people during those five hard years when they drove this nation to its figurative knees. Instead, months into their term of Office, the signs of a Government struggling to find its footing, were highly visible for all to see. From misappropriation of the people's wealth for personal enrichment and aggrandisement to building white elephants – such as D'Urban Park, their legacy – there was an inexorable path that made Guyana poorer, and impoverished many Guyanese families to the point of near-starvation. Ours had become a retrogressive country that was going back in time, on a fast-track to a 'Burnham era' of dissolute squandermania and profligacy, with Coalition leaders and elitists becoming overnight millionaires, while the people of the nation were reeling from an inept, self-serving administrative construct that had no developmental model on which to create synergies for economic growth to consequent social development.

Included among the multiplicity of their retrogressive actions were the sole-sourcing of contracts; the bypassing the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB); the splitting up contracts worth millions of dollars; the underhand dealings of an infamous Minister and the drug bond which turned out to be not really a bond; and the misappropriation of millions from poor people to build the white elephant that is now home to rats, rodents and vagrants. It is their legacy – the D'Urban Park. They gave fat-cat salary increases and unlimited benefit packages to the

Ministers and special persons who were assigned to sinecure positions, considerably bloating the public service spending, with nothing for the genuine public servants. Today, the 'great pretenders' are agitating for public servants' rights, wanting to crucify *the goose that is laying the financial golden egg*, with belated, devious, pretend-concern for public servants. Public servants are one of their support bases and they are laying the groundwork for the next elections. Their traditional supporters should heed the adage: *fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me*. They have been fooling their supporters for decades with the race-card, violent destruction, and mayhem being their primary electioneering tools; and yes, let us not forget their undelivered promises to the electorate.

The infamy of the Opposition's support for very corrupt levels of lawlessness and propagation of destructive, deconstructive, anti-national, and unpatriotic concerns are indelibly stamped into our historical records. The people of Guyana will never ever make the mistake of supporting the Coalition cabal again. They remember the CSOs. When I say, "they", Mr. Speaker, I am not including you. They remember the CSOs and the firing of over 1,972 hard-working Amerindian youths, as well as other Indigenous villagers who were finally doing progressive things with their lives. In 2015, I saw the tears of young people and even adults. I felt the anguish and pain of many of my Amerindian brothers and sisters as the People's National Congress/Reform-led (PNC/R) whirlwind swept its destructive path across the entire country, with hinterland communities disastrously hard-hit.

1.22 p.m.

After that, Amerindians realised that it was a dreadful mistake to vote the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition Government. Now, in contrast, with the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) record in the Office for just 18 months, we have reemployed 500 Community Support Officers (CSOs) in 2020; 2,000 in 2021; and, this year, we are going to hire an additional 500 CSOs. These are young, bright and intelligent Amerindians who are eagerly helping the various village economies. This marks an injection of \$720 million to \$1.50 billion in 18 months of PPP/C governance. Mr. Speaker, that is using Amerindians. It is just to give you an example of our job thrust and focus as adumbrated in *Budget 2022* that this Budget has measures which guarantee thousands of jobs for our people.

Budget 2022 takes into consideration the job boom that will be created in the oil and gas sectors following the passage of the Local Content Act in this august Assembly. While Amerindians were suffering under the previous APNU/AFC Administration, they entertained their friends, families, cronies and financiers at lavish parties at Georgetown Club, State House, luxurious hotel executive accommodations and the private residences of the APNU/AFC Ministers. I would describe everything that APNU/AFC Coalition did from 2015 to August, 2020, as a slight against the people who they thought did not vote for them – the APNU/AFC politicians – especially the Amerindians and the sugar workers, even though it was sugar workers' votes who propelled them into government. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, admitted in this august House that their perception is that the PPP/C Government was to save the sugar industry because they were your people, meaning majority voted for the PPP/C.

The land titling project was slighted by the venomous Opposition sitting on that side of the House. Not one single community in the Amerindian and hinterland regions got through with their titling under the APNU/AFC Administration. They stalled and complicated the process but kept promising those Amerindians that they would get through if they continue to vote for them. Amerindians said, 'never again' and today under the PPP/C, two communities are titled and some two more slated to be completed by February in this year in 18 months. That is the progress and urgency attached to Amerindian development by the current PPP/C Government.

Budget 2022 has allotted close to \$561 million for the land titling programme. Our Amerindian brothers and sisters will see 20 communities receiving titles this year. The APNU/AFC Coalition must be disappointed and in disbelief that the PPP/C Government has delivered so much and will be incrementally delivering much more after just 18-months. The Opposition could win the dress all they want, but on this side of the House, we do not dress up with false promises in our approach to hinterland development. Amerindians are, today, fully involved in the governance and upgrading of our communities. The Opposition utterances are based on optical illusions for the media and the mentally myopic. Our people can see them for who they are and they are saying, never again and that your time would be spent in Opposition forever. When the APNU/AFC Coalition Government was in power, Amerindians were walking long distances and struggling to get by while they travelled, but the Coalition

Ministers and their supporters travelled with style in planes and luxurious air conditioned (AC) vehicles.

Upon return to the Office, the PPP/C Government invested in transportation in all forms including trucks, tractors, boats and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) for hinterland communities. Additional tractors and ATVs are budgeted this year so we can tend to village economies and to assist our own grassroots development. To promote Amerindian village agriculture, a sum of \$411.2 million was allocated for additional Amerindian villages to benefit. *Budget 2022* caters the improvement of hinterland roads to a tune of \$3.4 billion.

The Because We Care cash grant will see our hinterland and Amerindian students getting the same amounts in *Budget 2022* of \$25,000 per child and \$5,000 whether one is from Dartmouth on the Essequibo Coast; whether one is from St. Cuthbert Mission; whether one is from Buxton, East Coast Demerara; or whether one is from the Rupununi, all schoolchildren will benefit. This year, Amerindian Development Programmes is \$3.1 billion to further transform the lives of our Amerindians.

I stand as proud as *Budget 2022*, as I turn my attention to my geographic region, Upper Takutu/ Upper Essequibo, Region 9, that I represent in this august House. I am proud to announce Region 9's budgetary allocation for 2022 – a whopping \$4.9 billion. This budgetary allocation will bring changes to the lives of the people in Region 9 with the construction of a technical training centre at a cost of \$35 million, construction of a female dormitory at Sand Creek Secondary School at a cost of \$45 million, an extension of Aishalton Secondary School dormitory, construction of Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) Training Centre at a cost of \$28 million, the rehabilitation of Annai Secondary School at a cost of \$25 million, construction of an infectious disease centre at a cost of \$25 million, construction of Kokshibai Health Post in South Pakarima at a cost of \$14 million and construction of a primary school at Carabaicru in South Pakarimas at the cost of \$14 million. I can go on and on. Those are in the pipeline that will bring changes to the lives of our people in Region 9.

The theme of this year's Budget is: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. I think the days of facing these challenges and struggling are soon going to come to an end, once we confidently and resolutely support the PPP/C's transformative and visionary budgets. *Budget 2022* has unprecedented levels of intervention and

financial support being provided to support every Guyanese child, man and woman.

Budget 2022 represents a strong force for the development of our country. I have listened to the contributions of the Opposition Members who have spoken earlier on the Budget. The Opposition Members do not have a clue or idea of *Budget 2022*. The Coalition Opposition lacks basic comprehension and will never understand that *Budget 2022* will change and transform the lives of Guyanese across this land of many waters. The Opposition Members hate this Budget so much because they understand that every PPP/C Government exposes their inept and visionless mismanagement of the nation's economy. All sober-minded Guyanese know that Guyana's Coalition Opposition is anti-development.

The founding principles in *Budget 2022* are based on pursuing the well-being and lifestyle enhancement of every Guyanese. *Budget 2022* puts the people at the centre of our economic, social, cultural and environmental policies. National economic prosperity is meaningless if it does not provide the well-being of every Guyanese. *Budget 2022* provides adequate levels of healthcare, education, water, housing, sanitation, and ensures safety and security for all Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, to ensure you can continue, you need to get an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for five more minutes for the Hon. Member to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** (*Inaudible*)] Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul for looking and listening. *Budget 2022* has special programmes targeting women, children, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups in society that will be developed and implemented together with a vibrant growing economy, with well-paying jobs and the promotion of the well-being of all Guyanese in health, education, and other areas. *Budget 2022* also recognises the need for promoting culture and sports, and the importance of developing rounded personalities in our youths. A robust growing economy must support the development and improvement of the social sector. *Budget 2022* is progressive, people-oriented and people-centred. *Budget 2022* is full of a promise backed by the resilience of

the oil and gas sector. *Budget 2022* is a fiscal marker with a blueprint clearly outlined for good governance, One Guyana, inclusive democracy and change towards the development trajectory.

I commend *Budget 2022* to this august Assembly and reiterate the confident prognostications of my fellow Members of Parliament (MPs) on this side of the House, when I say that we will pass this Budget despite the condemnation of the Opposition. We will pass this Budget and, I say again and again, *Budget 2022* will be passed for the people of Guyana. With this, Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Our next contributor is the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira. You may go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Listening to the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, I am persuaded that he has been organised very much so, and he seems to be in the company of the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall. I will not waste much time in debunking what he said.

More specifically, to make reference to one of the comments made by the Hon. Minister of Agriculture when he made reference to International Decade for People of African Descent Assembly-Guyana (IDPADA-G). Apparently, in his possession, he had some letter. I too have a letter in my possession from the Chairman of IDPADA-G and I just want to read part of this letter where he stated very definitively, and this is what he said:

“So far, we have come across a number of affected persons who did not have the opportunity to register their loss, as well as someone who registered their losses but have been excluded from the list of recipients of Flood Relief. In that regard, we are seeking your intervention.”

Mr. Minister, did you intervene to ensure that these issues were addressed? This is the letter from Mr. Vincent Alexander debunking what you have said to this House and it is most unfortunate. Mr. Minister, I will forward you this letter.

1.37 p.m.

I rise to join Colleagues in this House to speak to *Budget 2022*; a budget that is an installation of a menu of measures that does not reflect the wishes and the desires of the majority of people who essentially will have to live with the

ravages of increased poverty. Equally, Sir, it begs the question: where is the systematic developmental plan that shows a year-after-year projection in this close to six hours long speech – very impressive – 92 pages filled with words that does not clearly define a strategic and systemic time-bound developmental plan?

It must be noted from the outset that the Coalition views this Budget as anti-poor and anti-working class, given its orientation to be pro-business in a time when grave hardship is facing the majority of Guyanese citizens. We were told by the Government, last Wednesday, that food prices rose by 11.5% last year. I want to ask: which foods specifically does this percentage represents? This must be some type of voodoo economics at play, because almost all of the essential items for a food basket to sustain a household saw increases by a mere 25% in 2021. This Budget and by extension this Government have failed to give a clear direction of where we are going as a nation in tandem with the projected economic growth patterns. When one dissects the bulk of the political rhetoric from the Minister's Speech, in his effort to legitimise the space he and others are occupying on that side, one can appreciate the haste of putting together this document because their time is coming to an end. Flowery and well sugar-coated speeches cannot fool the people all the time.

The Minister, in the twilight of his presentation, posited that it is his fervent hope that this Budget will be judged on its merits. I can assure him that is what we, on this side, endeavours to do and will do. One of the main reasons for the Minister's lopsided approach to *Budget 2022* not addressing the plight of the poor, was the Government's remoteness from structural planning and the colonial import to governance. The utilisation of the divide and rule governance practices accompanied by cut and paste quasi-economic policies have engendered what we see on pages 39 and 40 of the *Budget Speech*, where no funds are earmarked for small businesses in Region 10.

Correspondingly, one needs to ask, who benefited from the value-added tax (VAT) removal on building materials besides the private sector? As a matter of fact, prices for materials got even higher after the removal of the VAT. All of these materials rose in prices – cement, steel, zinc, nails – making it far more difficult for the working poor and for the public servants to build their homes. Who benefited from the freight cost adjustment, which prices decreased as a result of this government's concession to the private sector? None! No one benefitted except the private sector. It is no surprise; one just has to be reminded of what Hon. Minister Mr. Indar

said in 2020. This is what he said. He said that everybody has to make money and that the Government will facilitate it. Is this really happening? Who is making this money?

Budget 2022 represents an unadulterated extortion of the people's money and fails with distinction to address the multitude of issues that plague our poor, vulnerable and underprivileged citizens of Guyana. We have to emancipate our citizens from the Government's hamper distribution policy that is at the core of their governance policy.

We are told that this Budget will be funded by oil inflows, but the *de facto* management of the supposed board is not yet in place, as prescribed to replace the superior arrangements in the Natural Resources Fund Act 2019. What is spurious about the Government is that they moved to repeal Natural Resources Fund Act 2019. They said that it was illegal but the same installed Regime collected billions of dollars in 2021 *via* the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) using Act 16/2019 the Custom (Amendment of Schedules), which was also promulgated in 2019. It is very clear that the intent was only to raid the oil funds using the Parliament cover as cover. This is the nefarious nature of the installed Regime. It is most disappointing to note and recognise the intellectual masturbation of the Minister about the current and projected oil revenues, coupled with a significant rise in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), due to the anticipated high oil prices. Despite his hysteria and despite his orgasmic moment about the country's new economic standing, his Government has failed to offer the poor, the vulnerable and the struggling masses any real hope for a better life against all of their real life challenges unearthed as a result of the management of the affairs of this Administration.

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance claims that he had difficulty navigating policy instruments to deal with price increases. Is this really so, Hon. Minister? Could you raise the income tax threshold to \$100,000? As you have moved the increase in the education cash grant, which is a good thing and we welcome this increase, but the same approach can be utilised across board as a policy instrument that represents equity. Please note that I have chosen not to say 'transparency', because the experiences with the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cash grant and the flood grant speak volumes about the People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C's) accountability.

The Government's paltry offerings of a mere \$10,000 increase in the tax threshold when the cost of living is violently abusing and *blamming* away at the shattered door

of the poor and the vulnerable is indicative of the Government's scant regard for the working class and the working poor in this country. Any reasonable thinking person who is living in today's harsh reality of these extremely high cost of living would have provided citizens with a reasoned increase of about \$60,000, given the incontestable fact that trained teachers, nurses, constables, policemen, armed force men, most of whom the Government is aware, get less than \$US500 a month. You could not have seen the common sense approach in ensuring that the public servants who keep the engine of Government running, be given a liveable increase. Come on, man; this is unacceptable. What is most flabbergasting about this Government and the many Ministers who presented so far, is how they had a braggadocious approach and a celebratory tone with a mere three per cent increase – a \$3,000 increase – to old age pension. A braggadocious appeal by the ministers, boasting about a \$3,000 increase to old age pensioners – \$3,000. The Hon. Prime Minister is also happy with his \$3,000. Three thousand dollars equates to \$100 a day. One hundred dollars a day you have given our public servants and our old age citizens. The Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, should be disappointed in this paltry sum. She has been a tireless and hardworking public servant. I am disappointed that this very hardworking, senior Member of the Government could not have used her very persuasive style of arguing to persuade her own Cabinet to ensure that senior citizens, like herself are beneficiaries of a significant increase to cushion the harsh realities of a high cost of living. This is total wickedness.

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance referred, in his Budget presentation, to the state of the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) as if it was sick financially because of someone else's doing. He was in charge of the plundering of workers' moneys from the NIS for political projects, investing in the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO), the Berbice Bridge and the Guyana Marriott. These projects guaranteed returns to private persons at the expense of hardworking Guyanese public servants who have made significant contributions to the NIS. [**Mr. McCoy:** *Inaudible*] it was successful. The Berbice Bridge *(inaudible)*] Mr. Speaker, the chief heckler is trying to distract me. The Government's chief heckler is trying to distract me but I will not be distracted from brining the truth to this honourable House.

The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) was given over \$50 billion for the last seven years but still owes NIS millions – millions – of dollars. Could the Hon. Minister say

what is he doing about this, to ensure that our public servants who are dependent now on the NIS get their dues? We on this side say that *Budget 2022* is not pro-poor. We do not, Mr. Speaker. We say so out of deep concern for the ordinary people who will have to withstand the effects of the Government's policies. Could you believe that this Government, in 2022, said that it cared about the working class in this country? The average working class owns a vehicle that is 1500 cubic capacities (cc) and less. What did this Government do? Instead of lowering the tax so that more hard-working public servants – the police who protect you, the army who protects you – could have been in a position to buy a car; what did they do? They reduced the taxes on vehicles above 1500cc – wickedness.

1.52 p.m.

I move to the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** The left left Minister.] The left left Minister, I am told. This is a ministry that I have been given the task to shadow. For the past two Budget debates, I am yet to hear or Guyana is yet to hear from the Minister with responsibility for this very important Ministry to adumbrate some intelligent ideas articulating the vision for the Ministry in those debates past, which he has fail to do. Hopefully, me being an optimist, I will wait to offer something of substance for his Ministry that is so important for Guyana and so important to the majority of our people in Guyana, our youth.

I hasten to say to the Minister, before he comes, that Guyana and, more specifically, the youth of this country are least interested in your version of the happenings during the election period that resulted in the Regime being on that side of the House. You are in the seat of Government. We are least concerned with what happened then, over and over every budget, wasting valuable time to set an agenda for the Ministry. We are least interested in him coming to repeat 'under the Coalition there were three ministers'. We do not want to hear that. Our young people want to hear from the Hon. Minister. We want you to tell us and tell this nation if it is possible and no pressure, what are your Ministry's plan for the billions more you have been in receipt of to develop, enhance and propel Guyana into higher heights in culture and sports with the collective contribution of our country's most valuable assets, our young people?

Preserving one's heritage is an important aspect of national life for any self-respecting government. Thus, the Guyana National Museum must be treated with respect. As we debate here, today, the exterior of the building and its

immediate environs are unkept for the longest time in the middle of the City. I wish if the media could take note and reveal this to the rest of Guyana. When it comes to culture and the promotion of it, I dare say, it goes beyond virtual concerts of which the Minister, his cohorts and his gang of role models who benefit from the promotion of these activities that he will have to provide answers to the people of this country when it comes to those estimates. After these concerts, after the bright lights have come off and after the stage is dismantled, what is next for all those talented artists?

The Minister, in 2021, hosted the Guyana Talent Search Competition and it appeared as if he was in search of himself. The Minister was the most featured person rather than the artists on all the radio stations and on all the television stations of the State. The Minister was in search of himself, denying talented Guyanese an opportunity for national and international exposure. What is the end game in all of this? Is it to ensure, as what the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, posited that ‘*money gah fuh mek*’ or is it to ensure that the artists get some money? We are of the full view that our talented artists in this country must be highly compensated. After all, they are showcasing their talent for Guyana. I dare say, that should not be the end game after the talent has been discovered.

It is well known that Guyana has a plethora of talented young musicians who often times find it challenging to pay for studio time. We need a government facility and it is a recommendation I am putting to the Hon. Minister for serious consideration. I have done this numerous times and sadly to the detriment of the Ministry, none of those brilliant proposals have been put by this Minister. I am not dissuaded in offering Guyana the best of ideas for our people. I say to the Ministry and to the Minister with responsibility that Guyana needs a facility where our young people can go and be provided with the services to help them in their craft. The Minister must endeavour to help our nation’s talented youths by offering them scholarships to the universities, home and abroad; and to enhance their passion in the arts. The Minister should invest in establishing a national music and photography studio for youths to have hands on opportunities to learn how to make and produce music, be exposed to voice and vocal training, and use the different musical instruments that bring the sound of beautiful music. Each region should also be provided with some of the same facilities to seek out; find and nurture those talents; to the benefit of those individuals, their families, communities and, by extension, the country.

It is in this regard I call on the Government, after recognising in this talent search that Guyana has real talent, real musicians and real singers. I call on the Government – and I wish the Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall, was here because he is one of the Ministers who is actually working – to bring copyright legislation, so that our talented artist intellectual properties can be protected and they can actually make money on the use of their intellectual property. Additionally, the Ministry should embark on a regional exchange programme from Regions 1 to 10 for Guyana’s youths to know and experience our cultural differences as a people. We should have students and young people from Region 6 going to Region 10 and students from Region 7 going to Region 2, so that we could have an interlink of experiences, and so that we could really and truly aspire as a nation and to make the President’s pronouncement about ‘One Guyana’ a real reality. It starts with programmes and initiatives like that.

The diversity of Guyana gives us a unique advantage Hon. Member Mr. Kwame McCoy that does not present itself anywhere else in the region and, I think, in the world. We have six beautiful people but not you, Mr. McCoy. We have six beautiful people, with the exception of the Hon. Member, with different cultural practices, religion, food, music, customs, norms, *et cetera* that, we as Guyanese, embrace as ours. We embrace each other’s culture. We participate in Phagwah; we participate in Christmas; we participate in Diwali. We see those occasions as Guyanese. We have to be serious in our approach of how we deal with ensuring that we forge a ‘One Guyana’ that can become a reality. As our motto states, one people, one nation aspiring to achieve one Destiny. We share this with the rest of the world. This is an opportunity we have to expose our culture to the rest of the world, our culture, that is so unique.

It is time to brand Guyana in music, dance, arts and craft. It is time to brand our culture. The question is, why have we not done so? It is because of poor leadership, no vision and leadership at the Ministry. We have seen and it is very sad; it is very sad, Mr. McCoy, that Mashramani – our own – reflective of our Indigenous people – not Amerindians, Brother Charlie; – Indigenous people – one of our national cultural events, has not been given the type of Government support for it to grow and mushroom into the countries number one cultural event that showcases Guyanese identity on an international scale. Mashramani should be given the much-needed resources and branded to the world as Guyana’s version of carnival. This is our own carnival and it should be given government’s support to ensure that it

becomes a reality. Mashramani, like crop over in Barbados, should be on a national platform where the world comes to Guyana to engage in what we have to offer as a nation of six people. The Business Community – the private sector that this Budget caters so much for should be given special concessions from the Government for their participation and contribution in helping to elevate Mashramani, so that the country's premier national event can be materialised. Rather, we see another country's culture being given priority right here in Guyana. That is an indictment to us as leaders. We are promoting someone else's culture when we have our own Mashramani which is a product that we as Guyanese can develop.

It is a crying shame. I have said it once and it is worth repeating. It is time for brand Guyana. The time is now for the rest of the world to know we exist; beyond the discovery of tonnes of cocaine; beyond having the largest suicide rate in the world; and for our newfound wealth, our oil resource. We should not be known for more than that. We must be known for our uniqueness as one people with six different ethnicities. The collective wealth we share in this country is our *guyaneness* which is a brand and it must be showcased to the world. There should be opportunities for our young people to participate in the arts and theatre in acting, playwriting, videography and directing. We need to see our own people in our locally produced movies, sitcoms and cartoons with our own Guyanese dialect – with our own Guyanese dialect. The time has come and the time is now for Guyana to establish its own film industry. I call on the Minister to use wisdom and ensure that these proposals become our Guyanese reality. Do not see it as coming from the Opposition, see it coming from a Guyanese who wants the best for this country.

Finally, it is well known that Guyana has, as I have said, a plethora of talent. It is time, we here in Guyana, produce a next Eddy Grant, produce a next Poonam Singh, a Diana Chapman, a Jomo, a Natural Black and a Samuel Medas. These opportunities have to be created by the Government playing a more decisive role and a more leading role in ensuring that our youth and our young people are given the best of opportunities to succeed in the world.

Sports – [**Mr. McCoy:** (*inaudible*)] The distractor is at his best. Sports has to play a more defining role in carving out our national identity.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you can carve that out further, you need more time.

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, Hon. Member. You may continue to do your carving out for five minutes.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you should listen to this part of the presentation. I know you are an ardent cricket fan and a table tennis player. I know you have a keen interest in sports and I know you want sports to develop here in Guyana. Your own effort is testimony to the marvellous and magnificent work the Speaker has done at the Everest Cricket Ground (ECG).

[*Technical difficulties experienced.*]

2.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think it has to do with the connection in the front row where the Hon. Member Mr. Jones is seated. Just give us a few minutes, also I stopped your clock at 2.08 p.m. Let us try one more time and see. All right, we have to get the technicians again. Hon. Member, you may try again.

Mr. Figueira: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member, Mr. Jones seem to be at the controls. Is that a new arrangement for Chief Whips? Hon. Member, it is now 2.09 p.m., you lost two minutes and you would get it back. Go ahead.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. Sports has to play a more defining role in carving out our national identity, and I dare say, yet again, the Minister is visionless in this regard. He has a jaundice view of what is needed to develop this ministry and of what is needed to develop sports in this country. I say so not to intentionally belittle the Hon. Minister because that is not my forte. I believe the Minister does that himself with regal grace. He spent the entire of his 2021 budget presentation at the polling station. This man is obsessed with the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). My position that I have articulated concerning this Minister and his very limited ability to push this ministry is informed by his very tenure at the ministry thus far. It would be remiss of me if I fail to state what I have aforementioned, that the Minister is a misfit for this portfolio. He by his own actions has put forward a no confidence motion against himself because he is a total misfit. I have seen a few ministers of the Government, I believe, doing work. I may not agree many

times with the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, but he is a Minister who is working. I do not agree with many things said by the Hon. Attorney General (AG), but he is working, and he is working assiduously to ensure that our petition does not succeed because he knows the revelations that would be unearthed of its misdeeds that is a result of it being on that side.

Mr. Todd, I see you are smiling. Mr. Todd, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs is foreign to the affairs of the Ministry. This Minister is a Minister of Mars. He is the best dressed Minister of Mars. I am so thankful and happy that the Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues is still working for this Ministry. I am happy that Mr. Carl Greenidge is there and the former Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Robert Persaud. These two people have contributed to saving our image on the international scene.

Let me go back to my portfolio. This nation is yet to be aware of the Minister and by extension the government's overarching time bound developmental plan for the ministry. I say that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and more specifically sports, needs to go beyond ground enhancements and balls distribution. This country has a number of talented athletes. The Olympics presents over 40 disciplines, 33 summer sports and 7 winter Olympic games, respectively – of which our options to choose from the variety that exists – of which we could competitively participate. We do not want to just attend these functions; we want to go there with the intent to be competitive and actually win. I see an opportunity before us to identify and prepare for several identified sport disciplines of which we have the greatest chance of winning Olympic medals and focus on those disciplines as a national priority, more so, with a timeframe. Of course, not forsaking the other potentials in the respective disciplines.

We must have a phase-by-phase developmental strategy. The Minister must retire from the optics, who cares which staff cried on seeing the quality of chairs at the National Cultural Centre. How does that concern us? Here is where the minister must invest the available limited resources that is much needed for durable infrastructure for those disciplines to have, more importantly, invest in our technical personnel. This country has a paltry of qualified coaches and nutritionists. These are the technical people, the coaches, the referees, the nutritionists on all...

Mr. Speaker: It is time to wind down now, Hon. Member.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you and allow me one minute to conclude. This industry needs qualified people to provide the best training and the technical guidance that is required for our athletes to have the best chances of succeeding. We see moneys for ground enhancement, but we see no enhanced players, and there is a reason for that. We do not have the skillset of personnel that is required. Even at the Ministry, the Minister's own personal assistant, what technical capacity does these individuals have that the Minister surrounds himself with, that massages his ego. We need to move beyond self if we are to develop sports, develop culture, and more so, develop our youths.

Finally, all of what *Budget 2022* offers are not bad, some are good, but the majority of it lacks public consultation. It lacks the ingredients of the Opposition's contribution in making this budget a superior budget. With that, I cannot support *Budget 2022*. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Our next contributor is the Hon. Charles Ramson Jr, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports.

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports [Mr. Ramson]: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I, listened very attentively over the last day and a half and I have also listened to the previous speaker, speak about how important the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports was until the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) disbanded the Ministry under its tenure.

I want to start off by saying that when a person comes to this House, he/she has to come with credibility. I am glad that the previous speaker and the Hon. Member, Christopher Jones, personalised this debate. I have said to the Hon. Members of this House many times before, do not get personal with me.

There is an old legal maxim that he who comes to equity must come with clean hands. People who steal barber chairs cannot criticise us. People who steal pigs cannot criticise us. People who steal bangles, bedsheets and bracelets cannot criticise us. People who give his/her own video production company contracts cannot criticise us. People who transfer \$90 million into their bank accounts within three months cannot criticise us. People who built the D'urban Park project for \$1.4 billion and \$600 million which cannot be found cannot criticise us. People who sole-source a bottom house for a drug bond for \$12.5 million a month, costing taxpayers \$340 million cannot criticise us. People who spent \$1 billion on the States Assets Recovery Agency (SARA) and could produce nothing cannot criticise us. People who

said that they won an election but cannot show their Statements of Polls (SOP) cannot criticise us. People who never run a cake shop, much less a fowl pen, cannot criticise us. They are hollering and am not done yet. Just like the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines said, take your licks like a man. In the famous words of the Prime Minister of Barbados, the Hon. Mia Mottley, what did she say when she defended our democracy on the APNU/AFC's attempt to rig the elections – the truth hurts. That is why no protests it would ever call; it would ever get anyone out there to come and support it – no protests. The scores of protests that it called in the last year and a half, nobody came to support it. Why? Why? It is because the people of the country know who it is and it has no credibility.

I am pleased to come to this House to support the country's largest budget in this country's history. This budget is not just the largest budget in the country's history. It is a 44% increase from the previous year. There are no taxes added, in fact, the taxes have been reduced. We are about to spend \$1.5 billion in this economy every single year for the year, 2022. Increasing money in circulation, creating thousands of jobs, creating invaluable, lasting benefits for the people of the country and creating a new and transformed Guyana.

2.22 p.m.

In addition, the budget deficit is a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is low. Our net domestic borrowing is low. It has fallen by half from \$100 billion to now \$50 billion plus in 2022, so that Government would not be competing with the private sector on loans. Our money supply is higher and that means more money would be in circulation. Our foreign reserves have now doubled. It moved from US\$400 million under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) to now, US\$800 million under us. Our balance of trade has moved from a deficit of US\$1.5 billion under the APNU/AFC to now, a surplus of US\$375 million. Our macro-economic position is healthier. On the very day that this historic budget was presented to this country, it was the very day, the Leader of the Opposition resigned. For the first time in our democracy, since democracy was restored in 1992, Guyana does not have a Leader of the Opposition. For all the folks who voted for APNU/AFC this is what they were continuing to get from the APNU/AFC – betrayal. It betrayed the people of the country while it was in Government, and it is continuing to betray the people of the country, today. All the confusion that is happening in the Opposition is because its deeds that are catching up with it.

The closing down of the sugar estates and the firing of 7,000 sugar workers, making them beg for their severance; the firing of the 2,000 Community Service Officers (CSO) the Amerindian officers; the breaching of the Constitution multiple times; the betraying of young people; the refusal to call an election within three months after it lost a no confidence motion; the insulting of the Guyanese intelligence by telling the people that 33 is not a majority of 65; attempting to rig the elections in front of the entire world and refusing to exit the office of the government for five months, causing this country trauma. Just when we thought that the international embarrassment was over, it attempted to steal the Mace on Facebook live. Some of the Members of the Opposition should be careful of how they are heckling me because they are not sure if they will keep their seats at the end of this Parliament.

Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, with this budget, the President Ali led PPP/C Government is about to commence the transformation of Guyana into a modern and prosperous country before our very eyes. All promises presented in our Manifesto will be kept and we will honour each and every single one. We promised to reverse every one of the 200 plus taxes that the APNU/AFC heartlessly put on the people of the country. We removed them. The value-added tax (VAT) on electricity is gone, VAT on water is gone; VAT on data is gone; VAT on cellular phones is gone; VAT on agriculture machinery is gone; VAT on mining equipment is gone; VAT on construction is gone and VAT on exports is gone.

We promised that we would distribute 50,00 house lots and we are on track. We have already distributed over 10,000 house lots in our first year. We have distributed more house lots than the APNU/AFC in its entire five years in Government. It will be the greatest transfer of wealth to the ordinary people of the country within any five-year period, to date.

We promised 20,000 scholarships and we have already done 6,000; we promised that we would return the Disciplined Services bonus and we have returned so; we promised that we would return the school's cash grant which the APNU/AFC took away from the ordinary people – the ordinary people that it claimed to love so much now, and we returned it. We have increased it already to \$25,000 per child. We extended it to the private schools, as well. The uniform cash grant is now up to \$30,000 per child. We will deliver the \$50,000 cash grant per child.

Meanwhile, the APNU/AFC even as Opposition, cannot keep its promises. It promised that it would hold a protest

every Wednesday at lunch time at the Square of the Revolution and it cannot even honour its promise. It promised that it would take the 'People's Parliament' that it had by the market square – the Stabroek Market. The Hon. Members on the other side started to *pampazette* themselves outside by the market square. It has not done that. It could not even honour its word.

The method of this Government is different too. The President Ali led People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is always on the ground building with the people, forming a partnership with people and consulting every day. One Member of our Cabinet and sometimes many Members of our Cabinet are in the fields and on the ground everyday consulting and building with people. When the Opposition wants to ask about how the consultation took place in building this budget, it was by building every single day with people. I have done more consultations with communities and stakeholders than the entire APNU/AFC did while it was in Government for its entire five years. The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Singh said I do more interviews in a day, explaining everything going on with my sector than the former President David Granger did for his entire five years.

I want to say this about the oil money. Many persons are asking how they are going to benefit from the oil money because they are hearing a lot about the oil money. It is a fair question because given the APNU/AFC history with oil money where it hid the US\$18 million and then it disappeared. When the Government of Guyana Petroleum Advisor was Carol Smith-Joseph... The most exciting oil economy in the world and the Petroleum Advisor to the Government of Guyana was Carol Smith-Joseph. It is natural that the people of the country would be jaded as a result of their history with the APNU/AFC and oil. I would like to advise the people of the country that this is the first year that we will be spending our oil money in the economy. This is the first time that they would be seeing real benefits.

What are we spending on? Guyana has to leap-frog the developmental curve. We have to convert our oil resources from under the ground into assets and infrastructural capital above the ground. All the developmental economists would say to spend the money first on infrastructure. I thought that the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan who likes to quote this book called the *Bottom Billion* by Paul Collier... He has been quoting this book since 2008, which is 15 plus years ago but Mr. Ramjattan, you have to update your book collection because Guyana has changed. The same author

who wrote this book actually presented a signed copy of this book to me and in this book, Paul Collier stated to spend money on infrastructure. That is the first thing that a country should be doing when it is spending its oil money. It should not have a big party; not raise salaries. It should spend its money first on infrastructure.

What are some of these transformational infrastructures? The gas-to-power project will lower our electricity cost by 50% creating more moneys in people's pockets and the preliminary work is already underway. The new four-lane high span bridge over the Demerara River which will give us back time and not the three-lane bridge that the APNU/AFC wanted to build. I also want to mention something else that the Hon. Dr. Singh mentioned in his budget speech which brought me back to 2010, when we were trying to build the Hope Canal. Hon. Minister Benn, do you remember, when you were the Minister of Public Works, when we were trying to build the Hope Canal? I want to share with you, Mr. Speaker and I will leave this so that you could have the benefit and the House could have the benefit of this.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

The Opposition, first of all naturally opposed it but that was expected. Anything that is beneficial to the people of the country, once the People's Progressive Party/Civic is doing it, it will oppose it. There is something that I want to leave here just for the sake of reference because there are a lot of young people who are going to be...

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

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Shuman: Stander Order 41 (6), the Hon. Member is trying to impugn improper motive on my character, contrary to my Colleagues.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you may want to expunge the Hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will judge all the support for the budget when the time comes for the voting for the budget. I want to leave with this House, two articles – one from the *Stabroek News* newspaper and one from the *Kaieteur News* newspaper which states:

“The GHRA urges the suspension of the Hope Canal Project and the Hope Canal expenditure is reckless”.

When this project was being opposed by this body – the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA), even though it had nothing to do with human rights opposed this project. However, since its construction, it has saved Guyana billions of dollars of economic value and wealth here to people. I am leaving these here. We are going to be building two more canals to save all the regions where those economic values and agriculture is being done.

I also want to say one other thing about oil. The Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) is many times confused in the debate by references made to the Kingdom of Norway. Why I want to clarify this position is that Norway found oil in 1969. It started producing first in 1971, from Ekofisk. It did not set up its Sovereign Wealth Fund until 1990. It did not transfer its first capital into the fund until 1996.

2.37 p.m.

The Kingdom of Norway had 25 years of spending its oil money on infrastructure for schools, hospitals, buildings, roads, bridges and all of these things were built during those 25 years. Why should it be any different for us here in Guyana where we have a weakness in our public infrastructure stock in the country?

I would like to touch on the criticism that we are hearing from the Opposition who have now gone silent. They have now gone silent. The criticism that we hear from the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change is inconsistent, first of all. At one point it is saying that the budget is too big, then at another point it is saying that we should be giving more. One cannot do both. Then I heard one of the Hon. Members mentioned the term trickle-down economics. We heard the Opposition Members saying what the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) is doing is trickle-down economics. The Hon. Member then turned to another young Member on the other side and said yes, the Government is practicing trickle-down economics. We are not practising trickle-down economics. Just like I have to teach the Hon. Member, Mr. 'Pigueira' – I mean Figueira – I also now have to teach Mr. Jones and now the other young Members on the other side. When one is doing trickle-down economics, one reduces taxes on things such as capital gains. One reduces taxes on high income earners. One reduces taxes on things such as savings and dividends. We are not doing any of that. We are reducing the taxes on consumption. We are reducing the taxes on productivity and capital stock. We are reducing those taxes.

I see the young Members on the other side have disappeared. I would like them to hear what I am about to say because they may be listening to me wherever they are. For the young Members on the other side, you have to earn the stripes. Not the right because you already have the right by being a Member of Parliament (MP). You have to earn the stripes to diss certain Members in this House –especially in this front row. Do not go down the road of being personal with them. You have not earned the stripes. Many of you have not even run a pig pen properly. You have not even run a fowl pen properly.

When I came to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, it was not even a ministry. When I came here and we added all the allocations for the year 2020, we had an allocation of \$2.89 billion. For 2022, we now have an allocation of \$5.6 billion which is just under 100% increase. When an Hon. Member came to this House and said that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports is so important, but it was so important that it was the APNU/AFC who disbanded the Ministry and relegated it to departments within ministries. Betraying young people. Not a single young person was appointed as a Member of the Cabinet. Not a single young person was appointed as a Minister in the previous Government. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I heard the Hon. Members saying that Ms. Sarabo-Halley, *ya ole*. The Hon. Members do not even know – including the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley – that Ms. Sarabo-Halley was a 'Charrandass baby'. Ms. Sarabo-Halley was a 'Charrandass baby'. She was appointed in April of 2019 after the no-confidence motion. What did the Constitution state about when one loses a no confidence motion? Let me remind them. The famous Article 106 (6) states:

“The Cabinet including the President shall resign if the Government is defeated by the vote of a majority of all the elected members of the National Assembly on a vote of confidence.”

If there was a single appointment, then that again was in breach of the Constitution. That was another breach of the Constitution. The People's Progressive Party/Civic has restored the Ministry to its rightful place with a seat at the Cabinet and the result is, our budget for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport has doubled. The youth budget just for training now stretches across many of the ministries with large allocations. The Ministry of Education for technical vocational education will receive \$2.5 billion dollars for the training of young people. The University of Guyana (UG) will get \$3.5 billion. The Ministry of the Public Service's Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) Scholarship

Programme for young people will get \$1.3 billion plus an additional \$1 billion for training in the public service, many of whom are young people. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports for training and youth programmes will get \$841 million. The Ministry of Labour, the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) will get \$450 million. The new Port Mourant Apprentice Training Centre (PMTTC) focusing on oil and gas will get \$260 million. That is for training alone. Tens of thousands of young people will benefit from house lots and young professional homes. That is happening because we have the care and concern for young people in the country. Youth entrepreneurship will also see major benefits. For sport, the budget is now \$3.15 billion with a capital of \$2.4 billion.

Every sport association and federation has issued statements for the first time in the history of this country. They have issued statements in support of the Government, in support of the Ministry, in support of the programme and the relationship that they have with the Minister and the National Sports Commission (NSC). I will leave all the statements here. After the appointment of our National Sports Commission and the Director of Sport, our board has been working. Meanwhile, under the APNU/AFC, its board met three times in three years. Three times in three years. The Director of Sport came here and *pampazetted* himself once again. He said that he cared so much about sport and about young people. Not a single audited financial statement as required by the Act was ever produced and laid in this National Assembly. Not a single one for the entire APNU/AFC as required by the law. That is being done now and will be laid before this honourable House.

We also completed the Guyana Cricket Board (GCB) elections. Something that did not happen for over 10 years, that was fraught with all kinds of problems. I do not need his criticism or his approbation. What I have here is a public statement from none other than Sir Clive Lloyd. He issued a public statement after we saw the completion of the election. Let me read the last paragraph. I will leave this with you too, Mr. Speaker. He said and I quote:

“Finally, it would be remiss of me not to refer to the efficiency with which the young minister of Sports, Honourable Charles, ensured the return of due regularity in the administration of cricket by insisting and ensuring that elections were held at every level, including that of the GCB”.

Sir, I had the privilege...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, end of time. You need an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, you may continue.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had the privilege of having a phone conversation with him after he was knighted by the Queen. I hold this public statement issued to me. Not the words said by the Hon. Member Jermaine ‘Pigueira’ and the Hon. Member ‘Barber Shop’ – ‘Barber Chairs’. Their words mean nothing for me. The words of Sir Clive Lloyd mean something to me. The words of the Athletics Association of Guyana (AAG) mean something to me. The words of the people of the country mean something to me.

We returned the Guyana Football Federation (GFF)/Kashif and Shanghai Tournament. We returned the Annual 3 Stage Cycle Road Race after five years, after the APNU/AFC cut funding for the race. We had the inaugural Guyana Sports Conference where we had the consultation for our first ever National Sports Academy (NSA). We then launched our National Sports Academy in December. On the international scene, we had the West Indies versus Pakistan tournament right here in Guyana. We also bid for and succeeded in hosting the Under-19 Cricket World Cup tournament right here in Guyana. Our capital money is going to be spent on the transformation of all our sports facilities and the building of our stadiums that the President announced in one of his speeches that he made to the public.

Concerning culture, the APNU/AFC likes to pretend that it is the cultured, sophisticated group until the cloak of sophistication was removed with the unsophisticated and rank attempt to rig the 2020 elections. That is when one saw the true nature of the beast. While in Government, the APNU/AFC loved culture so much that it removed the Guyana Prize for Literature. It removed the cultural endowment fund. It disbanded the Caribbean Press and replaced it with nothing. No explanation. Nothing. Meanwhile, in its 2020 election year, it spent \$290 million on Mashramani and \$50 million on Buju Banton tickets.

In 2021, we did the Cultural and Creative Industries Grant for 30 young people who received \$1 million for their

cultural and creative projects. I am pleased to announce the return of The Cultural Endowment Fund which will be in the sum of \$100 million. I am also pleased to announce the return of the Guyana Prize for Literature. Those 18 events that we were speaking about and that the Hon. Member wished to speak disparagingly about, the country needed it in a time of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Mental health was the most important thing in keeping people sane, keeping people in their relationships sane and those virtual concerts helped in promoting mental health as a form of entertainment. Safe entertainment in the country. Those events were of a very high standard. The highpoint of those events was our cultural performance at the World Expo in Dubai. I would like to speak about our ground enhancement. This is something that is very popular in the country. Out of our allocations and after going around the country, I have never seen all our community grounds and community centres so neglected.

2.52 p.m.

They were in such poor state, despite claiming they had spent all that money. That is why the Community Grounds Enhance Programme is so popular because it is making such a big difference to the people of the country. Out of our last budget, we have already lighted nine community grounds across this country with solid concrete poles, Light-Emitting Diode (LED) lights, and running underground wiring. I am please as well to announce that, in this year's allocation, there will be \$250 million in our budget for ground enhancement.

I want to conclude by saying this, 'I' and 'we' are not labouring under any misapprehension that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) will support this Budget. 'I' and the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PP/C), 'we' are not labouring under the misapprehension that the APNU/AFC will support anything beneficial to the people of this country because it is the People's Progressive Party/Civic that is in power.

I know this for a fact, because when they could want and call for a boycott of a clean-up event in this country, we know where their hearts are, and it is not for the benefit of this country, it is for the benefit of themselves. That is why they are fighting so hard to get back into power. But the people of the country know who they are. Either way, the country is moving on regardless, and the country will prosper without them. Thank you, very much. [Applause]

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, as I rise today to add my contribution to this debate, I first must make some general statements. The Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, his idea of 'One Guyana' is him using his one set of friends across the Ministry with taxpayers' moneys... Look at the broadcast of the national concerts, only aired on the National Communications Network (NCN), National Television Network (NTN), Multi Technology Vision (MTV), Television Guyana (TVG 28), Hits and Jams Television (HJTV) and Entertainment Networks (E-networks). They are all friends and family of the Government.

In the Hon. Member's world there is no Hoyte-Blackman Television (HBTv) Channel 9, no Little Rock Television (LRTV) Station, no Halagala Production Television (HGPTV), no Chandra Narine Sharma (CNS) TV Channel 6 and no Rambarran Broadcasting Station (RBS) Channel 13. He directs where the Government's money should go, only to his friends and family and blacklist those who speak against the Government. The Hon. Member could best be described as a well-dress failure. He has no policy and surrounds himself with promoters and support organisers using their hard work to make himself look good. It is really a shame.

On that note, it is quite interesting that the Government Ministers seems so incapable of representing themselves that their Chief Whip ensures that they speak after their Opposition shadows. In any normal Parliament, the Government Ministers would present their vision for the year and what they intend to do with the moneys allocated to their ministries and the opposition shadows would have a chance to respond. That is not so in Guyana. If Guyanese take a look at the line-up of speakers, it is clear that the Government Ministers do not want to speak before their counterparts on our side. I find myself trying to understand the minds of those who believed that the Guyanese people would be happy with the Budget that is before us. After reading the Budget presentation, there is no way I can accept this as good enough for the Guyanese people who are currently facing economic and social hardships.

The PPP/C has presented three budgets to this Assembly since their installation in 2020. Their *Budget 2020* read: *Our Plan For Prosperity: Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Economic Growth; and, Job Creation; and, Enhancing Welfare.*

When *Budget 2021* came knocking on the Parliament's door, a number of things were made clear from *Budget 2020*. One

– the PPP/C’s concern about unemployment did not extend to the over one thousand persons they dismissed over the last 16 months. Two – the PPP/C’s concern for the welfare of the citizens did not extend to those who now, either no longer receive public assistance or are being blackmailed by the staff to give a percentage of what they are receiving or get their names pulled from receiving public assistance in the future. Three – the PPP/C’s does not know how to protect our people in a Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) environment. Four – their governance structure is autocratic and everything they are engaged in is turbid, unconstitutional and antithetical to good governance. Five – the PPP/C’s plan for prosperity was for themselves and cronies. The United States (US) Embassy here in Guyana was forced to speak to the issue of rule of law in relation to how the PPP/C has operated since returning to Office stating that:

“...you need to be serious about the economic manifestation of the rule of law...”

This must be seen as an indication of how far the PPP/C is from what could be considered transparent, accountable, equitable and ensuring due process. Then, we moved on to *Budget 2021* which promised: “*A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. By the end of 2021, everyone asked: what did the PPP/C recover us from? From all appearances, we are in a worse state than we were in 2020 and by the end of their term in Office, we will still be in recovery mode.

People questioned whether those on the other side understood the meaning of dynamism. Economic dynamism is a concept that must be understood first in its wider context. The term economic dynamism refers to the rate and direction of change in an economy. It traditionally encompasses activities like the rate of new businesses’ formation, the frequency of labour market turnover, and the geographic mobility of the workforce. It basically allows for a process termed creative destruction, where businesses enter the marketplace and expand, or they contract and leave the marketplace. Now, if this is done strictly based on the supply and demand of the consumer, then it would be difficult to fight. However, the reality is that governments are usually the largest consumer of goods and services in any economy. Small, medium and large companies rely on contracts from the government to remain viable.

In our context, when a government has been as authoritarian as the PPP/C and thrives on driving fear into Guyanese, the government becomes the so-called invisible hand in our economy, determining the levels of dynamism we see. What

does this mean? Many companies entering and leaving the market here in Guyana, do so on the sole premise of whether they can gain contracts from the government. In the end, the economy has been dynamic, negatively affecting anyone, group or company that may be deemed not a friend of the PPP/C and positively affecting those who are friends and families of the PPP/C. Now, they have saddled us with this latest Budget titled: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*, with a non-oil budget of \$426 billion, \$6 billion less than last year, when one adds the four supplementals to the \$383 billion they initially presented in March, 2021.

This PPP/C Regime has given away so many tax concessions to their cronies and borrowed so much that our current non-oil budget is \$6 billion less than it was last year. Now, it becomes clear why they rushed to pass and assent to the Natural Resource Fund Bill of 2021, which the majority of Guyanese believe was illegally passed in the National Assembly. To sit and boast about the largest budget ever, when a large section of the population is left to suffer due to your poor attempt at governance, not yours Mr. Speaker, but the PPP/C’s, your incompetence, your mediocre attempt at policy formation and your inability to create and sell to the Guyanese people a vision that we could all agree to and work towards is ludicrous.

While they come here and boast about the largest budget, the Guyanese people have to endure, inflation, high cost of living, high youth unemployment, extrajudicial killings, blackouts, load shedding, blackouts, load shedding, plenty more blackouts and lots of load shedding. Then, there is no water, low water or if you are lucky to get water, it is grey water, brown water or reddish water, like the new \$2000 bill. Those are the challenges, and frankly speaking, they are all manmade challenges created by a group of people who are not allowed to think for themselves, but follow the instruction of one man whose scope is limited to corruption, nepotism, racism, bullyism and narcissism. This cabal has no idea what they are doing. They lack the intellectual capacity and foresight to effectively prepare the economy for the moneys available to us through the Natural Resource Fund. As far as the Members on this side of the House are concerned the NRF Bill, Bill No. 20 of 2021 was not legally passed. But what is even more worrying is that the PPP/C, who rushed that Bill through, is content not to abide by sections of it. Section 16 (2) states quite clearly that:

“All withdrawals from the Fund shall be deposited into the Consolidated Fund and shall be used only to finance -

(a) national development priorities including any initiative aimed at realising an inclusive green economy; and

(b) essential projects that are directly related to ameliorating the effect of a major natural disaster.

This section expects any government to clearly identify the national development priorities that require the resources of the Fund. Instead, what we are seeing in this Budget is a line item under Table 2(a), Table 2(b) and Table 4 which shows that the full \$126 billion will be withdrawn from the Fund. This is unacceptable and must be corrected. Nowhere in the NRF Act, that we believe is illegal, is there any word like consultation. Not one word suggests that the Guyanese people should be consulted on anything to do with how the Fund will operate or the moneys allocated. This to me should be seen as a major red flag. Why would you negate any form of consultative process with the stakeholders?

Just a few days ago, I had a dream. And, in this dream there were 65 members sitting in a National Assembly. There was a handsome gentleman sitting in the chair of the Speaker. In this dream, the Members on the Government side brought a bill before the Assembly, a Bill resembling all things corrupt and lacking transparency and accountability. The Members of the opposition side at the behest of their constituents and other right-minded groups and citizens, sought to have the bill sent to a select committee to facilitate consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. One thing led to the other and the Assembly was out of control. You see, my little understanding of how a Speaker operates suggests to me that whenever the Speaker recognises that he is not in control of the House he should adjourn the sitting and seek to speak to both the Government and Opposition to determine an amicable way forward.

3.07 p.m.

But, this Speaker in my dream was adamant to carry on with the business of his pay masters. Amidst the noise and confusion, I saw this Speaker holding on for dear life to a replica Mace and presiding over the Assembly where all Members were in defiance of his authority. Mr. Speaker, he did not care as long as his pay masters got what they wanted, and they were happy. His actions gave a lot of credence to the view that he does not attempt to pretend to be unbiased. Then again, Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I think you had a premonition and not a dream. Will you move on from that and come back to the Budget?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, I am almost finished with my dream.

Mr. Speaker: ...or else... You had a premonition.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: No, Mr. Speaker. It was a dream.

Mr. Speaker: It played out. Continue please.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could I finish my dream? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Not on this line though.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Then again, in my dream it was mentioned that he was on the Government's List of Candidates for the elections and that particular Government does not allow for any among its rank to even pretend to be independent. I guess the Opposition Members should not expect much from that Speaker. In the dream it became very evident that in that august House they reached the Nadir of all things transparent and accountable. For those of us who may or may not know, Nadir means the lowest point, a time of great depression. It is probably fitting in the most facetious way...

Mr. Speaker: I could give you some other definitions of Nadir also. If you are an ardent space fan, when you have the zenith, the star way above you, the opposite side is Nadir. In Arabic, I point you to check that out – very esteem person.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Alright, Sir. This is a dream, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I am a Muslim, and my name derives from Arabic. I want to, again, urge you to move on from your dreams.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: So, Mr. Speaker, it is probably fitting in the most facetious way that we find ourselves here today with an installed Regime, a travesty of a 2022 Budget and 16 months of a National Assembly being presided over by the Speaker of the House the Hon. Manzoor Nadir.

As the person responsible for shadowing the Public Service Minister, I must say that I am utterly dumbfounded and at a loss for words to describe how farcical it is of this Administration to bring its third budget to this House with little to no focus on developing or improving the public sector. Reading the entire Budget Speech, there was one

mention of the public service, and that only one mention was of what you did last year, which was already unacceptable. I am standing here wondering if the Public Service Ministry is a shell Ministry or is it that the Administration has no faith in the Hon. Minister.

The Education Ministry has seemingly hijacked the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) project, which was the only noticeable work that the Public Service Ministry was involved in. At this juncture, I am perplexed as to what the Hon. Minister and her Ministry has been doing or, according to this Budget, is planning to do for 2022. I await her presentation so that she could not only inform me, but this nation of what exactly she has been doing as the Minister of the Public Service over the last 16 months, and what she intends to do besides the GOAL Programme. As we are on the GOAL project, which is most likely what the Minister will spend most of her time speaking about, outside of probably what happened during the recount and my scholarship and who I did or did not give scholarships to, there are a number of things I believe should be highlighted. While the issuing of scholarships are an important part of the responsibilities of the Minister of the Public Service, it was placed under the care of this particular Ministry because it is expected that these scholars, once they have completed their programmes, would enter the public service, utilising their new skills and knowledge to further professionalise said public service.

This is not so for the GOAL recipients, as GOAL recipients are not bound to work in the public service. Thus, even public servants who are GOAL scholarship recipients could choose, after completing their programme, to leave the public service. Why then is the Minister of the Public Service spending so much of her time marketing a programme that is likely to have very little impact on the public service? Another question that must be answered is, will there be any database in place to ensure that scholarship recipients have first access to vacancies whether in the public or private sector or will our scholarship recipients be left to figure it all out on their own?

There are already major complaints about the GOAL scholarships as no assistance is given to recipients of these scholarships who do not have consistent and constant access to the internet. For those of us who are not aware, the majority, if not all of the scholarships, are to institutions overseas that are not aware of and are not interested in our deficiencies here where blackouts and the internet are concerned. The onus thus lies with the Ministry of the Public Service and the Ministry of Education to ensure that

recipients are able to successfully complete their programmes. This alone brings us to another point. What really is the success rate of those who received scholarships? It is all good to boast about the 5,000 or 6,000 persons who received GOAL scholarships, but could the Minister indicate to this House, what the success rate is for persons who took part in the short courses over the last year? There is no serious human resource plan and programme for our country that would ensure that our unemployment numbers reduce significantly. As I am sure I have said before, scholarships are good, but if not properly planned and targeted we will continue to have persons with a myriad of certificates who cannot find proper employment and that should not be our aim at this juncture of our development.

Mr. Speaker, the 2016 Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service generated a comprehensive list of recommendations for the reform of the public sector that will require time to fully implement. It is urgent that the Minister of the Public Service initiate actions to promote and enforce a depoliticised, meritocratic, efficient and citizen-oriented service through public service regulations and codes of conduct, performance management and rationalised, fair and consistent pay structures associated with written job descriptions. I do hope that the Minister of the Public Service has plans in place to properly develop all aspects of the public service. This grand lofty Budget that the PPP/C believes is best for Guyana requires capable and efficient public servants who have the requisite resources to properly implement the programmes that the Government wants implemented. It is inhumane for this Administration to expect that the public servants must continuously work and implement the policies of this Administration with a sense of ownership and alacrity, if they do not feel that they are also benefiting from it.

Much has been said about the fact that there is not much in the Budget for public servants. Inflation has not only swallowed up whatever tax threshold increase is being touted, but the 7% increase and the bonuses that persons received last year has also been swallowed up. The public servant who is earning minimum wage received a monthly salary increase of a mere \$4,900, while the President who is earning \$2 million plus will be receiving a \$150,000 increase. Worse still, is that the minimum wage earners must pay taxes on their salary increase, which they did, while the President will not. This stark contradiction highlights the major difference between the APNU/AFC Coalition and the PPP/C. The Coalition Government consistently ensured that senior public servants were awarded a lower percentage

increase than junior public servants, thereby ensuring that the income gap would reduce overtime. The PPP/C's single rate across the board increase is intended to widen the gap between those who have much and those who have little. In a time when world – over, emphasis is being placed on equity, the President chose to reward himself and Ministers with a 7% increase amounting to \$150,000 tax free for himself, \$120,000 for the AG and Prime Minister and \$60,000 for other Ministers knowing very well that the public servants who work for the minimum wage will be taking home an increase of \$3,528 Guyana dollars after tax, Hon. Sonia Parag. That cannot even buy a bottle of cooking gas.

In comparison, consider the following, after just 18 months in Office from 1st July, 2015, to 1st January, 2017, the APNU/AFC increased the minimum wage by over 50%, increased the income tax threshold by 20%, reduced the marginal income tax rate to 28% and removed the tax from employees' contribution to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). In addition, old-age pension increased by 45% and public assistance by 27%. All of this, without utilising one dollar in oil revenues. The age-old problem of persons entering the public service being told that they have to wait three to six months before receiving their first pay cheque has to come to an end, even though it may not seem to be important enough for the National Assembly to accept the motion. For whatever reason, other public servants who are scholarship recipients have complained about being forced to sign documents relieving the Government from its contractual obligations to students who were on scholarships and are expected to serve their country as a public servant. This too must stop.

This then brings me to another important point; the Ministry of the Public Service portfolio includes the management of the human resources in our public service. All indications from August 2020 to now, suggest that the professionals in many of our public sector offices are leaving the job or are being asked to leave. Persons willing to do the biddings of those in charge are being promoted. Public servants are anxious and unsure of what will happen next. The gains made in the public service between 2015-2020 have now regressed significantly across our public service and the Minister of the Public Service has remained silent.

One major Public Service Department that I believe requires highlighting due to its current inability to adequately do the work that is required, is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA was created in 1996 by the PPP/C. The state of the Agency inherited by the Coalition can be

described as follows and this is the description by the staff then, staff described the Agency as having “Low morale” ... “dysfunctional”...“ a toothless tiger”... “disrespected by all”...“place to dwell until one can do better”...“humiliating with politicians overruling decisions”. There was extremely high turnover over of staff. There was only one EPA office in Georgetown to serve the entire country. There was grave human capacity deficit to execute the legislative mandate of the Agency. A 2015 forensic audit determined that 262 staff were needed, but the agency was trying to accomplish its task with a staff of only 95. This number did not include the need for staff focusing on the oil and gas sector. There were no engineers and very few scientists were in the Agency. A system for record keeping, control, and secure custody of critically important legal documents, such as permits, contracts, and files, were non-existent.

The Coalition found the existence of 2,100 permits with over 500 expired permits, some over 15 years expiration, plus, a large number of un-expired permits were issued in error, and facilities constructed and operating without permits. Near zero opportunity for training, exposure to international technical conferences, and membership in internationally recognised professional associations. The Environmental Protection Agency did not have its own certified laboratory. It had limited up to date measurement equipment and modelling tools to measure and analyse contaminants in the environment. There were only two roadworthy vehicles which were far from adequate to conduct field inspections necessary for compliance monitoring for the entire country. There were no penalties or fines ever enforced, despite hundreds of violations. The EPA transferred its environmental oversight of mining to the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), which was a clear conflict of interest with the GGMC overseeing its own operations and the EPA ditching its legislative mandate.

3.22 p.m.

Permit applications took years to process. Except for the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill, which is in its self-questionable as to its engineering integrity, all other garbage and waste disposed in uncontrolled dumpsites seriously affected surface and ground water, air quality, they were fire hazards and bred rodents, mosquitoes, and diseases.

This is what the Coalition found. This is the PPP/C's record on the environment. This is how the PPP/C treated the entire public service – with scant regard. No matter what they attempt to say, as the Hon. Minister said yesterday, the facts speak for themselves. The APNU/AFC came to Government

19 years after the establishment of the EPA. Under the guidance of Dr. Vincent Adams, there were significant transformational changes at the EPA which included the following: One – two additional offices were opened at Whim and Linden, with plans in place for an office in all regions by 2021. Two – the memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the GGMC was cancelled, thus returning mandated regulatory oversight of mining to the EPA and which terminated the disturbing conflict of interest situation, with the GGMC overseeing its own mining operations. Three – the APNU/AFC began aggressive capacity building and career development of employees to cope with exponential increases in workload which quadrupling of the economy in four years. Four – there were paid study leave; summer internship programmes, and international networking such as exposing staff to international conferences, meetings, and memberships in professional organisations. The number of training conferences and staff participants doubled in one year from 88 to 161, and 160 to 223, respectively. We recruited 20 highly qualified staff and attorneys, including the first five engineers. We partnered with the World Bank to design an EPA Oil and Gas Unit consisting of 34 highly skilled staff to oversee the petroleum industry, including a 24/7 on-site presence.

We revised the Environmental Protection Act, environmental legislation, standards and guides as high priority to make current the rapid changes driven by the oil and gas production that was not considered in the 25-year-old Act. We hired an attorney dedicated to that task. We made Guyana the 10th Member of International Offshore Petroleum Environmental Regulators (IOPER), including membership on the Oil Spill Preparedness & Response Working Group (OSPRWG). We elevated Guyana to the forefront of international leaders in the ground-breaking environmental technology of environmental DNA (eDNA). As testimony to EPA's impressive show of leadership, Guyana was chosen to host the 2021 international workshop on this subject but was hampered by COVID-19. We established the Coastal Marine Management Committee (CMMC) in 2018 to coordinate the management of our coastal and marine resources.

The first Document Control Centre was built with a modern filing room, state-of-art electronic database, and a file management system constituting over 2,100 project files, thus alleviating a chaotic and unstructured system for record management and secured custody of important documents, including legal documents such as permits and contracts.

Mr. Speaker: Before you continue to tell us how much you did, you need an extension, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Speaker, I move for the Hon. Member to be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude in five minutes.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: We brought all 500 expired permits and most other violations into compliance and worked with others to establish compliance schedules as necessary. We recovered \$140 million in otherwise lost revenues by bringing violators into compliance, while, at the same, time quadrupling annual revenues from \$50 million in 2015 to \$200 million in 2019. Without any additional funding from the Treasury, Dr. Vincent Adams and staff used self-generated recovered and newly increased revenues to increase the vehicle fleet from two to 10. Thus, substantially boosting field monitoring to maintain compliance, which was severely lacking, and was responsible for the numerous expired permits and, recruiting 20 highly skilled scientists and engineers that were almost non-existent.

For the first time, we developed a board-approved plan for the full self-funding of the EPA by 2023. For the first time, the EPA took necessary actions in accordance with the rule of law to impose fines for very serious violations of the laws and threats to the environment, safety, and health of the nation, including proceeding with the prosecution of ExxonMobil for refusing to pay a paltry fine for one such persistent violation. We initiated plans for the EPA's own certified laboratory to conduct more complex analyses over and above preliminary data from field equipment. Laboratories will soon pay for themselves. We took on the much-avoided daunting challenge of finally solving the decades-old waste disposal problem, including nationwide garbage dumping in environmentally sensitive areas. This is what took place not only in the EPA but in other public agencies which finally had the space to breathe, to become professional, and to do their work without political overreach. This is what the APNU/AFC Government did during its tenure and of this, we can be proud.

Mr. Speaker, the PPP/C is back and what has happened in the EPA since August, 2020, is nothing short of a travesty. The current PPP/C Government, in just one short year alone, has embarked on a massive tearing down of the institutional pillars that were built by the Coalition for sound

environmental protection. Such cruel destruction of the extraordinary transformation achieved by the Coalition in its short four years may only be explained as political expediency without care for the nation's environmental safety, health and wellbeing. These unconscionable actions include: returning the same leadership personnel that ran the EPA into the ground; destroying the morale of, and having a chilling effect on high performing staff by executing discriminatory terminations, demotions, and negation of contracts, despite the Agency's limited capacity; returning the Agency to a state of mistrust and disrespect from the public and business community and politicising the Agency.

There is the wholesale interference from politicians who routinely pressure the EPA's staff to issue permits to friends and acquaintances, and overturn major decisions made by the EPA technical personnel. For example, the EPA published that the Demerara River Bridge required an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), only to be forced to reverse that decision. It now seems to be the order of the day not to have EIAs for projects which the EPA would normally be deemed to have them for.

The PPP/C dropped the court case against ExxonMobil and retaliated against the attorney prosecuting the case, even though he happened to be an employee of the highest calibre of performance. The PPP/C...

Mr. Speaker: It is time to conclude.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, when my Colleagues on this side of the House spoke to the fact that the PPP/C is not truly interested in real development, this is what we meant. When my Colleagues and I are sceptical about whether we can trust the PPP/C to effectively and efficiently deal with power and authority, what we just heard from the EPA informs us. We on this side of the House understand that the PPP/C has no interest in the poor, no interest in the working class, no interest in true development, and no interest in the environment. The Budget shows all who care to see, that their interest is in extending even further, than they have already done, their hands and our collective moneys to their cronies. So, I, Tabitha Sarabo-Halley will not and cannot support this travesty of a budget. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Thank you for the dream and thank you for the presentation. The Hon. Minister of the Public Service, Ms. Sonia Parag, it is now your turn to make your contribution.

Minister of the Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I had a very brief consultation with the Hon. Minister of Health, and he has reliably informed me that Melatonin is back in stock. It is a relaxer, so, I think it would be a cure for all ludicrous dreams. Unfortunately, you might not be in a lot of people's dreams anymore.

Mr. Speaker: She did describe me quite well.

Ms. Parag: Firstly, I would like to commend and thank our Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his dedicated team for presenting such a remarkable Budget. I would also like to thank my staff of the Ministry of the Public Service for their significant contributions to this Budget. Even as I rise to give remarks, I genuinely believe that *Budget 2022* stands fully defended by its contents, but for the sake of protocol, I will utilise the next 30 minutes to expound on the impacts this exceptional Budget will have on the lives of all Guyanese, our 'One Guyana'.

Before I delve fully into my presentation, I wish to speak on something I heard this morning from the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams. That Hon. Member made reference to my Colleague, the Hon. Member Mr. Joseph Hamilton's statement yesterday when he remarked on the behaviour of the Members of the Opposition – like *yard fowls*. However, that Hon. Member failed to reprimand her own Hon. Member when he looked across this room and called our Hon. Members, *jaggabats* and *trench crappos*. For the record, I would like to state that the definition on record of what a *jaggabat* is – is a sexually promiscuous woman. So, if you do not know that, know it now. [*Interruption*]

The fact is that Guyana is on an upward trajectory and, from the looks of it, we are headed for continued prosperity without any positive contribution from the APNU/AFC Opposition whatsoever. They have done years of talking but they have not walked the walk. We, the Members of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, stand judged by the people of Guyana. Over the past two years, they have seen how we have managed to bring this country back from a period of despair and pure despondency. They have seen us maintain composure in the face of significant threats – threats to our nation's democracy and, not so long ago, threats to the sanctity of this very honourable House. My Colleagues on the other side, know exactly what I am referring to – also known as (aka), the grabbing of the Mace.

I pause here to say that, yesterday, this honourable House heard the word democracy being used by the Hon. Members

on that side of the House. That word must have left a very bitter taste in their mouths as they held this nation hostage for five traumatising months. They trampled upon our Constitution and attempted with all their might to violate a most fundamental right enshrined therein. The holding onto power was not a fight for the people of this country, it was a fight to hold on to corruption, another word that aptly describes their tenure in Office. Let us talk facts. Some of the dishonesties were exposed by my Colleague, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Waldron, in her speech yesterday. From my own Ministry, let me tell this nation that the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, accused this Government some time ago of corruption or malpractices without producing a shred of evidence when that Hon. Member, while being Minister, was also the valuation officer for the scholarship students.

3.37 p.m.

When those students needed to value their properties to lodge as surety, they paid him and obtained the valuation when they were leaving the country. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, this morning spoke, without any evidence, about the People's Progressive Party (PPP/C) always being involved in corrupt practices. The only type of transparency the Coalition practiced was transparent corruption. Upon my tenure and because of this Government's commitment to transparency and accountability, scholarship students are being sent to the Government's valuation officers who work as just that. Here again, we should not be surprised because under the previous regime, even Government Ministers were receiving scholarships before the nation's children. Each of the Government Ministers got £10,000 each for scholarships and at least two of those scholarships have not been completed. That is money wasted before the nation's children could have gotten anything from it.

Fast forward to August, 2020. Things have changed and this Government has continued to deliver on the promises that our comrades made during the elections campaign. This is happening across all sectors – from serving our elders with continuous increases in old age pension...and let me make it very clear, the Coalition, in all of its five years, the highest increase for pensioners was \$3000. At one point, there was a \$500 increase. What a shame! Sir, from looking out for our children with the reintroduction and subsequent increase in the education cash grant...you stood up and you took away from children but gave yourself. Not to mention substantial investments in other critical areas such as housing and water, public works, health and so much more. I have sat and I have listened to people attacking the housing sector. The housing sector has a process whereby when they are allocating house

lots, they have what is akin to a lottery. They have house lots in a box, they shake it, and persons pull from it. What could be more transparent than that? Have you looked at the social media? There is no discrimination; none whatsoever. The only discrimination was under the five years of the Opposition's rule in despair.

It is also important to mention the billions of dollars that the Government has spent on the many direct cash transfers that almost every Guyanese, yes, public servants included, has benefitted from over the past two years. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cash grants were extended to each and every household across this country. The education cash grant was given to every school-aged child in the public and private schools system; absolutely no discrimination; absolutely no child who is registered in either the public or the private school system was left behind. That was money directly into the pockets of public servants as well.

Every pensioner benefitted from increased pensions and other subsidies to make their lives easier. Every frontline worker, from forces armed with guns to those armed with scrubs, benefitted from bonuses. Every household affected by the devastating May, 2021 floods benefitted from financial assistance to rebuild and recover. These were all given even before the Government was able to tap into oil revenues. I would not go any further because we all know that my Colleagues on this side of the House are more than capable of highlighting the milestones and defending the budgetary requests for their respective sectors.

Permit me to enlighten the nation – Hon Mr. Mahipaul and Hon. Sherod Duncan, this is where you would want to listen now – about some of the important things that the Ministry of Public Service intends to do with our proposed allocation of \$3.31 billion. Thank you, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. This represents a 7.45% increase or approximately \$246.6 million more than we received as part of the 2021 Budget, and rightly so, because, this year, we have much, much more to do. After years of operating without vision – that is the five years from 2015 to half of 2020 – and without any proper direction whatsoever, the work of the Ministry of Public Service is now being streamlined and executed in a manner that is strategic and forward thinking. Mr. Speaker, permit me to refer to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change's (APNU/AFC's) manifesto of 2015 on public service:

“Provide a meaningful subvention to all legally constituted and functioning trade unions.

Embark on steps to reform and modernize the Public Service.

Launch an intensive investigation into the entire Human Resource Management functions within the Public Service.

Establish an Independent Constitutional Salaries Review Commission to be responsible for the periodic review of salaries, pensions and other conditions.”

Mr. Speaker, of all that I have just listed, zero was done in the five years that the Coalition held the Ministry of Public Service. Mr. Speaker, you would not see us, on this side of the House, launch a whole school that will only serve friends and cronies. That is not who we are, but it is exactly what prevailed with the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service. When the College was first launched, it may have been the intention for it to be a noble venture, I do not know, but it was not until I assumed my current portfolio that I realised the disservice that College was doing. We like to talk about friends, families and cronies. The Bertram Collins College of the Public Service was exactly that for the APNU/AFC. Everyone over the age of 60 ran that College, everyone making more than \$500,000 to produce a Clerk III from that College who would jump a Clerk II in any Ministry and the Clerk II has to turn back and train that Clerk III who is making more money than them. Talk about unfair recruitment practices, that was where it was at. In our manifesto, we committed to fair recruitment practices. So, the first thing to do was shut down the unfair recruitment practice. It was yet another engine for discrimination set up by the APNU/AFC. That is not who we are in the PPP/C. Our agenda is about realising the ‘One Guyana’ which His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, has envisioned, a Guyana where all are equal, and every person has access to the same opportunities for growth and development.

At the level of the Ministry of Public Service, our programmes must reach Guyanese from all walks of life, of every ethnicity, of every religion, of every gender, age, social class and, importantly, of every political and geographical corner of our country. That is the direction that we will not deviate from, not at the level of the Ministry and, certainly, not at the level of the PPP/C Government. Our programmes for 2022 are fully aligned with the comprehensive 2030 development agenda. As many of you know, the primary role of the Ministry of Public Service is to develop the human capacity of our country. As such, the onus has been placed on myself and team to ensure that our

nation is served by competent, committed, and ethical public officers. Not only that, but we want to ensure that our training and capacity building initiatives are able to satisfy the needs of our country, not only now, but as we evolve as the global powerhouse that we are projected to become. We are not going to have our people wastefully enrolled in programmes that will serve them no purpose in the next 10-15 years.

As a country, we must be able to foresee the skills that will be needed in the years to come and begin nurturing those skills from now. How do we do that? It requires vision, proper planning and effective leadership, all of which the PPP/C is – qualities that were clearly absent from the Government benches for the five years prior to August, 2020. All is not lost because, this year, with this allocation, which I am sure this honourable House will approve, we intend to execute a national human capacity needs assessment in collaboration with the Ministries of Education and Labour, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and members of the private sector. We want to ensure that, years from now, Guyanese have the potential to take advantage of every opportunity available in the local labour market. Already, we know that our country is preparing for massive infrastructural transformation. We envision an increased need for engineers, especially those who specialise in the construction of roads and bridges.

To this end, we have tailored our scholarship offers to ensure adequate opportunities for persons desirous of being in that field. We also know that our Government has embarked on a mission to implement an iconic energy mix, using wind, solar, hydro and natural gas, to be able to achieve 75% renewable energy by 2030. Therefore, our scholarship offers will also pave the way for Guyanese to become qualified in the area of renewable energy. The Ministry of the Public Service is also collaborating with the Ministry of Health to offer the much needed and relevant scholarships for specialty areas in that sector, for example pathology. Currently, Guyana only has one pathologist. Human resource management and facilities management will also be areas of focus. I also heard from the previous Member about training in oil and gas. The Ministry of Public Service commenced that, and we offered a number of skillsets...not just a Masters in oil and gas, as broad as it is. It has many different skillsets within. We granted a number of skillsets from the Robert Gordon University in 2021, catering for our development in oil and gas. We also granted a number of scholarships in skillsets in oil and gas, of course, but from an

entering stage from the Enerec Institute in Suriname. This year, I proudly stand here to say that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stated earlier, and I will restate it, that Guyana intends to establish an oil and gas institute to facilitate the needs of that sector.

The Ministry of Public Service also has a Training Division that you will be hearing much more about in the coming weeks because we intend to breathe some life into that critical department and ensure that the programmes offered are impactful and worthy of the time people spend taking them to ensure a result oriented public service. Training in ethics and other soft programmes as well as robust training will be launched. Evaluation of employees' performance will also be a very important part of the service. Previously, that Division catered to the training and retraining of public servants. Public servants are not the only ones serving Guyana. Our brothers and sisters in the private sector are just as valuable, and we believe, too, that they should have access to our training.

3.52 p.m.

In 2022, with the handsome budget that I have been allocated, the Ministry of Public Service's Training Division will also be extending outside of the public sector. Once the allocation of \$20 million is approved for the Training Division, we will be purchasing a corporate training package, which contains up to 200 programmes, from human resource management to conflict resolution, *et cetera*. Added to that, plans to the tune of \$15 million are being made to kickstart the establishment of a regional Centre for Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) in each of the 10 Administrative Regions in Guyana. In 2021, the CEIT, as it is known, began training public servants in basic information technology (IT), a relevant training since digitisation is a very integral part of a modern public service.

Mr. Speaker, it is well-known that modernisation is *the name of the game* for this Government, and the public sector will follow suit. We will be partnering with stakeholders to upgrade the way services are offered. These include ensuring electronic access to government forms as well as implementing paperless office operations, *et cetera*. We will also be reviewing and updating the human resource policies of the public sector. We have already begun with our job description assessment throughout the public service in 2021 and that will continue in 2022.

Government of Guyana scholarships. We have come to this House to ask for the approval of a \$1.35 billion allocation to continue the very important Government of Guyana scholarships. Before the launch of the 20,000 online scholarships initiative, this was one of the key functions of the Ministry of Public Service. I pause here because the previous speaker, the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, made a reference that the Ministry of Education hijacked the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme, but it can only be that when you are looking at something in a shallow way that you will think that. The PPP/C Government has always worked as a team, and we will continue to do that in our term in Office and onwards. Over the years, these scholarships have ensured the further qualification of some of our best and brightest minds. It has also helped us to retain those persons in the service of Guyana. In the years to come, we are hoping to even increase the number of scholarships offered to Guyanese under this heading. In the meantime, let me let you know that last year, 1,394 persons were pursuing tertiary studies through the Government of Guyana scholarships, and this represents a worthy investment of \$1.6 billion that was allocated to the Ministry of Public Service to do just that. Of that 1,394 that I mentioned, 833 of the scholarships were students continuing programmes, while 581 persons were new beneficiaries awarded just last year. Of the scholarships that were awarded last year, 481 were students studying locally, while 100 were persons studying overseas. Last year, the new awardees were drawn from each of the 10 Administrative Regions of Guyana, and that is also how we do things.

I want to bring attention to how this Government implements transparency in everything that it does. In the Ministry of Public Service, the largest grant is the University of Guyana (UG) scholarships, and it goes through a scholarship select committee of several members, comprising of about 14 persons who would assess these persons. Mr. Speaker, I also want to draw your attention to the fact that in the five years that the Coalition sat in office, the largest grant was never subjected to a scholarship committee. It was upon the Minister's discretion.

From Region 1, six persons were granted University of Guyana scholarships; from Region 2, 28 persons; Region 3, 116; Region 4, 284; Region 5, 33; Region 6, 51; Region 7, seven; Region 8, one; Region 9, 10; and Region 10, 45. In 2019, zero was given to Regions 8 and 9. As it relates to the GOAL, Mr. Speaker, you would recall that we promised 20,000 online scholarships within a five-year period.

Unfortunately, we came in Office until half of 2020, so we started that scholarship. We know why we came in at half of 2020. We were trying to fight off the riggers. So, this initiative began in 2021. Six thousand online scholarships were granted in 2021. The Government promised 4,500 scholarships, but 6,000 were granted. The GOAL, I believe, has been one of the best programmes ever implemented by any Government in this part of the world, and perhaps even beyond.

I do not see how any sane person could be against something that represents positivity to this magnitude, but it should not surprise any of us that the APNU/AFC has objections to even this. From what we have seen in the news, the Hon. Members seem to be objecting, even among themselves and to themselves, so I am not too bothered by the utterances here today. As a matter of fact, I cannot even tell my predecessor, the speaker before me, in which part of the Coalition she sits. What I am concerned with is the fact that we have returned to this honourable House seeking approvals for an additional \$1.3 billion to roll out the additional 4,500 GOAL scholarships that have been earmarked for this year and to continue those we have already started.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to also address the elephant in the room: the topic of salary increases for public servants. This Government in December, 2020 granted... Although the treasury was empty when we got in here – a deficit – the Government still managed to give public servants a \$25,000 one-off cash grant in December. A 7% increase was given in 2021, despite the fact that we faced cost of living, no fault of the Government, and were also in the middle of a pandemic that does not seem to want to exit the world. Mr. Speaker, compare that to what the APNU/AFC has done for public servants. My Hon. Colleague and Friend, the Hon. Member Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, said, and he is so right, that the Hon. Members on the other side think that they own a part of this population. I will say that these Hon. Members think they have a transport over the public servants who they think that they own as property. You do not own them as property, and you cannot use them as pawns in this honourable House.

Yes, salary increases were given by the APNU/AFC, but what did they do? They deliberately, as opposed to us, raised the cost of living by pushing on the backs of every Guyanese, taxes on 200 items, basic taxes – a deliberate move to raise the cost of living. They *gave with one hand and snatched with the other hand* throughout the five years. Do not stand here and tell this Government that it does not care about public servants. Every single year there will be

money allocated under line item 6141 for public servants. Do not mislead the nation by saying that nothing is in here for public servants. In 2018, in the *Hansard*, which is a public document, when questioned, the then Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, said that it would be presumptuous of him to say that X amount or Y amount could be placed in a budget, that he had to consult with the union, *et cetera*, and then a percentage would be given. The APNU/AFC very well knows that a figure and a percentage is not given for salary increases in a budget. There is a... [**An. Hon. Member:** When last did you talk to the union?] Would you like me to answer you? Last week, and they were very happy.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you answer her, you would need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister of Public Service, you may continue.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the very issue of salary increases, tell the public servants how you cared about them so much that when you got into office, even before looking at them, you raised your own salaries by 50%. Tell them that you raised yours before you raised theirs. As the Hon. Prime Minister of Barbados said, the truth hurts.

On the issue of the GOAL, which is still one of the Government's best initiatives – and all of the initiatives that this Government has rolled out have been great and excellent initiatives – I would like now to give you the statistics on this programme. When we speak of 'One Guyana', this is what we speak about. This list was published in the newspapers, and it was published on social media for all to see. Region 1, number of persons qualified, 240; number of scholarships given, 238. Region 2, 536 qualified applicants; 531 granted. Region 3, 1,008 applicants qualified; 875 granted. Region 4, 3,619 qualified applicants; 2,767 granted. Region 5, 463 qualified applicants; 378 granted. Region 6, 525 qualified applicants; 510 granted. Region 7, 242 qualified applicants; 240 granted. Region 8, 100 qualified applicants; 97 granted. Region 9, 236 qualified applicants; 230 granted. Region 10, 312 qualified applicants; 282 granted. And out of the not stated Regions, there were 337 qualified applicants and 182 granted. Mr. Speaker, as we

stand here, I will show you what ‘One Guyana’ looks like. In this honourable House, there is from Region 3, a GOAL awardee. From Region 4, there is...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you would need my permission to ask them to stand. I will ask the GOAL scholarship recipients to stand, we can acknowledge them, and then you can continue. Everyone could stand. I am saving time.

[Recipients of the GOAL scholarships stood in the House.]

Hon. Minister, you can continue.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Sir. Unfortunately, the hinterland was too far for us to bring the students, but on our website, they did give their quotes as to what the GOAL scholarships mean to them and what it means to their families. This Government is committed to transparency, accountability, ‘One Guyana’, unity, and this Government will continue, until many, many more years to come, to be exactly that way. This Government is committed to ensuring that the welfare and the lives of all Guyanese are taken care of. Through this GOAL scholarship, the burden of finding finances by parents for their children’s tertiary education...that question and that problem has been solved by this Government, and we will continue to do that.

4.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, one last thing. Again, we are committed to ensuring that all Guyanese are empowered. To this end, and I know my Colleague and Friend, the Hon. Minister, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, will speak on what her Ministry has done. But with the GOAL scholarship we are ensuring that women are empowered, and to do this, the total number of males that were granted is 1,882 and the total number of females is 4,118.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and I thank the Hon. Members. I know that, at some point, they will give in to logic, and they will agree that this Budget of \$552,900,000 is going to make such a great impact on Guyana. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, we are going to continue until we complete the next six speakers.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. We now call on our next speaker, the Hon. Member, Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for the opportunity to present my contribution to *Budget 2022* in this House. Before I present my contribution, allow me a few minutes to address the previous speaker.

The Hon. Member who spoke before me, the photoshop lady, Mdm. Minister, Ms. Sonia Parag, when she spoke about corruption, she omitted to tell the nation, in her address, about corruption prior to 2015. Let me remind the nation because that is what we are here for, and people’s memories are not as short as yours. The APNU/AFC, when we got into Government in May, 2015, we conducted over 53 forensic audits. Do you all remember that? There were over 53 forensic audits. Corruption was evident, so much so that a lot of things came out of those audits.

Let me say to you that the audits were not done by the APNU/AFC Members. The audits were done by qualified professional accountants, including Mr. Christopher Ram and Mr. Anand Goolsarran, among others. Massive corruption was identified from the audits. These audits were sent to the police for further investigation. We shall not forget that the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) recommended charges for the PPP/C Ministers. Can you remember that the former Minister of Housing and Water was charged with 19 charges of fraud and the former Minister of Finance fled this country when he was charged? He fled this country and went to Dubai. When these people stand to talk about transparency and corruption, they should remind themselves of what they did.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member.

Ms. Manickchand: I stand on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40(b) – an elucidation. What the Hon. Member said is actually inaccurate, and I think it is important we have a clarification or a withdrawal from her.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, one minute, please. Hon. Members, there is currently someone standing on a Point of Order. I would like to hear what the Hon. Minister’s Standing Order is.

Ms. Manickchand: It is Standing Order 40(b) that deals with elucidation. [**An. Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible.]*] Yes, I agree.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Singh-Lewis, you would have to substantiate what you have with facts. It is not...

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, it was in the media. It was in every newspaper in 2015 and 2016.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member...

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I will get the records.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I think it is convention and it is in line with the Standing Orders that when the Speaker is speaking, he is given the opportunity and he has the floor. I will say again that in order for you to continue along that line, you would have to substantiate those with facts. If not, I will have to ask you to withdraw them.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I will continue, Sir. Mr. Speaker...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member... *[inaudible.]*

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I cannot hear what you are saying.

Deputy Speaker: *[Inaudible]* on a matter that for you to continue along that line, it requires that you substantiate those. If not, you have to withdraw them.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I do not understand what you are saying.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, the *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Comrade Speaker. I am seeking your guidance. The Hon. Minister quoted Standing Order 40(b) which, according to my interpretation, states that the Hon. Member who is on the floor has to give permission for the Hon. Member to make her argument.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Singh-Lewis, I will state again. You stated that the former Minister of Finance fled the country. Once again, you would have to substantiate that. Madam, if not, I will ask you to withdraw those remarks.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, the Hon. Member stood on a Point of Order. As I understand it, I have to give way to the Hon. Member for you to arrive at where you are now, and I have not given way to the Hon. Member.

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, you have inherent jurisdiction here to ask the Hon. Member to substantiate something without me standing. So, even if she does not want to give way, dishonourably, Your Honour could still make that demand of her. When you stand on the floor of this House, you must say things that are factual and that can be substantiated, and that cannot be because it is an untruth.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Ms. Singh-Lewis, I will, once again, restate the Standing Orders in relation to the point upon which the Hon. Minister stood. In order for you to make a claim that the Member fled the country, you would have to substantiate that. If not, I will have to ask you to withdraw that statement.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, let me go back to that part, and I will tell you what will happen. We are all aware that the former Minister of Finance and the former Minister of Housing and Water were charged; 19 charges of fraud. The same DPP who recommended that police to charge them, prior to what happened in those audits, that same DPP was instructed to withdraw those charges. Sir, we will move on. We know who was charged with 19 charges of fraud; we know who left the jurisdiction when they were charged; we know who went to Dubai for a frolicking time; and we know who returned when to do what they are doing now. The point here is when they stand to speak about corruption, they must not think that people have short memories because the records are there. As Ms. Mia Mottley stated, the truth hurts.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Singh-Lewis and Hon. Members, for the House's consumption, during the exchange, the technical person approached me and said that there will be an interruption with the feed. If you want we could pause for...I think, he said five minutes, but we will give him three minutes and then Ms. Singh-Lewis, you would continue. If not, the feed will not be able to be broadcast.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I will pause but I want to make the point that I was interrupted twice by you, and I would like to have my time back in addition to this time. Thank you, Sir.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been interrupted at 16:20:57 hours. You will be given the time until the technical people have indicated that they have the live feedback. The other points upon which you were interrupted were in line with the Standing Orders and those carry through.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: If you say so, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, my apologies, once again, to the House, to the people viewing and to you, madam speaker. I was just informed that we are back on the live feed. You may continue.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, do you want to tell me that entire thing about highlighting this corruption was not broadcast on the National Communications Network (NCN)? Is that what you are saying to me? Sir, would you like me to begin my speech? Sir, can I continue now?

4.22 p.m.

It is a privilege and an honour as I make my third contribution in 18 months in this honourable House. After 18 months a lot more than \$919 billion... Guyanese are poorer and very pessimistic about the future of their lives and that of their children's and grandchildren's. This Budget was presented under the theme, *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. For the purpose of methodology, I will dissect the theme before dealing with my portfolio. 'Resolute in Building One Guyana' is a mockery to Guyanese, given their current untenable living situation where the basic of their necessities are not met. This Budget fails to deliver, to the struggling people, the poor and vulnerable people, services that can maintain any level of decency as citizens of this nation.

Let us look at some of the challenges Dr. Ashni Singh talked about, and the more popular challenges that face the poor people of Guyana, especially over the last 18 months – discrimination, corruption; unprecedented loss of life as a result of the mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic; racism, which is another pandemic in Guyana; increased cases of crime, especially against women and children; and injustice.

Here, I pause to remember Mr. Orin Boston from Essequibo. He was brutally murdered at the hands of a police officer in the presence of his wife and his two children, ages six and seven, who were in the same house. They are left to fend for themselves with no support from the State. From September of last year to now, nothing, absolutely nothing, was given to the family. Are they doing this because they care for the people of Guyana? Those two children are of school age, they have to eat, they have to travel to school, and there is not a dollar from the State for that mother. The PPP/C are a set of heartless people. While I expound on the challenges of the poor and struggling people of this country, I bring to the fore the injustice meted out to our people, injustice as a challenge. I pause here to remember Joel and Isiah Henry,

the two teenagers who were murdered since September, 2020. The death of these two young boys... their blood is on the hands of the PPP/C. There is no justice for the Henry boys, and that is the record. I want to recall that the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, who talked about the PPP/C's records... This is the record of the PPP/C – no justice for the people of Guyana.

Sir, do you think that the world knows, or even Guyanese know, that, out of the \$329.5 billion budgeted in 2020 and the \$383.1 billion budgeted in 2021, there was absolutely no psychosocial support provided for the Henry family? The mother of one of the boys, Joel's mother who is Gail, is very ill because of what happened to her child, and because of the trauma she suffered during and after that period. Sir, nothing was given to that mother. I repeat, no psychosocial support was provided for either of the Henry families. [**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** That is not true.] Tell me that I am wrong, Prime Minister. [**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** You are wrong.] This is a reflection of how the installed PPP/C cares for the people of Guyana. This is their record of caring. This is the 'One Guyana' vision where they discriminate based on the makeup of the family and where their support lies. I am convinced that they care only for one set of people, hence they speak of 'One Guyana'. We are heading down a road where there is a dark cloud that is hanging over Guyana. Treachery and thievery lines the pathway of that road.

As I continue to examine the theme of this Budget, I went on to talk about the challenges – 'Resolute in Building One Guyana'. Mr. Speaker, the House allowed Dr. Singh to present to this honourable House information that is misleading to this nation. Sir, let me remind you of one misleading statement:

“...the governance architecture of this Government is based firmly on inclusivity, participation, transparency and accountability, and the rule of law. It is grounded in the concept and policy thrust of a One Guyana.”

I do not know what to say about people who come to this House and knowingly tells us untruths. He went on to say that:

“The consultations on the new and expanded LCDS 2030 and the establishment of the One Guyana Commission are the two critical pillars of the emerging, new Guyana, and *Budget 2022* anticipates the establishment of the One Guyana Commission in 2022.

Do you understand what that means? In 2020, they talked about the one Guyana commission; in 2021, they talked about the one Guyana commission; in February, all they said about the One Guyana commission is that Prime Minister Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Phillips would head that commission. Absolutely nothing else was said about that commission. How in God's name could a Budget be visioned on 'One Guyana', when absolutely nothing was done to it? I do not know who in God's name they think they are talking to. Something is fishy here. The last part of that statement where they said that:

“... *Budget 2022* anticipates the establishment of the One Guyana Commission in 2022”

...is damning. Let me repeat it. They will establish the one Guyana commission in 2022.

For what did we approve moneys in this House in 2020 and in 2021 if this Budget, in 2022, will establish the one Guyana commission? I believe that the concept of the one Guyana commission and its establishment is another failed promise or, perhaps, another photoshopped promised like the 50% increase for public servants. This thing is serious business. If they are now, in 2022, promising to establish a one Guyana commission after 18 months in Government, could we logically deduce that this means we approved two budgets in this House without a vision for this country, much less an articulated approved strategy for the development of this country? What have we done?

In the 2021 Budget speech, I said that Dr. Singh's first Budget was visionless, and 14 months after we have the evidence. There is no vision for Guyana, and this, my friend, is why poor people are punishing. The PPP/C is visionless. If they are struggling to conceptualise what 'One Guyana' means, and a vision for this nation, then perhaps, small 'c' Charles should lend 'fatboy' a copy of the strategic plan for social cohesion in Guyana. He has it, but he is too arrogant to read it, much less share it.

More than a plan for 'One Guyana', the APNU/AFC Coalition has the expertise on this side of the House to develop a strategy for One Guyana. When we took Office in May of 2015, by April, 2017, there was a Cabinet approved strategy which was informed by consultations across this nation. We did it. We have the expertise, but they are too arrogant to stretch across to ask us for help. We could help them with that. Let me move on. This 'One Guyana' thing is a farce driven by a whole circus, even the *trench crapo* is in the circus. This whole country in *puckatory*.

Mr. Speaker, could you remember in this same House, a few months ago, a Budget was delivered under the theme, 'Our Plan for Prosperity'... [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Which Masjid do you go to?] The same one that Monica goes to. *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation; and, Enhancing Welfare.* Sir, do you remember that a Budget was presented under that theme? Seventeen months later, as of yesterday 31st January, 2022, there are 50,450 confirmed COVID-19 cases with 1,165 deaths. Let us assume that an average of four persons per household means that more than 1000 families are suffering across this country and that, approximately, 4,660 persons are grieving the loss of a loved one. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** (*Inaudible*)] Dharamlall, if you have a problem with my Khimar come and tell me that, let me fix you up; your eyes pass me. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** You are a disgrace to (*inaudible*)] Your... Mr. Speaker, let me continue; he is distracting me. Four thousand six hundred and sixty persons are grieving the loss of a loved one, many of whom are teachers, nurses, police and soldiers. Mr. Speaker, could you say how many families are single parent families now as a result of this pandemic? Could we as a nation say that? Do we know that statistic?

After 18 months, have they collected any data on the impact of COVID-19 on the family, the school and the communities? If they were concerned with data-driven analysis to inform policy decisions, we would not have witnessed a \$3,000 increase for old age pension and \$2000 for persons in difficult circumstances. It is madness. There is no data driven policy in this country. These struggles are beyond the Minister of Finance. He is out of touch with reality. He should start visiting the communities and see what is happening, and how people are suffering.

4.37 p.m.

Sir, while our people are suffering daily, the PPP/C came right in this House 18 months ago to tell the nation that the Budget is based on strengthening democracy. The same 'wannabe' Minister of Finance, the Hon. Member Bishop Edghill. He said that. Let me pay some attention to the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall. Local Government Elections was due, in fact, since November, 2021. The Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, wrote to all the parties involved in the elections and said to them and I quote:

“You are hereby informed that due to the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) lack of readiness, it is impracticable to hold Local Government

Elections within the timeframe stipulated by the provisions of the Local Authorities (Elections) Act”.

What kind of strengthening of democracy is that? They have installed a Chief Election Officer (CEO) at the Elections Commission (GECOM). Mr. Dharamlall, let us get on with the work of this nation. The nation was made aware yesterday when the Shadow Minister of Local Government, the Hon. Mr. Mahipaul, spoke. He said there is no money in this Budget to hold Local Government Elections. Sir, this is a deliberate act. I might ask: What are they afraid of? Call the Local Government Elections and let us see what the people on the ground say. My conclusion here is that the Minister of Local Government is playing *a cat and mouse game* and that the strengthening of democracy is just a big fallacy in the PPP/C.

All that we heard yesterday and today from this side of the House should indicate to this nation that the welfare of our people is in peril, and we ought to take cognisance of the fact that people are punishing; poor people are punishing. They are unable to have two square meals per day under this installed PPP/C Regime, and the PPP/C does not care to find out anything about that. Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to another aspect of Dr. Singh's five and a half hours speech, and I quote:

“Inclusive governance is also demonstrated by the fact that our programmes are accessible to all, for example, the Covid-19 relief and support cash grant programme...”

What in the name of Jezebel is he talking about? He said that this programme is accessible to all.

[*The Hon. Member held up a document.*]

I have a list here with 1,367 persons who did not receive the cash grant. People who qualified for the cash grant did not receive it. You seem to be the judge in this House of recent and so I ask you, do you think that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance is being untruthful to the people of this country? When one analyses the data, one will see that most of the complainants reside in Region 4 and Region 10. In Region 4, Georgetown is affected tremendously, and if that is not discrimination then it is the ‘One Guyana’ syndrome that Members of the other side of the House are talking about. They are trying to sell dreams, but, *we big and we get sense.*

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I would like to say that, in order for you to finish off, you would need a five-minute extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to wrap up. Five minutes might not be enough. There is one point that I really want to make. In this oil producing nation, Guyana, where the vision is ‘One Guyana’, we are told that there is a \$2,000 increase and a \$3,000 increase for senior citizens and people with difficult circumstances. Mr. Speaker, I have come to present to you that the PPP/C boasts of a mere \$2,000 increase per month and a \$3,000 increase for old age pension. Let me tell you, as Mr. Jermaine Figueira said, \$3,000 really means \$100 per day for the pensioners. [**Ms. Teixeira:** (*Inaudible*)] Mdm. Teixeira, \$100 per day cannot buy a bag of tennis roll for the pensioners. That is what you are giving them. What the people on the other side would not tell this nation is that every sitting Minister carries home over \$1.2 million, while they are giving pensioners \$100 per day which cannot even buy tennis rolls for them.

When we were in Government, they talked about the increase for the Ministers, but all of them are carrying home that increase, plus the 7% increase. The mere \$2,000 and the mere \$3,000 for the pensioners are the big highs in this Budget. Let me say to you, Mr. Speaker, that, in this country, we recognise that the PPP/C installed Government is all about corruption. The big boys will get a lot and the ordinary people will get nothing. You are talking about people in difficult circumstances receiving \$14,000 per month. Would they tell this nation that the failing CEO at GuySuCo is receiving US\$14,000 and more in a package for running an industry that is failing? Would they tell this nation that? That is the PPP/C for you, Sir. The big boys will get a lot and the ordinary man will remain poor.

Let me tell you, Sir, this Budget is the biggest joke of the year. We cannot support this joke. I recognise that I would not have gotten my time back. Let me wrap up.

[*Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker: You got your time back. You still have two minutes to conclude.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: You were not here when the Deputy Speaker disturbed me.

Mr. Speaker: The Deputy Speaker disturbed you? Could you withdraw that?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: In wrapping up...

Mr. Speaker: The Chair does not disturb Hon. Members; the Chair keeps order in the House. Please withdraw.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Whatever that means, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Whatever that means is that you have to withdraw the statement that the Deputy Speaker disturbed you.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Mr. Speaker, you could withdraw the statement; that is fine with me.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am asking you to withdraw that statement.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Withdrawn, withdrawn! In wrapping up, let me say that the Budget is visionless as is evidenced by no plan for social cohesion and nation building in Guyana. The PPP/C is shamelessly trying to rebrand the APNU/AFC strategy for a unified and harmonious Guyana as 'One Guyana'.

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance is being untruthful to the people of Guyana because he presented a Budget on a ghost concept of 'One Guyana'. With the presence of a ghost strategy and a whole circus on the other side, I would like to posit our recommendations, including effective anti-property measures that are designed to ensure that all Guyanese are guaranteed an income on which they could live decently, particularly the working poor and the elderly, the low-income households, and the hinterland residents. We are approaching our two-year mark living through a pandemic. We should have a data driven national development strategy to inform our projected expenditure if we are serious about developing our people and this country.

Poverty is at its all-time high in Guyana. This Budget is designed to make our poor people even poorer. Unless we identify clear strategies to reduce poverty, we are nowhere close to ensuring unity and social security for our people. We need to know what measures are in place for the more than 15,000 single mothers in this country. How will they survive this year, much less next year? Let us start with the women. Let us start with the women in Ann's Grove,

Haslington, Belladrum, Rosignol, No. 5 Village, Ithaca, Eversham and Angoy's Avenue. Tell us what is in this Budget to train them to become employable? How will they ever leave an abusive home and become financially independent? Tell us.

The practice of trickled down economics is not impacting the lives of the poor people and so we have to revisit the drawing board and put measures in place to benefit our most vulnerable people. Until such time, I cannot support any policy that is discriminatory in nature. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security, Dr. Vindhya Persaud to make her contribution.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This House descended into the most offensive environment with what was just shared by the Hon. Member before me. It was offensive and vile, and I will never descend to that level of histrionics, ringside theatrics and circumvention of the truth in what I say. When Members come to this House and they speak, the entire country listens; the entire country will be able to determine whether it is truthful or not. There are many truths that I would like to share with this honourable House this afternoon.

My colleague, Dr. Singh, came back to this country on his own recognizance, on his own volition, and he faced those charges. I want to say that. He did not flee this country; he faced those charges. Every one of us, the entire nation, was quite aware that it was a political witch hunt because those charges amounted to zero. That is truth number one.

4.52 p.m.

Secondly, when you speak of the tragedy of the Henry boys and you use it for political offensive mileage in this hallowed House, it speaks volume of you, not in a good way either. The Prime Minister, Cabinet Colleagues, Mr. Robeson Benn and I were the first on the scene from the Government of Guyana. We visited both homes, and subsequent to that visit the families benefited from psychosocial support. I will not raise the pain of that family by going into that, but I will say that one of those families is benefiting from public assistance. If we did not do anything, I do not know how that would have occurred. Mention was made of the Elections Commission (GECOM). The Elections Commission is a constitutional entity and moneys

are allocated to GECOM. Further, I will say that the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) cannot be directed. To say that about an honourable person, in their absence in this House, is nothing short of staying true to character and being extremely vile in what you were saying. When we come to this debate, it is intended for us to critically examine the budget, for us to offer recommendations of a constructive nature, and for us to look at what was done and what is to come. Very little, in my humble estimation, was offered in what went on just now.

I would sincerely like to thank and congratulate my colleague, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, his members of staff, the members of staff of all the Ministries, including the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, for their dedicated work in crafting a budget to the tune of \$552.9 billion.

I often ask myself why there is need to belligerently bellow, creating a cacophony of banshee-like yowling from that side. Why? Why must we be consistently regaled with that type of behaviour? Save that for the ringside. I do not need to do that. I can quietly share the result of hard work, meticulous structure, and careful organisation, which were considered to be the hallmark of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security in the last year. We were able to revolutionise the manner in which pensions were distributed and are distributed, currently, across the length and breadth of Guyana. We did not take five years to do it; we did it in one year. From ensuring that pensioners receive their books early in the year, to ensuring that there are no longer those long lines but that there are alternate venues for pension payment, to also ensuring that Guyanese pensioners in the most remote parts of our land benefit from pension, with as much as six months of their pension in their hands at one time, is what one calls progress. That is not one what one calls conjecture or delusions of grandeur or any kind of fanciful fantasy; that is reality. I think the Members of the Opposition need to have multiple reality checks, because it seems that they are living in their surreal parallel universe which is devoid of any kind of logic and also reality.

As I speak on the pensions, we are looking at an increase. We are looking at placing \$2.3 billion of disposable income in the hands of our pensioners. I will not stand here as part of the PPP/C Government and say that we have done all that we can; this is just the beginning, in 18 months, where we would have increased pension beyond what the APNU/AFC Government did for its entire five years. We are committed to consistently increasing that pension until pensioners are at the point as promised in our manifesto. When we consider manifestos and we compare records, which I think we should

do at this point in time, I want to say what was promised in the manifesto of the APNU/AFC Government. It went something like this. In fact, it went exactly like this – we will:

“Immediately double the level of Old Age Pensions and Public Assistance and develop a plan to incrementally increase the OAP to the level of the minimum wage...”

Let me give you the reality check. In 2015, there was an increase by \$3,875, and that was the highest. Then the incremental increase led to a reality in the decreases that followed: A sum of \$1,200 in 2016; \$800 in 2017; and \$500 in 2018. Where were the incremental increases that they promised? It is nowhere. When persons come with the sanctimonious protestations and the fervour of their convictions, they need to do research in their own homes to see what the reality really was. In fact, over five years, they did not, at all, live up to the promise that they made to the pensioners. In 18 months, we have increased pension by 37%. As I said, it is just the beginning.

This Budget that speaks of resoluteness, and this Budget that speaks of being steadfast is not a Budget that could be looked at in a silo. Instead, the facets of the Budget integrate and interlock to provide a holistic, comprehensive approach to families across the country – the good that the Ministry of Health will do through improved healthcare services; the good that the ‘Because We Care’ cash grant will do for children in a family, and by extension that family; the good that infrastructure will bring through connectivity, ease of transit and also decreased loss of time in getting from one place to another and improved connectivity; and the good that the Ministry of Housing and Water will do by providing affordable housing. All of that adds to what every other Ministry will accomplish, including the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. We cannot and we must not allow this kind of fallacy to present itself when people selectively and conveniently extrapolate parts of this Budget for an ulterior agenda. When we look at the cumulative benefits of the people, the benefits that they will achieve from this Budget, the 2022 Budget, I think they will be anxious for successive budgets that will build on this robust framework that this Budget will provide.

Let us talk about women and men. In the last year, moneys were expended to train women and men. We have increased to \$172 million to continue and expand that training. Like my colleague Ministers, I can say that training was inclusive. Training was inclusive to the extent that every region

benefitted from the training that was offered. The Women's Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) programme saw \$93 million being expended to train women across the country. Two thousand, one hundred and seventy women were trained in diverse technical vocational skills and information and communication technology (ICT). For some of them, that was nothing short of life changing. The beauty of this programme is that there is no eligibility criteria attached to a woman getting access to this type of training. Not only is she equipped with training that makes her more employable and puts her on a path to develop her own microenterprise, but she is also equipped with training on legislation, on social issues and on a number of areas that will aid in her self-development.

When I went to the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, it was nothing short of sleepy. It was stagnant; not much happened. In one year, that Ministry has been revolutionised to such an extent that people asked whether there was a ministry like this before and say that they had never heard of it. We continued to ensure that more and more programmes were churned out in so many convenient ways that people who chose to access our programmes in person had the chance to do so. If they wished to have access online, they could have done that. These programmes were, are and will continue to be free to all the women of Guyana. It is envisaged that we will expand our training to cater for over 4000 women in 2022.

It was not only about training. It was not only looking at training in an abstract context, but it was ensuring that, whatever was delivered through training, was relevant to niche markets and the demands out there. For the first time, people in the hinterland got training in a number of areas where they can easily find jobs in all of the sectors in their region. In fact, the WIIN Programme was launched in Baramita, Region 1. To date, we have trained over 150 Amerindian or Indigenous persons, and we have trained 1000 women from rural communities. That is the type of work that we have been doing at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. The movement of this training is towards increasing women in the labour force. We speak of the gender divide; we speak of the digital divide; and we speak about gender inequality. With this type of training, moving women to a state of financial independence, we are looking at narrowing those divides and, with the laser focus on ICT, narrowing the digital divide.

As we look to training, the model mushroomed out comprehensively. How could one, in addition to training, empower women further? The first business incubator for

females was constructed and established in 2021. That female business incubator will be accessed by women across the country where they will have support services to help them with marketing their product or skill and to also have an equal shot at the environment where they can earn in a competitive manner. To further accelerate their opportunity, we have launched the WIIN application. This is a groundbreaking application. If you want, you could upload it on your phones. It is called WIIN or WIINGY on Apple iPhones. What does it bring to women? It brings the opportunity for women to advertise their products at no cost to them, and it puts their product in the hands of every Guyanese who would have an application on their phone. It is that big for the women of Guyana. In addition to all of that, we created an empowerment fund where 2,660 women across the length and breadth of Guyana, in every region, benefitted from \$50,000 towards their business ventures.

5.07 p.m.

That is progress. It is not only looking at those avenues, but when someone gets a certificate, I was very insistent that the certificate be accredited, so these certificates are United Kingdom (UK) or University of Guyana (UG) accredited. When those women have those certificates in their hands it is a definite feeling of empowerment.

In March, 2021, we launched a beautiful initiative that again transformed opportunities for women. Many of them said that this really propelled them into more of a visible type of profile. This WE LIFT – Women Empowerment, Leading, Innovating, Flourishing Together – initiative was launched at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) and 75 women-owned businesses participated. What was very good about all of this was that the women did not only participate, but they got notice and got business, and now, many of them are expanding. I want to say that this year, in 2022, we will not only hold the WE LIFT initiative in Region 4, but we will also expand it to a couple of regions.

I just want to share what some of those participants said. *LURE by Shiv* said thank you to the Ministry of Human Services for the opportunity to express its brand. It was impactful to be a part of WE LIFT. They highly appreciate the organisers for their support and assistance and for the energy they created; and *Little Otter Candles and Melts* said that they had the opportunity in participating along with other female entrepreneurs in the Ministry of Services and Social Security's WE LIFT, a signature two-days event to celebrate women. It was truly empowering to see how other women like themselves were making their mark.

Collectively, they believed that this women-own initiative will bring immense diversity to businesses in Guyana and will make it strong.

I want to applaud and congratulate every woman who has excelled, jumped into business and would be taking the risk and, more so, to thank all those who participated in our programme. Thank you. In addition to working with women, we are in the process of creating a digital database to track the progress of women to continue to support them, so that they could effectively expand and sustain their businesses and become well-known names across the length and breadth of Guyana. It is a business directory that we are looking to have. When we think of women in the country, we must know that once women are empowered and elevated, they can make an indelible impact in governance, in education and on every conceivable national platform and sector across the length and breadth of Guyana.

As I share with you, it is with great pride too that I say, a very tangible, evident transformation is happening at the Guyana's Women Leadership Institute. Here again, the Government of the day, we are establishing many opportunities for women. We are investing in women. The Guyana's Women Leadership Institute has a brand new, modern, well-equipped computer laboratory, which will continue to deliver training to women. In addition, there is modernisation and also rehabilitation of all of the training spaces at the Guyana's Women Leadership Institute. By the way, no one knew about that under the APNU/AFC Government because it was starved of resources, and it was just in absolute decay and disrepair [**Ms. Rodrigues:** Despair.] Yes, like everything else.

This year, in 2022, we will be opening a state-of-the-art culinary centre at the Guyana's Women Leadership Institute, which will offer women the opportunity to benefit from classes and training so that they could start their own businesses or become more employed. This is progress. As I continue, I must not only spend time on what is happening without women in the country, but I feel very passionate about this because I think the mission is to remove them from the lowest brackets of pay to the higher brackets and ensure that they have equal opportunity as their male counterparts. Our males were also focused on through the International Men's Day celebration, which we will continue to host, also training in anger management, conflict resolution and the formation of a number of men's groups in all of our regions.

When we think of the Regime of before, we could see them on a consistently 'taxist' level. I made that word up. I am not going to tell you otherwise because all they did was tax and burden people with taxes. This Government could be seen to consistently remove, reduce and not put taxes on the backs of people. That is progress.

As I move toward more of the work of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, I also want to say that much work has been done for and with people living with disabilities. Now, in addition to benefiting from the public assistance increase, which is going to mount to \$385 million, persons living with disabilities will be able this year, when the centre opens in the first half of the year, to benefit from training opportunities and other skills at our centre that will cater exclusively for teenagers, young adult and adults living with disability from across the country. In addition to that, last year, persons living with disabilities benefited from \$120 million. This year, if you combine the cost of the centre that we are constructing and opening, and combine what is budgeted for persons with disabilities, it will amount to nothing short of \$200 million. That is inclusive and considerate governance. Included in that is the construction of a brand-new facility for children who have special needs. They are going to be removed from the completely untenable environment that I found them in, and they are going to have a brand-new institution that we can all be very proud of. That is a first.

Also, last year we collaborated with the Ministry of Education and we were able to fund the screening of children in the interior who could potentially have autism and dyslexia. That level of screening will enable children to benefit better from the education delivery as if they are autistic or they have learning issues like dyslexia. They could now be treated and dealt with. As I continue to speak on the number of initiatives that had been undertaken by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and also what we plan to do this year, you could see this is a presentation with substance. I do not need to scream into the rooftops. The people who benefited and continue to benefit knows and I am sure they are happy to say to the others across the country.

The Sophia Drop-in Centre, *oh my goodness*, never have I seen such squalor. In just a few weeks, the children will have a spanking new kitchen and dining area and a recreation room just for them; children in our care. That is to the tune of \$38 million. It is not only persons with special needs but persons who are homeless and indigent. What are we doing for them? Programmes will continue to be rolled out. The

Night Shelter has undergone serious transformation expanding and increasing its capacity and ensuring that people who are homeless and indigent are treated with dignity. They will also have the opportunity to benefit from free training. I have already discussed this with my Colleague, the Hon. Minister, Mr. Joseph Hamilton. It is not only to provide shelter and food, but also to work on the development of people who may not have had an opportunity in life or maybe life just treated them badly, to get them back into the labour force and take care of themselves.

As I continue, there is a very big area that falls under this Ministry and that is the area of gender-based violence. A comprehensive look at gender-based violence was done last year and a number of initiatives have emerged. Those initiatives will be expanded as we continue to provide access to services and access to justice in the remote areas, the hinterland, and rural communities across the length and breadth of Guyana. The 914 number, free 24-hour tollfree hotline, is now joined by the gender-based violence application called *iMatter*. Just put that on your phone and you will find all of our resources. There is also a panic button that is linked to the 914 hotline number to access help.

In addition to that, [**Mr. McCoy:** Programmes for women.] there are programmes for women too, Hon. Minister, Mr. McCoy. In addition to that, we will be looking to expand our Survivor's Advocacy Programme. This is the personalised support to persons who are experiencing violence. They will now be equipped to provide survivors with survival kits. In addition to that, we have been doing serious work with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Guyana Police Force training policemen. The target this year is 75% of the Guyana Police Force through the COPSQUAD 2000 initiative so that the police could be more accountable, professional, efficient and deal very well with cases of gender-based violence.

In addition to all of that, a number of programmes will be rolled out to rehabilitate offenders and perpetrators of abuse and violence. My Colleague, the Attorney General, and I, will this year be launching the hope and justice centres that will provide decentralised legal services and decentralised access to all of the services that are required by persons experiencing gender-based violence. It is not *ad hocism*; it is a structured and comprehensive approach to one of the toughest social issues to tackle in our country. We need to cultivate reporting, and so the Community Advocate Network was launched last year. This year that Network will

expand to include members of the public, citizens who are advocates and persons who would like to see a reduction in the numbers of gender-based violence.

We move on now to children. As I move to children, I want to say that children are extremely important to the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. When we think of children, we want to keep them safe. We launched a Every Child Safe Campaign, which allows engagement with the community, directly through the Ministry, to ensure that children and adults understand to recognise child abuse in all of its dimensions and how they could access health. The 'Every Child Safe Campaign' of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security benefited from books that were crafted to start a conversation among children, in a very sensitive and appropriate way.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, before you could continue, we will have to give you an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: [*Inaudible*]

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, I would have loved that half of an hour because I could tell you enough things to fill that half hour. Thank you, Mr. Speaker for five minutes. When we looked at the allocation for the Childcare and Protection Agency, \$852 million allocated in the 2021 Budget and increase to \$955 million in 2022. What could the public expect?

5.22 p.m.

What could the public expect? They could expect early childhood development programs, focus being placed on children zero to four years, with buildings being done to serve the dual purpose of day-care as well as early childhood development centres. We not only work with the children, but we work with their parents through the launch of our parenting modules and manuals, so that we could really have more effective parenting, and parents being opened to best practices that exists across the world.

We are also focusing on young people. One of the programs of this Ministry that I really felt very happy about is the young influencers program. This program will again be rolled out in 2022. It is a programme where 25 young people from every region had the opportunity to work with the

Ministry, to be involved in community outreach projects, and to have even the opportunities to present on very high-level platforms like the United Nations. Our young people did not disappoint. I want to congratulate them on all of their endeavours in 2021. I look forward to a brand-new batch in 2022. As we continue to focus on youth, we will be working towards mentorship programme and looking at a programme in addition to the mentorship youth program, where young people who are ageing out of the State institutions, State care, have access to housing and opportunities for employment so that when they age out of the institution, they could still have a steady stable life. As you could see, there are many things that have been done by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. The Support and Heal Network must not be forgotten. This is where over 30 faith-based organisations came together to work with the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and partnered with us to work with vulnerable communities, providing grief counselling, and all the different types of counselling, because we have trained them as trainers and persons who could provide these services, and helping us to reach out in a myriad different ways to vulnerable communities.

I want to share with you some comments from two persons who were trained through the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and these are persons who are visually impaired or blind. I remember meeting these gentlemen, and it was as if a whole new world had opened for them, because we did not only train them, but they were presented with tablets and other support aids, including wheelchairs, to help them to access training and to continue what they have learnt. Mr. Collin Ceaser said that he tried to use a computer and it was difficult not knowing how to go about doing so, but the Job Access With Speech (JAWS) programme has enabled him to use the computer. Mr. Jumar Rajat said that he is thankful to the Ministry for giving them the opportunity for the computer course, and that he is very grateful as it was his first time using a computer.

Our work did not stop there – our work that moves us to the state of one Guyana – and it is not an illusive thing; we could do this. We have every day of the week been reaching out to communities across this country, in person and in so many different ways. And through the Difficult Circumstances Unit of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security we were able to provide 1,300 pairs of spectacles to people across the country with the majority from the hinterland region. To say that it was life changing, I would be doing a disservice because many of those people would never have had access to that. I want to also highlight a very excellent

programme that I know will come, but it has already started with the injection of \$600,000 towards dialysis patients to help with dialysis; excellent! I know this is so because through the Difficult Circumstances Unit, we were able to help over 75 such dialysis patients. This is where the Government of the day is listening to what the people of our country want and is delivering in a very excellent and commendable mode.

I want to say that these debates will continue to the end of the week, but I hope that those on the other side of the House will think long and hard before they return and display any kind of obnoxious, offensive behaviour, but bring substance, but bring recommendations of value and bring some of what we could consider and we could engage with them. If you are truly interested in people, you will not keep a list of people who you say were deprived of a cash grant; you would have submitted it to the Ministry of Finance. If you are truly interested in people, you will not deprive people from services which are easily available and accessible, you would point them in the direction of those services. If you were truly interested in every person of this country, you would not tell them to stay away from things that will benefit them, even more so, a clean-up campaign, that benefited entire communities. If you were truly interested in people, you would find every available opportunity to engage with the Ministers of Government to see how you could help the people in your communities. The people on the other side, if they are true to themselves, they will know that when they approach me, I am not only approachable, but I help. I think I could speak for all of my Colleagues to say that they would do the same.

In the true spirit of the debate, in the true spirit of love for country, love for the people of the country, do the right thing. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security, the Hon. Dr. Vindhya Persaud. Now it is an honour to call on the Hon. Member Mr. Devin Sears to make his contribution. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I believe I speak for us all; we have had a very long day and I want to entice you with some pleasantries. I want to thank all the contributors so far. I have listened very carefully to the previous Speaker. I must say that I commend the Ministry for the excellent work they are doing. However, I believe that there is still room for improvement.

There once was a man walking on the sea walls, and for this story sake we will call him, 'Pholourie' – no relation to the Hon. Member Hamilton. When the Almighty noticed him, God said, he is a God-fearing man, upright and honest. The Almighty said to Pholourie that for his faithfulness, he wants to reward him. Pholourie asks, how, Lord? The Almighty said that he needs him to make one wish. Pholourie said to the Lord that he has been working hard, needs a vacation, but is afraid of flying, and afraid of sailing; he preferred driving. He said to the Lord that he wants him to build a bridge from Guyana to Dubai, because his friends left me out of the last trip, so he wants to go on his own. The Lord paused for a minute and asks 'Pholourie, if he was sure that is what he wants He tells him that he needs him to think very carefully, because he wants to give him something meaningful. He paused and he said he will come back tomorrow and will tell him exactly what he wants. He went back to the Lord and said to the Lord that he knows what he wants. He said that he has been married four times and has gotten divorced four times. All of the women kept saying that he cannot please them, he is insensitive, and he does not know how to treat them; he does not understand them. He asked the Lord to help him to understand women. The Lord paused and asked Pholourie how wide he wants this bridge and how many lanes he wants.

Budget 2022 is like Pholourie not understanding women; not because of the lack of comprehension or the lack of intellect. The Guyanese people do not understand this fluff and bluff of a budget. I wish you, the Members of the honourable House, the Clerk, staff, the persons seated and the great people of Guyana everywhere a happy, healthy, safe and prosperous new year. As I rise to make my contributions to this year's budget debate, one word comes to mind, adversity.

Adversity is a difficult or unpleasant situation, but it is one of the most powerful forces in life. It could bring out the best or the worst in you. Adversity provides the opportunity to believe, to revitalize your commitment to what you want to achieve and reassess what you are willing to sacrifice to make it happen. It builds character, learning, resilience, creativity and conviction. It teaches us to embrace challenges and grow from overcoming them. When we face adversities, we, as Guyanese, have only one option – march forward, fight harder, push pass the seemingly impossible circumstances, turn adversities into triumph.

Prosperity: Prosperity is the condition of being successful, flourishing or thriving, in other words economic wellbeing. Prosperity enables people to gain meaningful employment,

pursue opportunities, live lives and build a future for themselves and their families. It reduces vulnerability, enhances resilience and makes one economically stronger. Development and growth must not be a zero-sum game; one's personal advancement must not be to the expense of others. By that I mean the expense of Guyanese. Is that not what the Guyanese should enjoy? Shared prosperity is the order of the day but not under the PPP/C.

These are challenging and unprecedented times for Guyana. We understand the context in which *Budget 2022* has been developed; a lot of fluffs with bluffs. However, we are concerned that the current Budget will not adequately address the economic fallout, and the rising in equality that has worsened since the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh from across the aisle spoke of polices during his Budget presentation. Might I remind the House, good polices do matter. It is something we, the APNU/AFC, agree with on this side; we have always held that people matter. Any good policy must be crafted with people at the centre of it.

The big question I ask when considering these Estimates is, what are the economic benefits that is proposed in this Budget? What will it bring and contribute to the wellbeing of the residents of Upper Demerara–Berbice? The Regional Democratic Council (RDC) has never concurred with some aspects of the financial submission. The hardworking sub-committees of the RDC met with the administrative arm, however, unfortunately, many of these submissions that were originally identified by the residents were not included. Once presented to the Ministry, directives were given to remove projects, several important critical elements to the region's development were ignored. It seems to me that the Hon. Members on the other side of the House, work as part-time tailors and seamstresses, because all they do it cut. In my region, Upper Demerara–Berbice, they cut out the Community Infrastructure Improvement Project (CIIP) workers; they cut out the Saint John's Ambulance Brigade workers; they cut the young people who work at the National Data Management Authority (NDMA); they cut the information communication technology (ICT) programs and training programs for young people and even single parents; they have cut the real farmers who should have received the flood grants; they cut even building a new building for the RDC; they have cut the Linden Economic Advancement Fund (LEAF) and even the board; they cut the Linden Hospital Complex Board; they even cut the Wismar–McKenzie bridge out of the Budget, even though the feasibility study was completed under the APNU/AFC; they

have cut the fire tender that was designated for Kwakwani; they have even reduced the tags for community forest associations knowing well that they depend on that for their livelihoods; they put a stop to the Linden Television Station; they put a stop button on finding investors to replace Rusal Bauxite Company, but continue to pump billions into the sugar industry, ignoring and stifling a community that has contributed economically towards this country. They have removed public assistance from some of those living with disability, and I know the Hon. Member will look into that. They have removed the citizens strengthening program.

5.37 p.m.

We have a Government that has Tailors and Seamstresses. What we are seeing is the PPP/C largely ignoring the representation by elected components of the Council and determining their own priority. Where is the governance? Has it taken a walk to Robb Street, Hon. Member Mr. Kwame McCoy? There is no longer decentralisation of Government because now the PPP/C is instructing the NDCs and the municipalities on how they should function – who to hire; who to give contracts; and how much to spend. Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall, your name is calling. So clearly the views of the people are not being considered. This is not the people's budget anymore; it has become a Freedom House budget.

Let me inform the residents of Region 10 – our youths, women, teachers, healthcare workers, contractors, farmers, entrepreneurs, social workers, religious groups, persons with disabilities, and those who need public assistance – that your ideas were recorded. The concerns you raised with the APNU/AFC Councillors were listened to, and policies were formulated that applied directly to what you had highlighted. This was transmitted to the PPP/C Government but was ignored. This or any other region should not be short-changed of resources that saw a trajectory path to progress under the APNU/AFC. We thank you, Upper Demerara–Berbice, for the 19,200 votes that you gave us in the last General and Regional Elections. We know we are going to get 100% votes for the APNU/AFC at the next.

Agriculture: according to the World Bank, agriculture can help reduce poverty by 75% of the world's poor, who live in rural areas and work mainly in farms. My beloved region imports over 70% of its food, inclusive of meat, staples, and vegetables. In this Budget's submission we had asked for one 4 x4 vehicle which would help the agriculture Extension Officer and other support staff. Do you know what they did? They decided to give us an all-terrain vehicle (ATV). We are

grateful, but we believe that if we are serious about food security, we deserve more as a region because you are a caring Government. The PPP/C is not serious about food security. Many people welcome the rehabilitation of the Ituni to Tacama waterfront road, but caution that military zone markers must be erected around the lone military facility within that area – the Tacama Battle School.

The Opposition cares for our servicemen and women – the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the Guyana Defence Force (GDF). They enjoyed, during our tenure, the best equipment, training, and resources that money and bilateral relations could afford. It hurts my heart to hear our GDF and the Guyana Police Force constantly being called, the *slinging shot army* or the *slinging shot police force*. We are an oil-producing nation now. The Hon. Prime Minister would agree that we have to do more for our servicemen and women. I must say that this Budget does not reflect such. We need a modern army and police force.

Education: the educational gap continues to grow between the rich and the poor. Those in the hinterland and riverine areas are suffering while those along the coastal lines are reaping all the benefits that this Budget can afford. The Ministry of Education will boast about study resources being prepared and sent to every child. The pressure now is on the parents, some of whom never got a chance at education but trust the system. They trust the PPP/C to create a path for their offspring. The Minister of Education will boast of resources that are posted on the website. How can the students and teachers access the same when the Government did not maintain the internet hubs in the Indigenous and rural villages? The Ministry of Education is forcing teachers to take money out of their little salaries to absorb the cost of internet access, knowing very well in this Budget there is no provision of salary increases for public servants.

Team Omicron on the other side of this House – the Hon. Members – is forcing teachers and students to have in-person sessions, knowing very well that COVID-19 cases are spiralling out of control. It is such an uncaring and heartless Government. Could the Government explain how the region will strategically and tactically benefit from the plan to address COVID-19 in Region 10 when many times we notice that their friends are benefitting from throwing big parties and not having the restrictions being applied to them? We want to know when that will end and when we will have a level playing field. There is some hope.

Tourism could grow to become one of the most important transformative sectors within Upper Demerara–Berbice. Our

residents are beginning to enjoy some amount of economic stimulation because we have a bipartisan approach that is geared towards development. However, more can still be done. Our residents would like to be the beneficiaries of an eco-lodge at Rockstone and cabins at Great Falls. Tax breaks will encourage investments to come to Linden. We heard in the Budget presentation, about four to five international hotels being thrown up around the country. What happened to Linden and Region 10? *Goat ain't bite we*; encourage investment to come to Region 10. An annual subvention is being requested for the Region 10 Tourism Committee. I know, Hon. Member Ms. Waldron, we will ensure that is done.

Mr. Speaker, for the call centre – Midas BPO Incorporated – that the PPP/C boasts about opening, it was under the APNU/AFC that work and construction began. We thank you for completing the project. I caution this honourable House that those who are employed are being treated unfairly. I hope and trust that continued dialogue, coupled with corrective measures will be had. Not because we need jobs you will give us anything; not because we need jobs you will give us anything.

Infrastructure works: Will *Budget 2022* cushion the growth of unemployment and economic hardship that we face in the region? We have asked that projects be given to contractors within the regions who are compliant. In the region during the last year, we have seen over 80% of the contracts being given to persons outside of it. What happened to our small contractors who have been bidding time and time again for projects? What happens is that when these contractors come from outside of the region, they bring their workers with them. Very little residents of Region 10 actually benefit from those jobs.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will tell you what happens now. You need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Opposition Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Sir. Thank you very much, Hon. Opposition Chief Whip. Mr. Speaker, the boys are back. It seems that only those who are friends with the PPP/C are getting contracts. We need this to stop; we need to create a level playing field again for everybody. Let me tell

you something, Mr. Speaker. As the APNU/AFC prepares to head back into Government – as the APNU/AFC prepares to get back into Government – the Party that I represent proudly, that boasts of a good track record, will execute all the projects that the PPP/C did not. We will add more to it; let me add a few. I will tell you what we will do when we get back into Government.

We will find a reputable investor for bauxite in the Berbice River. We will construct our Wismar–Mackenzie bridge. We will construct a new bridge over the Berbice River to Kwakwani. We will finally construct a university campus in Linden. We will construct a new municipal mall at Mackenzie. We could go on with what we will do because we reflect what the people want. Sadly, that opportunity was snuffed out of us as a result of what happened in 2020. We removed value-added tax – this is a key one – from the reconnection fee for electricity. Imagine, one cannot even afford to pay one's electricity bill and VAT is put on the reconnection fee. Come on; you all need to address that. Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on, but I know my time is limited. Allow me to paraphrase a poem that a famous poet wrote, which falls in line with the fathers of this great nation. It reads:

“Knock knock down doors of racism and poverty that I could not. Knock knock down doors of opportunity for the lost brilliance of the ... men who crowd these cells. Knock knock with diligence for the sake of your children.

Knock knock for me for as long as you are free, these prison gates cannot contain my spirit. The best of me still lives in you. Knock knock with the knowledge that you are my son, but you are not my choices.

Yes, we are our fathers' sons and daughters, but we are not their choices. For despite their absences we are still here. Still alive, still breathing with the power to change this [Guyana]..., one little boy [or] girl at a time.”

We are here as legislators and our conscience must guide us in making the right decisions for those to follow – that means our future generations to come. Mr. Speaker, when I analyse this budget, the Current Expenditure stands at over \$4.6 billion. More than half of that goes to employment costs. The Capital Expenditure stands at \$738 million. That is not enough for our capital town. That is unacceptable. As I analyse this Budget, we must place it within two defining

hands. On one hand, there is the 1% eating well, while on the other, the ribs of Guyanese are showing. I will repeat myself again. On one hand, we have the private sector that probably stands at 1%, benefitting a lot out of this budget but the rest of the country's ribs are showing.

Our people are hungry: the small man is hungry. The PPP/C is ignoring their cries and that is what this Budget reflects. At this time, given the clear evidence of marginalisation, I cannot support the national Budget of 2022 in its current form. We have much work to do, but reconciliation is what we have to ensure that we push; The two sides have to work together. You cannot continue to ignore the people and make decisions on behalf of them, knowing very well that you do not have their interest at heart. Mr. Speaker, I yield the rest of my time. I say, God bless Guyana and save us all from the PPP/C. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member Dr. Jennifer Westford, you can proceed with your contribution.

Dr. Westford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, like my Colleagues, would like to join my contribution to this 2022 debate. Firstly, let me congratulate the right Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for his eloquent presentation. I would also like to acknowledge the sterling contributions of the staff of the Ministry of Finance and other line ministries, without whom the timely presentation of this budget would not have been possible.

We just heard the Hon. Member Mr. Sears. First of all, we keep saying that they do not read. Obviously, we heard the Hon. Member lamenting that they were not being given opportunities in tourism and scholarships. The Hon. Minister of Tourism Industry and Commerce sat here and said – it is in the newspapers, there are advertisements, have you ever applied? I would like to encourage my Friends on the opposite side, once again, to please pay attention. Everything is in the open; we are not hiding anything.

5.52 p.m.

All our citizens are free to participate and enjoy all the goodies that this Government has to offer and has been offering from the time it took Office. The Hon. Member also said when they get back into power – I do not know when that is going to be – they will remove the VAT from electricity. I am wondering if he is aware as to who put VAT on electricity in 2015. It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic who removed the VAT from electricity when we

got back into power. The other thing I need to tell him because he is probably too young to know this, when he spoke about persons ribs, some are eating and other ribs are showing; that is something of the past. I was looking around to see, but Dr. Persaud may not even remember that. Sir, there was a time in this country when we had a special area for some children we deemed malnourished. They had a special place for them. Sir, do you know what? That was under the People's National Congress (PNC) Regime. That institution was abolished when the PPP/C took Office in 1992, Sir, and remained being abolished. Mr. Sears, I do not know if you know of any pockets where we have such children. I would encourage you to please bring it to the attention of the Ministry of Health so that we can rectify it because we have the capabilities of doing so.

This Budget is predicated upon an understanding of the needs of the citizens of this country, young and old, Mr. Sears. It is tempered with the realities of our actual financial situation. Against this backdrop, we seek to overlay a new code of conduct to be adopted by the current implementers, based on the general principles of selflessness, objectivity, accountability, openness and leadership. 'Leadership' is a word that is missing from the vocabulary of our Friends on the opposite side. These values will form a trend that provides all of our endeavours throughout this year and, indeed, for the duration of our unending term in Office.

Several Members on the opposite side of this House, said that this Budget has nothing for the poor and vulnerable. This is a blatant distortion of the truth. Any rightfully thinking person, even one with minimal comprehensive capabilities can understand the benefits to be gained, not only by the poor and the vulnerable but by every single citizen of this country. All of our citizens, throughout the length and breadth of this land, even Mr. Sears, those who work at Freedom House, incidentally at Congress Place and, even you, the Hon. Members on the opposite side of his House will derive enormous benefits from the \$300 million allocated for small businesses... [**Ms. Manickchand:** The 30,000 cash grant.] Yes, thank you, Hon. Member. ...the \$1.3 billion allocated for the development in Information Communications Technology (ICT) and the \$245 million allocated for the establishment of new industrial estates. That is where we have jobs for those who are qualified as you said, giving persons jobs that we want to give them, not what they want. We are also qualifying those persons to occupy those jobs that will be created. Sir, also, there is going to be \$600 million for power generation in Region 9, \$170 million in Region 8 and \$1.1 billion for solar farms in our hinterland.

Guyana Power and Light (GPL) will be given a further \$1.6 billion to improve its transmission capabilities. I would like to assure the Hon. Member who spoke about blackouts, blackouts and more blackouts that, maybe, there is an issue with paying your light bills or your transmission lines. That will soon be looked after. The sum of \$27 billion will also be allocated to roads and bridges and, incidentally, this amount will be expended on actual works on roads and bridges; not on feasibility studies as we saw under the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Regime. There will also be \$600 million for hinterland airstrip upgrades. As you can see, Sir, every single person within this country in every area will be benefiting under this Budget.

Our river and sea defences – we have been having lots of floods recently and that is going to be rectified. It will not be rectified totally because we have to remember, we live below the sea level. I am going to speak a little on what development really is. We have to do things one day at a time and it just cannot happen now as my Hon. Colleague on the other side, the hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, who wants everything to happen now. It will not be happening now but it will happen in time. We are setting the floor; we are setting the baseline for these things to happen. It is going to be resolved.

All these massive allocations which allocate to trillions in the health sector and the education sector, we hear a lot about the education sector when my Hon. Colleague, the Minister of Education, comes here and when the Hon. Minister of Health comes to make his presentation. Sometimes I wonder, are these people for real? The Opposition who are calling for the increase of the tax threshold, increase in old age pension and for the University of Guyana tuition to be free are the very people who sat quietly under the APNU/AFC reign when water and electricity subsidies were taken away from our pensioners, when the one-month tax-free bonus was taken away from the hardworking men and women of our disciplined services. When the tuition fees, of the very University of Guyana that they are asking for it to be free, was doubled, who was it doubled by? The very Regime, the persons who sit on the opposite side today and spewing what should happen. Where were they? Why were they not advising their own Administration?

Additionally, over 200 new burdensome taxes were imposed on items that are essential for the wellbeing of the very poor and vulnerable that they are suddenly so caring for. Even the milk and cereals for the poor orphan babies were taxed. [Ms.

Manickchand: (*Inaudible*) donkey cart man.] Yes, even the donkey cart man had to pay taxes. Yes, everything was taxed; everything was taxed. I would have liked to repeat something that I was told by a citizen but because of the rules of this hallowed House, I will not do so. Our Friends on the other side of this House came here with their crooked and cooked up stories in the most self-righteous and hubristic manner hoping that the people of this country really have a short memory or that they are suffering from total amnesia, but I call it an insult to our intelligence. What deceit?

It is a fact that some deceivers are so expert that they deceive even themselves. This statement aptly describes my Colleagues on the opposite side of this House. All of the Budgets including this one presented by the PPP/C Government are always methodical and herald clear economic pathways to development. Sir, this Government is and has always been committed to the development of our people and country. Development is achieved through properly planed and implemented processes and not by whimsical ideas. Every citizen will remember the popular catch phrases of the APNU/AFC Government and these were: “the good life” and “the green economy”. That good life was only realised by a privileged few who were obviously Cabinet Members and the touted green economy was exhibited by the painting of all Government buildings in the colour green. What moral authority does anyone on the Opposition benches have to criticise this expertly crafted 2022 PPP/C Budget, when all of the Budgets presented by APNU/AFC were loaded with promises; devoid of any ideas and plans for diversification of the economy; no creativity; no vision, or definitely, no plan for sustainably development.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will need five minutes to continue and conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Dr. Westford: The former APNU/AFC Government stands accused and guilty of systematically dismantling all working and progressive reforms that were so carefully instituted by successive PPP/C Governments. This was done for no other reason than for political spite and vindictiveness. Sir, the Hon. Opposition Chief Whip, Mr. Jones, said when he was

reminding this House about the existence of article 13 of the Constitution.

6.07 p.m.

Yes, Hon. Opposition Chief Whip, please note that article 13 did not fall out of the sky and into the Constitution today or in 2020. It was there since 1980. Five years ago, when APNU/AFC was in Government, they told us, “that is why we are here and you are there”. It was not arrogance and breach of article 13 then but it is arrogance and breach of article 13 today. They told us that they did not need to consult the Opposition because they had 34 seats and we had 33 seats. Yes, Sir, we remember those things. Even on that faithful day when the no-confidence motion was passed against the APNU/AFC Government, no lesser person than the Government Chief Whip said to us, “The APNU/AFC is in the Government and will be there for the next 40 years. We will have no discussions with you. You have 33 seats and we have 34. Bring it on.” It was not arrogance then but, according to Mr. Jones, it is arrogance now. I sat there and for all of them who want to play that they do not remember, I remember, and the people of Guyana remember. As long as they remember, that is all that matters to us.

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance had no objections to having discussions with the APNU/AFC during his Budget presentation, but they are the ones who have to make themselves available for those discussions. Mr. Speaker, do you know that they keep saying that whenever the PPP/C is in Government crime increases? That was one of their mantras. Have they ever noticed that when they are in Opposition, crime increases? Yes, Hon. Members, when you are in Opposition, crime increases. That is very significant. There is a new phenomenon that fires in public buildings have now been added to the crime list. The Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, said, when he spoke, that you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time. I think they should read that for themselves.

Once again, let me congratulate the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance on this 2022 Budget, a budget which will definitely instil and restore national confidence, pride, integrity, accountability, economic stability and rebuild the trust of the people in Government, while developing our willingness so that we will do the work together. Restoring Guyana back to its pre-2015 glory is paramount and will require the collective effort of every citizen with the full engagement of those on the

other side. I make a call for all to rally around our programme; a programme of development; a programme of vision, which has policies and clear directions for the development of this dear land of ours. Let us do this together; I implore upon you. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, to make her contribution.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin my presentation, I would like to publicly talk about the abuse being meted out to female Members of Parliament (MPs) on the Opposition side by some of the male Ministers over there – some. I am registering my concern because I do not think it is right for us to leave our homes to come into the National Assembly to deal with Ministers who are abusive in their language. I would like to register that concern to you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Registered.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Even as I look at *Budget 2022*, I ask the following questions: is there hope? No. Is there fairness? No. Is there equity in the distribution of services? No. It is definitely ‘Steadfast Against Challenges’; challenges of all the voices, all the letters, all the complaints against marginalisation and the barbaric practices of the PPP/C Administration. It is ‘Resolute In Building One Guyana’, but One Guyana for who? Is it just for the PPP/C’s supporters or one ethnic group? When one looks at the allocations in the Budget, that is what it reflects.

I am a proud mother of five children, so when I speak about the Budget, I could look at the Budget from the position of being a mother. In the Budget, they announced that there is public assistance and \$28,000 for the seniors. When one deals with the seniors, if one takes out his/her electricity bill, if one takes out his/her phone bill, if one looks at dinner – \$300 for dinner for 30 days is \$9,000 – and if one has to have lunch at \$500 per day times 30 is \$15,000. When the two figures are added they sum to \$24,000. Basically, one would have \$4,000 to pay the bills and do whatever else have to be done. There are uniform grants. If one is to go to the cheapest store to purchase uniforms, with \$5,000 one might get two shirts, two pants or one could decide to buy a bag. That is eventually what the Guyanese people are talking about.

There is public assistance of \$14,000. From my experience of working with the visually impaired, working with people

who have disabilities and working with children who have challenges, I could tell you that \$14,000 really cannot do much to assist those persons. The visually impaired really do not go to the markets without having the relevant support to shop. They would shop at the supermarket where they could guarantee that whatever they are picking up is safe enough for their consumption. The sum of \$14,000 might last them for two days. If there is a child with a disability, depending on the challenges the child may have, the \$14,000 might barely be able to cover some pampers or cover a taxi fare, depending on if the child has to go to the hospital. Yes, that is what is catered for in the Budget for our people. At least, that is what I see from the position of a parent.

Look at yourselves – the privileged. When you have maids at your disposal to clean up after you; when your bills are being paid without you pushing your hands in your pockets; when you have free transportation to move around; when you do not go to the markets to purchase anything, prices will not matter to you; and when you are showered with gifts. None of the elites can truly understand what it is to live as an average Guyanese who is dependent, be it on monthly salary, be it on a weekly wage or a fortnight pay. When one hears about *Budget 2022*, right away one starts to think of that. [**Mr. McCoy:** (*Inaudible*)] Mr. Speaker, please ask Mr. McCoy to shut his mouth, thank you.

Yet, a budget was presented without considering all of this since it really does not cater for the underprivileged. Let us be real. Moving the tax threshold from \$65,000 to \$75,000 only gives the trained teacher an average of \$2,800 which is basically equivalent to a Lysol spray. Therefore, you are telling the hardworking public servants that they only deserve a spray.

Paragraph 1.3 of the *Budget Speech* has some colourful adjectives for persons who are fooled by fancy words and nothing else. The reality is that over the last 18 months, since this PPP/C Administration has been placed into Office, Guyanese have been dumbfounded that education did not play a meaningful role in the PPP/C Administration. They returned with the same method of governance – same method of governance – and, even worse, after five years of being out of Office and 23 years of total distress on the Guyanese populace.

I reflect on the past Budgets themes under the previous PPP/C Administration. They are amazing. In 2003, the theme was: *Confronting the Challenges: Staying the Course for a Prosperous Guyana!* Look where we were. In 2008: *Staying the Course, Advancing the Transformation Agenda.*

In 2012: *Remaining on Course, United in Purpose, Prosperity for All.* In 2013: *Overcoming Challenges Together, Accelerating Gains for Guyana.* Then, last year's Budget, we talked about all of this economic dynamism. What has been the result for the majority of Guyanese – a very hard and uncomfortable life? Do not fool yourselves. The elites are the ones who enjoy what was proposed and what is being given. It still happens today.

Referring to paragraph 1.4 of the Budget, lest we make a mistake of taking for granted the freedoms for which we have fought, Guyanese people have taken their freedom for granted and that is why we are where we are under this miserable Administration. We continue to witness the barefaced rape of our state resources, the marginalisation of people looking like me – and I can attest to that – and supporters of the Coalition. The Budget continues to marginalise the majority and empower just a few. That is a fact.

I turn my attention to the oil extracting industry. To the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, in this industry, I see reference in paragraph 3.13, there is a decline in mining bauxite, gold, *et cetera*. Hon. Minister, in my first Budget speech, I recall you talking about administrative controls and removing them and, now in this Budget, we see that has become a challenge.

6.22 p.m.

I hope that is being reviewed properly because when I checked the books and the projects, all I see for your Ministry is some all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) being acquired, and when I look at your staffing, I see you are lacking technical support, but yet still there is only one technical person there. I hope that will be clarified for me when we have our perusal of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Budget.

I now turn my attention to my constituency, the East Bank Demerara and Region 4 specifically. It is total madness to have a budget presented for a region where none of the elected officials had an input but, rather, one individual decided what needed to be done, submitted that and it was acceptable by the subject Minister and all in sundry. There are numerous works to be done in this area which could alleviate simple things for the residents.

Bagotstown – has drains that really need to be cleaned and it will alleviate the flooding in Water Street. These are farms from my community, Mocha Arcadia. [**An. Hon. Member:**

(*Inaudible*) I did not get flood relief although I am a farmer. I had to witness all the crops that went down. Many of the farmers still have not received anything. This is what we dealt with after we had our farm-to-market in the Mocha Arcadia community. The main drainage canal for our community was blocked for the construction of a bridge that has still not been removed; this is Barnwell North. This area needs a road and this is the condition of the road. We are talking about projects but when one peruses the Budget, one will barely see anything happening.

Covent Garden – these are sections in these different Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). This is the road and this is the drainage. These are projects that need to be done. We talk about housing but I will come back to that. Look at Great Diamond. This is where residents live on the riverbank. We see all this housing boom, were anything made in preparation or any consideration given for these persons that are living here? When the water is high, this is the condition in which they live. This is Cane View. In the Cane View area, the Grove/Diamond NDC is responsible for this area. The bushes in the trench are taller than the houses. These are projects that need to be done. These are things that need to be done. There are roads there. I am looking in the Budget to see how old people are being helped.

This is Craig. The drainage canal is at the side of the road; this is what one sees.

Friendship – flooding. Many of these farmers did not get any relief. Look at what is happening here. This is the whole road. I will go and see how many ducks and fowls are in the water. The amazing thing is, Friendship is flooding but yet, this is a koker that was blocked recently. When one sees the Koker with all of this stuff in there one will wonder, what is happening? Persons would call to find out, what is happening. The amazing thing is, I had to write a question to this House asking, what consultation has ever been done with the authorities, the people and so forth, when there is work to be done?

Supply – road to be done. Soesdyke – the koker. This is where all the sand are banked up by the junction. This is the condition of the koker. The amazing thing is that when one goes up the Demerara River – Mr. McCoy would know this because he would traverse the area to take hampers for the people drive past the residents and go to the top, the last village, while the people in every other village have to steer their boats to go behind him to collect a hamper – the area is in need of electricity, telephone and all of these services.

[*The Hon. Member displayed documents.*]

There is a very famous place called Laluni. It is an Amerindian area and the road is terrible. One would be driving one and a half hours in pools there. I do not see anything in the Budget.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you can continue with your pictorial presentation, you will need an extension. I also want to tell you that you should label all the pictures and deposit them to us. Thank you. Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, do not have a dream, just move the motion.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member Ms. Flue-Bess, you may continue.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Housing is a sore issue to many residents on the East Bank Demerara. Many of them have application in the Ministry of Housing but their names seem to be lost in the well-advanced technological system. Imagine being a squatter for over 20 years, then the Government decides that one should not be in the area and must remove all in the name of development. When development starts, one recognises that the claims are not true. That is the plight of 35 families and 50 children located at Cane View, Herstelling. This Administration is so bent on marginalisation and unfairness that they rather occupy a playfield at Third Bridge, Herstelling, to take those residents and it continues to cause conflict with the people living in Herstelling and the people from Cane View. Here again is another example of uncaring action.

Health services – at the different health centres, definitely services can be improved in serving our people during this pandemic. I believe all health centres should have masks that are freely distributed to persons accessing this service. There should be mobile units travelling to far-reaching communities, educating and distributing vaccines, and giving out information that is much needed for the people. The Hon. Minister spoke earlier about her programme, I think it will go well if the people get the information. I see the plan to build a new secondary school at Prospect on the East Bank Demerara is in the Budget. I believe a skills training centre for many youths might be best suited for that area. Covent Garden Secondary School, Diamond Secondary School and Friendship Secondary School are within 12.7

miles of each other, so imagine putting another secondary school at Prospect, the village just before Covent Garden.

I hope the wrong that was done to marginalise the people of Region 4 with the Budget, that it be corrected. It needs to be corrected. Region 4 is the largest region in terms of population. You need to fix it. The people of Region 4 deserve better and if they do not want to fix that then I would recommend, if there are Ministers living in Region 4, they should probably go to the other regions that they put all the wealth into and all the resources into. It is very sad.

I, therefore, would like to rename the Budget as ‘steadfast against all hardworking Guyanese and resolute in building Guyana for only PPP/C supporters’. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Our final contributor today is the Hon. Member, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran. Hon. Member, you may proceed with your presentation.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good evening, to all my Comrades; Members of Parliament; and, more especially, to any Guyanese at home who may be following us. I would like to join in congratulating the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and, at the same time, I would like to recognise that this is not a one-man job. He must have had a superb team. Let us celebrate that team of hardworking public servants who are, like our nurses, working under severe conditions and psychologically they are working during a very crisis period of the pandemic. We want to congratulate him and we would like him to take those congratulations back to his Ministry. They have been doing this for many years now.

There are many things that distinguishes this Budget. First of all, it is an early budget and I would like to talk on that a little. It is an early budget and we hope that, in the near future, based on the use of his team, we will be able to get it even earlier. Why? This early budget does something; it allows the apparatus, the civil servants and the public servants in the regions, in the institutions and in the agencies to have more months to execute the plan. Many of us, sometimes probably some sitting here who have never thought about this, I can probably share this with you. Usually, we might have the budget coming out as late as March/April. We have given our apparatchiks and we have given our officials nine months to execute a 12-month budget or a 12-month spending that was definitely unfair to them and moneys might be returned. I want to congratulate the team for the early budget. It gives them an extended

period to execute their job and, at the same time, to take the message to the citizens in the area to get them incorporated and sympathetic with what we are doing.

I would like to bring to your attention, the concept of an early budget and urge the Minister to make it even earlier. Give us a Christmas gift the year before so that we could come to the new year already prepared. It is a mega budget but what is very interesting Comrades and Colleagues, no one has mentioned it so far as I have heard that there are no new taxes. We have a massive budget or a mega budget. I like that term. I stole it from a press article but there are no new taxes. Congratulations. This is the way the PPP/C is taking it. We are going to mobilise moneys by cutting other edges but not imposing taxes.

Modernisation Budget. Indeed this is a transformational budget. The PPP/C is now trying to take up where it left off, after the Cabal was able to sneak itself in for that little period. It has really set things back. Fortunately for us, it was so incompetent that the destruction it did to some of our programmes did not spread to others. It was just too lazy to go around destroying everything. We are back in the saddle as it were; it is a modernisation budget. In other words, as some persons, especially the younger folks, who I had a discussion with recently said, we could call this Budget, “Getting Guyana back on track - One Guyana”. That term seems to get under their skin. **[Mr. Dharamlall:** Getting it right] Getting it right, One Guyana.

I invite all Guyanese to join in building back a better, bigger, brighter and bolder. That is what this is doing. It is doing that in severe conditions, against the background of the pandemic and against the background of the flood that we had not too long ago and such other things. I want to invite all Guyanese to join in this exciting task. This in itself could foster unity and to work for a costed plan because a budget by definition is a costed plan. I would like to invite all of us to come together and it is good to have the rhetoric here, the little bubbling up and so on, especially from the side across there. I want to get to their supporters, and they do have supporters and we must recognise that. We want to get over to them and say, let us build back better, bigger, brighter and bolder. This reminds me of the 1992 and 1993 periods when we gained power after long, bleak years. There was excitement. I think people were hoping to build things back and we have built back. We have that opportunity here again, building back better, bigger, brighter and bolder.

6.37 p.m.

I want to invite all Guyanese to join in this exciting task. This, in itself I repeat, could foster unity and 'One Guyana'. The budget, itself, is replete with many measures that are positive. I would like to list a few and bring it to your attention.

Measures to strengthen government agencies; it is financed right across at the national and local or regional levels. Measures to improve government efficiency. Measures to incentivise the Private Sector to join the government in buffering the disastrous impact of the current Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) public health threat. It is a public health threat as is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO). It also includes measures aimed at helping the most vulnerable of our citizenry, workers; single moms which is a very important category, because they would determine how they are going to be able to bring up or not bring up their children who are the future generation. Then, of course, we might say, let us call on the men to be more responsible. Old age pensioners, dismissed sugar workers, people living with disabilities, indigenous communities bashed or battered by the recent repeated severe protracting flooding. Many of us who do not know or do not travel to the hinterland might not know it, but in recent months or the mid-part of last year, there were massive floods in, for example, Region 9. There were flooded cassava fields, not for a few days but forever and so they could not even salvage some of the crop and it was just left to rotten. We need to look at our hinterland citizens and see how we could take them into consideration although they are far out. Of course, these things were precipitated by protracted flooding, and flooding occurred not only in those distant and remote areas, but it was also right here on the coast.

Measures aimed at countering the impact of climate change, recognising that Guyana is a small, low lying coastal state. Here again, I remember and would like to bring to your attention something that we now take for granted. The Hope Canal – probably many youngsters did not know about the construction of the canal and passing it, one might think that it is some extension of the Atlantic Ocean as it is so big and so effective. What is more important, is that the Hope Canal would be having partners because it has proven its effectiveness. Remember how the Opposition laughed and ridiculed it? Now it is taken for granted by the great job it is doing in that area to such an extent that the Hope Canal multiply by two – as I put it in my notes – would be having two further partners or should I say offspring because, as we understand from the budget, they are going to be using that example and experience to put similar ones in other areas to

stop the flooding. Because rain will not disappear from Guyana and we have to learn to live with flooding, mitigate, plan ahead, and this is what makes me excited with this budget because it does exactly that based on the experience with the first Hope Canal.

Measures aimed at creating, training and retaining the brain power to manage and maintain the new Guyana in these adverse conditions. I noted the continued support for the massive 20,000 scholarships programme, which is a good point because I lived in the Berbice/ Corentyne for almost a decade. The upgrade of the reputable Guyana Sugar Cooperation (GUYSUCO) Port Maurant Apprentice Training Centre (PMATC) to a technical training college with a more robust curriculum which might look like a small thing, but if one knows the reputation and recognition that institution enjoys with Guyanese communities overseas, one will recognise what a progressive step that is. The GUYSUCO Training Centre in Port Maurant would be upgraded to a technical training college, as I understand with a more robust curriculum.

Further, measures are included to address the needs and treatment of other small but valued Guyanese struck by catastrophic diseases which could financially ruin them and their families. For example, I noticed several persons refer to the budgetary support for dialysis, which is a lifesaving activity, but it is expensive, and we need to look at it. We have a small public health sector capacity, and we need to work on that, but those measures are included to continue addressing those issues, so that no catastrophic disease could financially ruin a patient or a Guyanese citizen and his or her family. Measures to restore the money transfers from the state to children and their families which was introduced by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government and was withdrawn by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) and the Granger, Nagamootoo and Ramjattan cabal, as soon as the Coalition assumed office. I think my good friend 'Prak' is depressed now. I have been looking at him and I think he has to go to the river side and do some work there; you know, we are going to talk on that.

Measures to restore the money transfer... [An Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*] ...listen well 'Prak' from the state to children and their families, was introduced by the PPP/C Government, and was withdrawn by the APNU/AFC, (PNC), Granger, Nagamootoo, Ramjattan cabal as soon as it assumed office.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, please.

Dr. Ramsaran: Some youngsters asked me to remind the Opposition that even while it was doing that, it almost immediately increased its salaries by 100% in some cases, surreptitiously and it was the Opposition who use to be telling us that the PPP/C Ministers are fat cats, so it did not reduce it, but it added to it. This bold and transformational budget comes against bleak global backgrounds. Let us look at what I meant by this.

Firstly, the COVID-19 public health threat declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be of international concern which resulted in an international lockdown, and the consequential difficulty in accessing imported inputs, and the steep rise in cost of imported inputs. Humanity had not witnessed such a pandemic since the dreaded Spanish flu in 1918.

Secondly, protracted, and severe repeated flooding in the costal and hinterland communities in Guyana. It was against that background that we had to mobilise our resources to fight the dreaded pandemic, and we did well, especially in the Ministry of Health where Dr. Frank Anthony, led the team well, continues to lead the team well and we must not forget them.

The frontline workers, the nurses, the ladies and gentlemen who trained to be nurses but are doing so many other things under the tent which started at the Square of the Revolution and is now in the compound of the Ministry of Health and so many other venues. I want to put a plug here to encourage the vaccine resistant or the vaccine reluctant to get fully vaccinated as soon as possible. At the same time, I want to recognise the good work being done by the nurses and other frontline workers. The COVID-19 public health threat declared by the WHO as an international concern and this is one of the things against the background, we developed the budget and also the protracted repeated and constant flooding in certain areas in Guyana.

There could never be adequate training as one would always need more training but in the budget, there is a good provision for the training of our workers. For example, mention was made that the nursing school is going to be properly equipped and properly staffed. The next good thing I observed and would like to bring to your attention is the resources to train nurses and other second level professionals who are not on the doctors and specialist level and it seems interesting because that has not been decreased. It could always be more, but I would still like to congratulate the

Minister of Finance for having found those moneys. The investment and correctness of our workforce is being seen now with the response to the pandemic and the vaccination for the virus. I would like to also point out a little plug for the angels in white. Guyana is interested in vaccinations for COVID-19 and are having discussions to have it. Our nurses in the system responded superbly because we have a great history of having one of the best records in the world for vaccination programmes. I am not speaking of the 'Johnny-come-lately virus' vaccine for COVID-19.

Over the past years, starting under the PPP/C, after 1992/1993 or around there, we have been able to effectively and consistently, vaccinate up to 94-98% of our population of toddlers and babes in arms who need the vaccine to prevent childhood diseases, and I think that there are about 20 of them. Remember when we introduced the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (HPV), there was some resistance with some uninformed miscreants picketing the Ministry of Health and so on. We have a glorious history. When I look back and see how much work we did, it is unfortunate that we have to now mention this, or it only comes up for public viewing and public interest because of the pandemic that we are discussing. Then again, we would like to note the good work the nurses and the system do at the community health centre level. I would like to make a plug here for men's health...

Mr. Speaker: Before you make the plug, you would have to get more time.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Ramsaran: I close by saying it is very interesting to see some very big, strong men - who sometimes from looking at them, a person may not want to talk to them because they are afraid that they may bite them - lining up neatly like little children to get the jab which is good and I say let us build on that and let us make opportunities out of crisis. I see the Hon. Mr. Ramjattan shaking his head maybe we could probably have a little chat on it in the corridor some time. Men do not have a proper health seeking behaviour. They drop their wives off with the children at the health centre because they are going to the clinic for either

second or third pregnancy, while at the same time, taking along the toddlers for the routine vaccines, as we call them.

I want to bring to the attention of the House and the Members, that we need to get men more involved. Let us use this opportunity that they are interested - men are lining up at the Square of the Revolution. Let us not have them only drop off their wives or partners at the health centres for the maternity clinics or the child clinics, but to get involved themselves. Let us put men's health on the front burner after coming out of this crisis. Yes, it is a bad experience, but let us get as much good out of it.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I would like to thank you for the extra time. Men's health is now on the agenda coming out of the crisis. Please let us get vaccinated totally, full coverage and, at the same time, encourage the vaccine reluctant. Also, there is a special invitation to the men to join their wives/spouses or child mothers when they go to the health centres, so that they (men) would remember this time, when they started to go to the health centres, and remember a good thing coming out of this terrible experience that we are having with the shut down and the COVID-19 invasion of our spaces. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

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

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. to 2nd February, 2022.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 2nd February, 2022.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 2nd February, 2022.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.50 p.m.