



**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

39TH Sitting

Wednesday, 2ND February, 2022

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.19 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

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[Absent – on leave]

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* **Non-Elected Speaker**

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[Virtual Participation]

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**Heckling and Shouting during Budget Debates**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we begin today's sitting of the National Assembly which is the third day of the budget debates, 2022. The last two days were very encouraging. We have been taken down dreams, nancy stories and the culinary delights of Guyana, including cook-up rice, pholourie, plantains, nuts and cassava. Let us continue in this vein.

I just want to remind Members that some amount of heckling is necessary but shouting across the room tends to be very distracting and it is behaviour that is not associated with August Assemblies like this. Let us continue in this vein and continue to complete the work of the people of our country.

PUBLIC BUSINESS**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****MOTION****MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 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 I, 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.

Hon. Members, we will now resume the debate on the budget speech for 2022. The first speaker for today is the Hon. Member, Mr. Vinceroy Jordan. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in relation to the budget presented by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance on 26th January, 2022, under the theme “*Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*”.

My careful examination of this budget proves that the Hon. Minister was right when he chose the theme. Yes, he was correct because to my understanding, he said to all Guyanese the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government remains steadfast against challenges by the ordinary man and the Opposition, to convince them that a pro-poor and people-centred budget is what is needed and not a rich man’s friends, families and associates of the PPP/C budget. Further, I say that the Hon. Minister was again correct when he said ‘Resolute in Building Our One Guyana’. Clearly, the PPP/C ‘One Guyana’ is evidently defined as special preference to one ethnic group, one class and calibre of people, one set of affiliates, associates and yes, one way of governance through corruption, inequalities and injustices.

This budget will indeed build one class and one group of people, while the ordinary citizens and hardworking public servants are left out in the cold, fighting for survival in an already challenging and difficult society. I deem this budget a long empty talk, one which has been a funded waste by taxpayers’ dollars, to hold the National Assembly and the budget sittings to have the Hon. Minister come before this

August House and Guyanese, to indicate such harsh measures in the form of a national budget. In an already challenged and adverse Guyanese society, one would have expected that a budgetary plan coming to this House would bring great relief for all citizens, workers and their families, amidst the Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) pandemic. This budget failed to do just that. Instead, it has caused Guyanese now to be in a much depressed and worrisome state, now knowing that they have to put up – very soon– with three major pandemics instead of two in one country. Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic. Secondly, the PPP/C Government and thirdly, the soon to be passed, 2022 budgetary allocations.

To this end, Sir, permit me to tell you about the wanton woes and failures of the PPP/C Government 2022 budget. Public health in Region 5 – this budgetary allocation will fail the people of Region 5 – Mahaica/Berbice significantly with some \$219 million allocated to this region for health care in an oil producing economy, a mere \$24 million more than last year’s allocation. All that this allocation would do for the people of Region 5 is purchase one ambulance. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, Sir, one ambulance and one bus. It will also cater for a storage bond and oxygen supplies for two health centres and the Mahaicony Hospital, along with the construction of a living quarters. This is a demonstration of the gross incompetence by this Administration and the lack of vision for the region, not forgetting, it is the true uncaring nature of the PPP/C Government. Let me tell you what the people of Region 5 needs. We need new ambulances, one to be added to the existing ones at both Fort Wellington and Mahaicony hospitals, in addition to those three new ambulances should be placed at health centres across the region in our far-flung and densely populated areas, such as Rosignol, Bush Lot and High Dam, respectively in cases of emergencies.

We need a new state-of-the-art modern regional hospital to house all the necessary departments and sectors of the public healthcare services, such as a functioning surgical theatre, physiotherapy and radiology centre, maternity and paediatric wards and dialysis centres. We need a fully equipped and functioning laboratory at both of our hospitals. We need hospitals that are properly staffed and cater for all levels of those staff ensuring that they have at least the basic personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical operating equipment. Our Amerindian brothers and sisters from Moraikobai need a river ambulance to get them from 96 miles up the Mahaicony river in cases of emergencies. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** They have those already.] We need sufficient

supply of drugs, so that we could move from often being referred to a private pharmacy for purchases, especially when our senior citizens received only a mere \$3,000 on their old age pension and with cost of living significantly skyrocketing on a daily basis and public servants only receiving a slim 7% increase in salaries for almost three years.

Mr. Speaker, how could we survive? Just how could the ordinary Guyanese survive under these difficult conditions? When the Regional Administration and the PPP/C Government can get all of that right with a well-paid and happy public sector, then it could come back to this House and call it *Budget 2022*. However, for now, this budget is a long and empty talk.

Permit me to touch on education in the Mahaica/Berbice Region. Again, in this oil producing economy with education being one of our main pillars for development in society, this sector received a meagre \$20 million or 14.7% increase from last year's \$136 million, taking it to \$156 million. The PPP/C Government continues to deny a good life for all Guyanese – our teachers and children in the Mahaica/Berbice Region. I would continue to stress the cry for the people for the urgent need of a new and separate building to house the No. 8 Nursery School which is presently being housed at the lower flat in an already crowded No. 8 Primary School building. It is not an extension of a building. Permit me to say to the Hon. Minister of Education that we are still in a Covid-19 pandemic and all our schools should now be developing new safe spaces and be adequately outfitted with quality furniture and not like the inferior table and chair combinations that were sole-sourced and purchased by the Regional Administration last year for our precious teachers to sit on. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally could testify to that.

From this budgetary allocation all we could see is rehabilitative and maintenance upgrade works being done to existing structures. There is nothing new. Where is the Ministry of Education plan to advance more new schools and Smart classrooms in Region 5? Where is the study and plan to have a Cyril's Potter College of Education (CPCE) for the hundreds of Teachers who have to travel to Region 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne and Region 4 – Georgetown to access training. In essence, what I am advising here today is what Mahaica/Berbice regional budget should look like especially in an already US\$607 million rich economy. This 2022 budget is like the flood relief and the Covid-19 Cash Grant,

which was highly politicised, ethnised, unfair, corrupt and benefits only the friends and elites of the PPP/C to get rich and some more rich.

Permit me to touch on public infrastructure. Deplorable roads and broken drainage systems should be a thing of the past, for all in a well claimed oil rich economy like Guyana. However, the PPP/C remains resolute in building its 'One Guyana'. As of such, only one set of communities could have new upgraded roads, like the Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally's road, canals and bridges.

10.34 a.m.

Let me list from the long empty talk, a number of communities that will benefit from roads and streets in the regional allocation. For example, completion of road at District No. 10 De Hoop, Mahaica. The Hon. Member Jaffarally can tell you who lives there and who will benefit. [**Bishop Edghill:** Guyanese will benefit.] The Regional Chairman. Upgrade and rehabilitation of works to roads at Waterloo, Bush Lot, Bath Settlement and No. 10 Village, West Coast Berbice. Let us face the facts, these are extracts from Estimates Volume 3, Reference code 346, Programme 753- Public Works under the executing agency, Regional Democratic Council- Region 5. With no other villages being mentioned it begs the question, Hon. Jaffarally, what happened to villages like Belladrum, Hopetown, Lovely Lass, Calcutta, Trafalgar and Number 5 Estate, just to name a few? Hon. Member, what you said in this House the other day when you spoke about love and care is far from the truth. This confirms that the Hon. Minister was right, the People's Progressive Party/Civic is on a mission of building its 'One Guyana', when it set out to spend an entire budgetary allocation of over \$131 million in only predominantly PPP/C supported bases and Indo-Guyanese communities. How dare the PPP/C say to Guyanese that this budget is for all and benefits all.

Apart from the heavily ethnicised and politicised nature of this allocation of the nation's resources, the PPP/C Administration is seeking to starve all communities that do not support them from positive growth and development such as Region 4 and Region 10. Let me help the Hon. Minister with a fair workplan for Region 5, Public Works. The Number 29 Primary School needs urgent repairs, but I guess the Hon. Jaffarally knows whose children go there. The Burma/Mahaicony Branch Road is in a deplorable state. Several streets in Ithaca and Trafalgar are impassable and

needs to be repaired because people love there too. The Number 8 Primary school street is like the Lethem trail. Cross streets in Onderneeming and Hopetown are far beyond repairs. Hon. Jaffarally, you can fix them then come back to talk about love and 'One Guyana'. I dare the Hon. Minister to add those to his workplan then return to this House and call it a national budget.

Permit me to touch on agriculture. The sugar industry has been pronounced dead by the PPP/C Administration when it failed to resurrect and reopen the number of estates it had promised to once it returned to office. This is not only a failed promise but an unrealistic venture especially when it keeps plunging billions of dollars every year into propping up the image and survivability of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) at the expense of thousands of poor Guyanese and hardworking public servants who continue to suffer. Let me let the Guyanese people know about the performance of this unprofitable, poorly managed...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let me know but you need an extension to tell us about that.

Opposition Chief Whip [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. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you can tell us about that in the next five minutes as you conclude.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Sir. In 2022, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition left a five year, 2020 to 2025, business plan for GuySuCo. That plan had estimated to continue on the path of production of 147,000 metric tonnes of sugar annually. However, with the PPP/C managing the sugar industry, we saw production significantly reducing from 92,246 metric tonnes in 2019, to just over 80,000 metric tonnes in 2020. A revised 97,420 metric tonnes in 2021, to 70,000 metric tonnes, to an unsatisfactory 57,995 metric tonnes. Then to a further reduction of the planned production target of 66,000 metric tonnes for 2022. All this represents a 34.7% decline in the performance of the sugar industry. This Government spent almost \$30 billion on GuySuCo from 2020 to now and still fail to reopen one estate. Yes, Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha – one estate. On page 29, paragraph 4.39 of his *Budget 2022* presentation, the Hon. Minister stated:

“To this end, these products will increase from 34 percent in 2020 to 64 percent of total production in 2022”.

How laughable. If we cannot produce the sugar, how will we be able to produce the new bagged and packaged sugar products at an increased 64% in 2022? I dare say to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance that he is living in Disneyland and is planning a fairy tale for GuySuCo in Wonderland.

The suffering continues for rice farmers. I visited a number of farmlands and had a first-hand look at what the farmers are going through to make a daily living. Rice production declined by 16.1% over the last year while the price for fertiliser tripled on the market. The plight across the rice industry ranges from deplorable farm-to-market access roads, clogged irrigation canals and the unfair, irresponsible manner in which flood relief cash grants were distributed with only the rich and the associates of the PPP/C receiving those reliefs. In Bush Lot Village, a large-scale cattle and rice farmer who is a well-known supporter of the APNU/AFC was denied fair compensation for his losses. With evidence to show, this farmer has hundreds of acres of rice lands that he cultivates and over 150 head of cattle but was given a cheque in his name of only \$100,000 while persons who have never planted, not even grass, received cheques worth \$2 to \$5 million in that community. Then those on the other side, do not want us to come here and talk about corruption. If it is not corruption, then what is it?

In conclusion, this long empty talk of a budget will put significant pressure on the lives of ordinary Guyanese. It will take only the hand of God to perform a divine act to rescue this nation out of the hands of the modern-day Pharaohs of Egypt called the PPP/C Government. Nonetheless, I can assure Guyanese that God is watching, and he will act very soon. Like the words of Moses to the Israelites, in the book of Exodus 14:13 which states:

“Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.”

According to the *New King James Version*, the PPP/C shall be no more. *Budget 2022* is crude, cruel and wicked. It is like a runaway train heading this country into a serious wreckage. It will do the ordinary Guyanese no good. Finally, Guyanese today are emotionally distressed at hearing this

budget and will soon file a report with the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, thank you for that very colourful presentation. Our next contributor is the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. [**An Hon. Member:** Nice suit, Hon. Member Seeraj.] I will advance the address of the tailor to you, Sir. I am happy to make my presentation this morning on *Budget 2022*, on behalf of the Government's side. Last Wednesday, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance presented *Budget 2022* to the National Assembly. The loaded budget titled *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*, contains key and critical information in relation to the global and regional economic context in part, and detailed information about our domestic economy and budget projections. I take this opportunity to congratulate and to thank the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh and members of staff for their hard and dedicated work in producing this document. It is a document for the heavyweights on this side of the House to put into operation.

The Minister informed the National Assembly that the global growth is now estimated at 5.9% in 2021, which represents a rebound after nearly 10 billion Coronavirus disease vaccine doses were administered worldwide. Advanced economies grew by 5% and emerging markets and developing economies grew by 6.5%. We were told that growth prospects for 2022, were subjected to a high level of uncertainty and projected to be lower at 4.4%. Growth in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is projected at 2.4%. No doubt, global COVID-19 deaths of 5.7 million and confirmed cases of 382 million worldwide have contributed to this situation. It is in this context that the debate on the 2022 budget should have started.

The type of information contained in the presentation provides enough material for constructive and sometimes critical, and indeed we would have welcomed, probing comments by all, but this golden opportunity was squandered by the Opposition with much time spent on the price for plantain which it did not get right. The last time I checked it was \$180. I heard the price was \$300 for a pound of plantain. Sir, that is not the case. One can go to any market. We heard about trumped up charges, missing elections documents and installed regimes. This Government

was legitimately put in place by the people of this country. If we would like to use the word 'installed', we were installed by the people of Guyana through a democratically held election which the Opposition, which was the then Government, tried to derail using all sorts of measures starting with the half man that was rounded up to provide 34.

10.49 a.m.

We heard the complaints about only two days being given to scrutinise the Budget. The Hon. Minister did his presentation last Wednesday and the debate started on Monday. Obviously, we have some lazy people in the Opposition who work only on working days and probably for two or three hours only. Then, it was in this state of mind that they questioned the capability and the capacity of the Government to execute this Budget. I admit, it would be challenging to execute with that kind of work mindset, where one only works on working days for two or three hours. This Government is committed to working 24/7, seven days a week, to deliver on what *Budget 2022* promises. That is our commitment to our people; that is our contract with our people.

There were talks about tailors and seamstress cutting and all of that. Time would have been better spent to deal with what is contained in the Budget. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, who spoke just now, obviously did not read the Budget. His comments were structured in such a way so as to undermine our cause or make an attempt to undermine the 'One Guyana' that we are trying to build. The Hon. Members of the Opposition are obviously in panic mode. They are afraid of our stated objective of building a 'One Guyana' inclusive of all of them. They are trying their best to undermine that effort and talk about preference to one ethnic group. There are a lot of talks, but nowhere in the presentation are these Hon. Members bringing anything of substance to the House, for the Government to act on. They talked about discrimination. Who are we discriminating against? What are the names? Where are these people located? Which village or region are we discriminating against?

The Hon. Member spoke about the need for a modern hospital in Region 5. It is contained in the Budget. Not only one, but I think we will be building six regional hospitals and one of the locations will be in Region 5. So, obviously, the Member was trying to score cheap political points. All of us would like to have an ambulance at every health centre. All of us would like to have modern facilities. That is what

the Budget is trying to address because not only are we going to build these new hospitals, but there is \$1 billion to upgrade health centres across all regions, to address critical interventions needed to improve patients' experience. The Budget speaks a lot about health.

The Hon. Member spoke about flood relief and the Coronavirus disease (COVID-2019) grant and sought, here again, to politicise the issue and to give the impression that there was some sort of discrimination in the allocation of the flood relief and the assistance for COVID. Every single Guyanese, deserving and who would have loss to the flood, received assistance. When the first list left out some persons, there was a second round to ensure that those who complained, received the attention of the Government through the Ministry of Agriculture and the agencies of the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB), National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) and the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC). The Government is still open to considering any other request from any other Hon. Member of this House that could come up with the evidence that anyone was left out. With the COVID-19 grant, it was the same thing. Every single household was visited, and every single Guyanese benefited from the COVID-19 grant.

In terms of trumped-up charges, I was a victim. The Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, was a victim. The Hon. Ashni Singh was a victim. I recall the rubber stamp Prime Minister shouting across the aisle saying, '\$100 million, we are going to lock him up'. They searched near and far. They searched low and high. They tried everything and they could not find anything at all. They sent the auditors and detectives and all they could have come up with was an 'attempt to commit fraud' by failure to make entries into a ledger, which members of the board of directors never ever saw. How could they charge a member of a board of directors, who spend a maximum of two hours at an institution, with failing to make entries into a ledger? It was the very A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government who charged me, Mr. Dharamlall and others. In our case, was forced to withdraw the charges. Those charges against me were dismissed under the tenure of the APNU/AFC. Some try to make it out that the Hon. Ashni Singh fled the country. The Hon. Ashni Singh left to feed his family and to look for a job. When the Hon. Member learnt that there were charges against him, he came promptly back to Guyana to face those charges. And again, proven in a

court of law, with competent jurisdiction, that there were trumped-up charges.

This is not new. In 1973, I think it was August, 1973, the People's National Congress (PNC) Government trumped-up murder charges against Mr. Arnold Rampersaud in Berbice, following the July, 1973 Elections which the PNC rigged to give themselves a two-thirds majority in the Parliament. There were trumped-up charges against Mr. Arnold Rampersaud. After three trials and many years languishing in prison without the benefit of speaking to lawyers and families, that gentleman... They brought it to town. Do you know why they brought it to town, Cde. Speaker? The defence counsel, led by Senior Counsel Rex McKay, moved a motion, I do not know if it is called a motion, I am not too versed in the court because, I did not spend much time there, although I was charged, they dismissed the case. The prosecution chief lawyer, Senior Counsel Rex McKay moved in the court to get the matter transferred to Georgetown stating that the jurors were biased against the Government and were supporters of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). The Senior Counsel was Mr. Bertrand Oswald (B.O) Adams, Mr. Doodnauth Singh, Mr. Maurice Bishop of Granada and Dr. Walton Rodney, I think also played a part in the defence of Mr. Arnold Rampersaud. There was a wide cross section of lawyers against the trumped-up charges. Mr. B.O Adams in counterpunch demolished the argument of Mr. Rex McKay by stating that the July, 1973 Elections results showed that the PNC won a huge majority in Region 6. How could you now come and say that the jurors of Region 6 were supporters of the PPP/C? That knocked the argument out of the window.

We saw the continuation of that kind of behaviour because, as recent as 2020, after measures were put in place to cut out stealing of the ballots at the place of poll by the counting of the ballots at the place of polls, we saw elements of the Elections Commission (GECOM), supported by the APNU/AFC, trying to rig the elections. The door was opened by the Hon. Mahipaul. We must put the records straight. I want to speak on the Budget, but these matters must be put to rest because one arrow tried with a spreadsheet – a bedsheet – and then incoherent mumblings to try to convince people that the APNU/AFC won the elections.

According to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Observer Mission and I want to quote again. I did it last year and I want to quote again. This was a 'transparent effort to

alter the course of a democratically held elections'. Mr. Bruce Golding went on to state that it took a man of great courage to try to alter the results of an election in the face of such a sturdy paper trail. The rigging is in the Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) of the PNC. Look what happen recently when we were debating the Bill on the Natural Resource Fund. Every ship has a captain, every school has a headmaster or headmistress and every Parliament, I supposed, would have a speaker to ensure that things are done the way they are supposed to be done.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. That is why I will ensure that you could conclude by asking someone to move for you to get five minutes.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. The behaviour was so atrocious, not only did they try to disrupt the sitting of the National Assembly, they damaged State property. Then, Sir, when you manage to bring order back to House and ensure that we proceed with the subsequent reading and passing of the Bill, they are now trying to get rid of you by moving a motion of no-confidence against you. This bullyism and rowdy behaviour must come to an end. We must behave properly in this National Assembly.

I want to skip all these pages in wrapping up to put this Budget in the context that people will understand. I heard utterances like this is an oil sector budget. The Hon. Ramjattan said there is little money for the non-oil sector. Most of the money in this Budget is for the non-oil sector. I will describe this Budget as a non-oil and gas Budget because the resources and allocations in this Budget goes towards the development of a foundation that will support a superstructure to ensure that Guyana's economy moves from one of developing to developed. For that, you need a solid foundation. A foundation by way of infrastructural development that will ensure that this Government could provide the services that we so badly needed.

According to the Global Competitiveness Index prepared by World Bank Global Forum, out of 140 economies, Guyana rank 104, in terms of road infrastructure. How could we develop this country without putting a major investment in road infrastructure? In terms of port infrastructure, we rank number 87. We rank number 93 in air transport infrastructure. We must put our infrastructure right so that our people could enjoy a better life. That is why we are making substantial investments in health, education, agriculture, drainage and irrigation, farm to market roads, in our young children – uniform support, the Because We Care Grant – and in our elderly.

11.04 a.m.

All these investments and more to come in the years ahead is ensuring that we position our people, we position our country, for the eventuality of a non-oil and gas economy. That is the overall objective of our Government, to use the resources available now to build a solid foundation that will support a super structure of services to our people that could rival the infrastructure and the standard of living of the developed world. Without further hesitation, I commend, with absolute certainty, *Budget 2022* to the National Assembly for unanimous passage. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Ms. Fernandes: I listened to my Colleague on the other side, Mr. Seeraj. I am convinced that Mr. Seeraj is yet to read the 2022 Budget. Mr. Seeraj went on to say, 'this Budget should have been named non-oil and gas Budget'. The first budget in this nation's history to utilise the revenues from the Natural Resource Fund, Mr. Seeraj stood in this House and said this Budget... [**An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)**] The Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, stood in this House and said that it should have been named the non-oil and gas budget.

Mr. Seeraj, further spoke about the price of plantain. Again, I am convinced that Mr. Seeraj has not gone to the market in a very ... [**An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)**] The Hon. Member, very Hon. Member, has not gone to the market in an extremely long time. The price for plantain is not something that the Coalition was speaking about. The price of plantain was an issue that the nation was speaking about. Mr. Seeraj also said that the Opposition is in panic mode. The Opposition is not in panic mode, the nation is in panic mode. The vulnerable members of this country are in panic mode. The single parent is in panic mode. Everyone in

Guyana who is not a part of that clique is in panic mode. That is a panic that we are experiencing in our nation today.

It was Mark Twain who said:

“Never argue with stupid people, they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience.”

Mr. Hamilton has left the House, however. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Look he is there]. Oh, he is here. Mr. Hamilton, Hon. Member, took it upon himself to launch a personal attack on me in his presentation on Monday when he opened for the Government side of the House in their debate. The most astonishing thing about Mr. Hamilton, Hon. Member, is yet to be known. The records of great politicians who walked these lands know not the name of Joseph Hamilton, Hon. Member. It is unbelievable that someone who spent decades in politics finds it fitting to come to this House and in his presentation for a budget, sees it fitting to make sure that he launches an attack on a young female Parliamentarian. Must I enlighten this House and enlighten Mr. Hamilton – the decade old politician in the House – that my political career started a mere five years ago. The latter part of those five years, I have been sitting as a Member in the National Assembly. Sir, you found it fitting to insult me because you said you believed, and let me quote him, he said he thought about it all night that I am tasked with shadowing Dr. Ashni Singh. He thought about it all night, Sir. I did not say that, he did. I am not surprised and rightly so, he thought about it all night because it is in those quite moments that you, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, Hon. Member, when you do not have your Colleagues to prop you up, it is in those moments that you reflect on the political failure that you are, miserable, incompetent, sorry excuse of a politician.

In my last budget presentation, when speaking to the non-oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP), I quoted and it states:

“...the APNU/AFC’s accomplishments, in building a strong economy in 2019, was so overwhelming that... that the PPP/C will take three years... Caribbean’s largest oil producer...”

It will take the PPP/C on to 2023 – three years in Office as the Caribbean largest oil producer to finally match the economic output of the APNU/AFC final year in Office. That was a direct quote from my presentation in 2021. The Hon. Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, responded and said that I did not know what I was talking about. Yet, the

said Minister stood right here in this very House last Wednesday and delivered a report card to this nation that not only confirmed what I said, but he delivered a report card of total and utter failure to the people of this nation. The Minister reported that, in 2021, non-oil GDP growth was an anaemic 4.6%. After a projection that the said Minister made in this very House of 6.1% in 2021, after that had suffered a contraction of 7.3% in 2020. Further, the Minister gave the projection for 2022 as 7.7%. Again, I project an epic failure to meet the target for this year as well.

For the Member that is shouting, due to his ignorance to the matter at hand, let me explain further. The Hon. Mr. Kwame McCoy who is shouting, I am simply saying, Sir, I am going to take the time to explain it to you. You met the economy here. In 2020, it contracted. It went down here; 7.3% contraction. You projected, Sir. Your Government, Sir, projected that, in 2021, there would have been a growth of 6.1%. They did not meet that target. They met a target of 4.6%. Do you think you are following, Sir? That is what is going on. We have witnessed the PPP/C missed two GDP growth targets in two budgets. Not only have they missed every growth target since they came into Office, but they missed both by miles. They have missed every growth target and they have missed those targets by miles. In 2020, the Hon. Minister projected, like I said, that the GDP would contract between 1.4% and 4.3%. Then, when presenting the 2021 Budget, he reported that the economy actually contracted by 7.3%. With that failure on his record, he then projected GDP growth of 6.1% in 2021 – that is what he projected. With this failure on this record, I think 6.1% was a very modest sum which fully took into account the COVID-19 pandemic, I dare add.

The PPP/C is coming to this House, speaker after speaker, speaking about their failure, trying to sugar-coat it and trying to blame the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to remind this House that the COVID-19 pandemic was already upon us when those projections were made at the beginning of 2021. That is not an excuse for the drastic failures that were reported here.

Modest as it might have been, it was clearly not modest enough to overcome the legendary incompetency of the PPP/C. The Hon. Minister came to this House just last week to report that, instead of the 6.1% projected growth, Guyana has recorded a GDP growth rate of only 4.6%. With another significant failure on his record, he then proceeded, like I said, that at the ending of this year, he is going to realise a

non-oil GDP growth of 7.7%. Well, I am willing to take any bet that the PPP/C is going for the *hat trick*. With three failed GDP growth targets in a row, let us all assume, for the sake of argument, let us assume that, somehow, they will get their act together and finally deliver on a promise; just one promise. Let us say the economy actually grew by 7.7% in 2022 non-oil economy I refer to. Unlikely as it is, that would amount to an average GDP growth of 1.47% over the three budgets executed by the PPP/C. These are the people who attempt to lecture to us. When they come to this House and they speak of transformation, they come to this House and they say, they know to do it best. This is what they have delivered – failure upon failure.

Let us talk about inflation, big topic at hand right now. Every media house is reporting on inflation. The people of this country are crying out about inflation. As I turn the nation's attention to another target that the PPP/C has totally failed to meet, they have a trend of missing targets since they came back in Office. In his 2021 Budget presentation, the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of the Presidency with Responsibility of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, projected that there would be a 1.6% inflation in 2021. He then came back to this House, the Hon. Member and reported a 5.7% inflation rate for 2021. Mr. Speaker, 5.7% is over three and half times his announced target and the projection was made in light of COVID-19. COVID-19 is not an excuse for this failure to meet this target.

I pause and I wonder how a Government could be so utterly incapable of hitting a single one of their targets. Targets that they set. These are not targets that the Opposition set. The Opposition did not set targets, they set targets. They said based on their competence, they will make these things happen. Failure, failure, failure – this is all that they have delivered to this nation. When this budgetary period ends, at the end of 2022, the PPP/C would have presided over a total inflation rate of over 11% in just two and a half years.

11.19 a.m.

This is taking into account the projection from the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, a cost-of-living increase of \$11,000 on a \$100,000 budget. Where will the average worker and pensioner find the money to meet this spike in the cost of living? In the Budget, the biggest budget ever, a Budget that drains the Natural Resource Fund (NRF), the pensioners will receive an increase of \$3000. This is a relief that this uncaring Administration offers when, by their own

projection, they would have presided over inflation of 11%. Since they assumed Office, they are now giving the pensioners \$3000. These are the people who want to scold us on the management of the economy. What a joke. Their own report reeks of economic mismanagement.

Let us turn our attention to corruption. The People's Progressive Party/Civic loves to speak about corruption. My friend... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] The very Hon. Member, Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, spoke about numbers do not lie. Let us go to corruption. The *Corruption Perception Index 2019* states:

“With a score of 40, Guyana is a significant improver on the CPI since 2012.”

In 2012, just for the reminder, the PPP/C was in Office.

“While there is still much work to do, the government is demonstrating political will to hold former politicians accountable for the misuse of state resources.”

That was reported under the APNU/AFC Administration. Not only did that statement acknowledge the misuse of State resources under the PPP/C, but it went on to show how the policies of the APNU/AFC were geared at correcting systems they met in place to raid the nation's coffers. The PPP/C come to this House and talk about corruption. What a joke. In 2012, under the PPP/C Guyana had the highest ranking in corruption ever in this nation's history. It was under the PPP/C. They presided over that. However, the PPP/C wasted no time after they assumed Office in 2020 to set back up systems to raid the nation's coffers. In 2021, the *Corruption Perception Index* was forced to drop Guyana's ranking by two. We are two rankings worse-off than when they took this country in 2020 and they want to speak about corruption. What a joke. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Let us speak about the Budget.] This is the Budget, Sir. I know you do not understand that, but this is the Budget.

Taxation – one of the most boasted tax adjustments in the 2022 Budget is the removal of the 2% withholding tax on resident contractors. It is right here on page five of their little abstract – *Budget 2022 at a Glance*:

“1. (d) Remove the 2 per cent withholding tax on resident contractors...”

We are only left to assume that this tax reduction is simply a redirection of those funds from the coffers of the Guyana

Revenue Authority (GRA) and into the pockets of the gang that is raiding the nation's coffers. We have evidence of this, Sir. The Hon. Member, as I must refer to him, Mr. Kwame McCoy, is shouting across as to how this is possible. I would remind the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy – I do not think he follows the news – that it was their Permanent Secretary (PS) that a sting operation was set up against. It is their PS who is before the court – for what? Do you remember what for? [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Corruption.] It is for corruption. Yet, the PPP/C comes to this House and tries to scold us on management.

Speaker after speaker, the PPP/C has come to this House and talked about track record. What did you do? That is what they said. What did you do when you were in Office? It was every Member of the PPP/C. We have listened to all of them from the Government's side stand and speak on track records. We have heard them. We have heard them ask the question, what did you do? I stand here to remind those on the other side with their shallow memories of our track record. More importantly, to enlighten them of their own track record since assuming Office in 2020. It is clear that they were partly deaf. I believe they were partly deaf when the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, was actually delivering his presentation. The Hon. Member stood in this very House last Wednesday and delivered his report card to this nation. Let us talk about track record. Do not get distracted, Sir.

He delivered a report card for which he was repeatedly forced to grade his Administration and Ministers in the various sectors and ministries – 'F', 'F', 'F' – failure, failure, failure. We can look at the very presentation starting from page seven. This is the document that was read by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. He spoke to sectoral performance. These were developments in the domestic economy in 2021. This is not the Coalition going out there and saying that they failed. This is them reporting the number of failures. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance reported an 'F' in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors. He stated that the sector contracted by 9.1% in 2021. It was not growth. This comes after he had estimated the sector to expand by 5.6% in his previous budget presentation. Simply put, he came here at the beginning of 2021 and said they are good, they are competent, they can deliver, and they were going to use the resources well. He said that, at the end of 2021, this sector would have grown by 5.6%. His report card said that it contracted by 9.1%.

The Minister went on to state that the sugar-growing sub-sector had reduced by 34.7% in 2021 and delivered a total sugar production of 58,025 tonnes. Simply put, in 2020, this sub-sector produced 87,875 tonnes. It was after the Minister stood in this House last year and said... I want to quote him here on the restructuring of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). They came and spoke about GuySuCo. I think it was every speaker that spoke about GuySuCo, if I am not mistaken. They came to this House and spoke about GuySuCo. I am quoting from the Minister's 2021 Budget presentation. He stated:

“The restructuring of GUYSUCO, alongside the recapitalisation of sugar estates, will see improved production and productivity, not only in 2021 but over the medium-term. As a result, in 2021, the sugar industry is projected to grow by 9.6 per cent.”

He is here and he is trying to blame the failure to reach this target on the flood. Even that, by his own admission, for the numbers he projected within this very report, Mr. Speaker, if you were to do the calculations as to the loss they impugned due to the flood, you would realise that even if you subtracted from that number they projected, they would have still fallen short tremendously. Sir, do you know what is most astonishing and persons need to understand this. Even with the worst projections that we have encountered thus far, even with their failure to meet any one of these targets thus far, the Hon. Member proceeded to give a projection for 2022 for this subsector as 65,000 tonnes. I want Guyanese to understand what we are saying.

The PPP/C comes to this House, speaker after speaker, and they say that they will rescue sugar. They came to this House and they said that we did not know what we were doing when we were in Office. They came to this House and they said that they will reopen the sugar estates. The PPP/C now, by its own admission... It is a bare-faced admittance that they know that sugar is failing. These are the people that stand in this House and lecture us. People who three budgets later are yet to bring up the production of sugar to where we left it off in 2019. Sir, no estate will be opened. Mark my words. Absolutely no estate will be opened. I want to touch on Mr. Mustapha's.... He is not here; I will still continue. Mr. Mustapha stood in this House yesterday and said that when they are finished with the work, they will create avenues for tens of thousands of jobs. It should be a crime for a sitting Minister to randomly pull numbers out of the sky like that. Just to inform this honourable House of the

unemployment rate, these are the numbers. For the third quarter of 2021, it was reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (GNBS) as 14.5% in comparison to the 13.1% in 2019. Simply put, more persons were employed under the Coalition than those who are employed today. The APNU/AFC did not talk; we delivered. We employed more persons. That is what the numbers of the National Bureau of Statistics stated. [Mr. McCoy: *Inaudible*] You can go and challenge that if you wish, Sir. I repeat to further make it clear. It is a statistical fact, proven by the hard work of the National Bureau of Statistics that there are more people unemployed today than there were under the APNU/AFC Administration's time in Office. This is the cold, hard fact beyond debate. Those are the numbers, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks. As you rightly said, the numbers do not lie.

The Minister continued to read his failed report card that the PPP/C got an 'F' in rice production, also. According to his report, this is his report, there was a reduction of 20.5% resulting in 860,000 tonnes of paddy production in the rice-growing sector for 2021. This was after the Minister stood in this House and projected production to increase by 3.5%. Another mistarget – the PPP/C continues to miss its targets. Let me remind this nation that it was under the APNU/AFC Administration that paddy production was at its two highest levels, with 2015 being the highest and 2019 being the second highest.

11.34 a.m.

Both years recorded well over 1 million tonnes of paddy, Sir. We do not need you to lecture us on the rice sector. We have delivered. This is the track record. You asked for a track record, and I am delivering that track record to you.

Let us look at the extractive industries. The report card for the extractive industries is another F. Bauxite mining declined by 3.8% - F; gold mining contracted by 14.8% - F; the combined output from large operators declined by 31.7% - F, F, F. Since we are talking about track record again, let me remind this nation of the track record for the extractive industries under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Administration. In 2014, the last year of the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) in Office, gold declaration was 387,000 ounces. Listen carefully. Mark this number – 387,000 ounces in 2014. The Coalition came into Office in 2015. Guyanese, you are listening. The first year of the APNU/AFC in Office, gold declaration was 451,000 ounces, a 16.5% increase. That

was our first year in Office, Sir. Let us move to our second year in Office – 2016.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will need some time to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. Let me recap for persons who missed that. In the PPP/C's last year in Office, in 2014, the declaration of gold was 387,000 ounces. The Coalition came into Office in 2015 and we had the declaration of gold being 451,000 ounces, a 16.5% increase. In 2016, the second year of the APNU/AFC being in Office, there was 713,000 ounces, a 58% increase. And they tried to school us on the extractive industries. What a joke. A mere two years of being in Office, the APNU/AFC had an increase of 326,000 ounces. That, my friends, account for almost an 85% increase. So, do not attempt to lecture us on gold. Sir, the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, does not understand, and we know why. The report card, as delivered by the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, is a dismal report of failure. It is a report card that fails to reach any target that was set by their own Administration and not by us. It is a report card of failure presented to this nation and yet they come to this House and shout and scream with their incompetence. Indeed, *empty barrels make the most noise*.

This Budget rips through the very soul of this nation, a nation that was hopeful. This hope is now lost. The abomination which the PPP/C calls a budget lays out a plan to add a further debt burden of \$100 billion while emptying the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) of \$126 billion. Let me put that into context for my friend who needs me to put it into further context for him. The PPP/C has outlined a plan to place a debt burden of \$476,000 on the shoulder of every Guyanese family while they also withdrew \$600,000 per family that was saved in the Natural Resource Fund (NRF). I know you did not do that calculation, Sir. It is \$1,760,000 for every Guyanese family, \$90,000 a month for every Guyanese family. That is what the PPP/C has done to this nation. This is more than enough to immediately end extreme poverty in Guyana and make hunger and homelessness a distant memory for the thousands of Guyanese who are struggling in the depth of extreme poverty

in this nation. Yet, one can search until the end of this budget period, or one can search forever and one will not find a single policy within this Budget that actually addresses extreme poverty. This is the Budget that the PPP/C comes to this House and claim to be a caring budget; this Budget, the biggest budget ever, \$552.9 billion, the first Budget to use the oil revenue after it would have been fully implemented at the end of this year, and there is still absolutely no relief for the poor. There will still be a plastic city in Region 3, their stronghold. There will still be families struggling in Tiger Bay. There will still be children begging on the streets. There will still be homeless people sleeping on every road corner in this city. After the biggest budget ever, listen carefully, the first budget to utilise our oil revenues, Guyanese will still be struggling to survive. Poverty and the lack of basic human needs will continue to plague our most valuable under this careless, heartless, immoral and inhumane budget. Single mothers struggling to provide for their families, pensioners who are no longer able to work, the sick and the disabled are the people who make up the bulk of those who will suffer in extreme poverty in this country. This Budget does absolutely nothing to raise their standard of living.

Mr. Speaker, I do not believe it is too much to ask that, in a country set to have the third highest oil production ever per person when the Liza Unity comes on stream in just a few weeks, this 2022 Budget should have outlined a plan to end childhood hunger, at the very least. Is it too much to ask that there be a plan to get thousands of children living in squatting areas be provided with emergency housing? Is that too much to ask? Is it too much to ask that our pensioners be given enough money, in the biggest budget ever, the first budget to utilise the NRF...is it too much to ask that you give them enough money so that they can afford three healthy meals a day? For the PPP/C, this is too much to ask. For the Government of the day, it is least amongst their concerns. They are more concerned with projects and programmes that will yield the biggest kickbacks.

As I wrap up, how do we expect a Minister, who travelled via bus for the first time when he was 30 years old – and he had to take a camera crew to film his experience – to understand the needs of persons? How do we expect him to understand poverty? How do we expect him to understand that a \$3000 addition, after draining the nation's oil resources, is nothing close to being enough for our pensioners? How do we expect him to understand that? The PPP/C seems to be filled with two extremes. On the one

hand, they have people who do not care. On the other hand, they have people who do not understand. What we have is a situation in which persons who do not care are actually leading persons who do not understand. That is what is going on there. Sir, in my final statement, I will say...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will have to stop the final statement because I have been signalling you for the past three minutes to conclude. I will give you 30 seconds.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. Much obliged. In my final statement, I would say that if I were to name this budget for the PPP/C, an accurate name for the budget would be trickledown economics again. We promise it will work for you this time. Thank you, Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, before I call on the next speaker, I am not going to raise the finger anymore at speakers. When it is two minutes on your original presentation, I will raise this white pen. I hear a word being used by the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan. I am asking you to desist from it. For your two-minute warning on your original, I will raise the white pen. Hon. Member and Minister in the Ministry of Public Works, the Hon. Member, Mr. Deodat Indar, you have the floor.

Minister in the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to address this honourable House with my comments on the 2022 Budget. To start, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, and his team and the Ministry of Finance for the great work they have put in to delivering this Budget. I want to address some of the comments made by the two speakers from the Opposition's side this morning. The first thing I want to speak of is that they tend to evoke God in their speeches. I heard the Hon. Mr. Jordan speak about a passage in the Bible, and I can quote passages too. I reference John 10:10:

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy...”

I want to explain that reference as well. I want to reference the seismic destruction that the APNU/AFC Government left in the trails that we had to remedy. Let me go through and explain how they have destroyed this country from the very fabric. That is why I used the words ‘seismic destruction’. The closure of the sugar estate to put 7000 persons out of work put people at a diminished position, where men could not have gone home to their wives and said that they had

brought home income for the family. They have taken back lands from the forestry sector and shut that down, taxing even to the shingles that one uses to do fences for one's yard. That is the second thing. The third thing is the number of taxes. They taxed the life blood out of people with over 200 taxes. They changed the schedule in the Value Added Tax Act to make sure that items that were zero rated...they put taxes on them. They also weaponised the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to audit people in the private sector, increase their assessments and run them into bankruptcy. They also created the sum effect, with all of these actions, of no new investor coming in during the period they were in Government; no person came. In colloquial language, what they have done is *lash people pot*. That is what you say in the countryside. They *lash people pot*. [Mr. Dharamlall: They *lash yuh pot*]. *Lash yuh pot*. Thank you, Hon. Member. They themselves like to quote numbers and quote verses from the Bible too.

I also heard the first speaker talk about this Budget being for the 'big boys' and the private sector. We have no regret, shame or distance from the private sector. I want to speak to this matter. The private sector employs 65% of the working population. I will direct you to page 19 of the Guyana Labour Survey that was done in May, 2021. That labour survey, done by the Bureau of Statistics, states that 65% of persons employed are from the private sector. Out of 251,000 jobs, the private sector puts 163,047 jobs in the economy.

11.49 a.m.

If you have a budget and it does not address those 163,000 workers and the companies they work for, then the budget is a misfit. But this Budget that we have put together addresses that exact thing – creating jobs and expanding the private sector. The public sector has around 57,000 jobs and not for profit organisations have about 30,000 jobs. That makes up the total workforce in Guyana. To say that it is a private sector budget is a weak argument on their part. I also want to say that if you look at the estimates that the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, presented, if you check table 2(a) and 2(b) of those estimates, you will see a couple of numbers. I want to point you to those. The first thing is that the income tax from the private sector is what the GRA received to be \$89 billion from companies alone. The private sector pays taxes so that government could spend money on public initiatives. There is about \$27.5 billion in import duties. They also paid value added tax (VAT) on imports of about \$26.3 billion.

The excise tax on imports is about \$40.5 billion. The private sector pays into the Government's coffers taxes and fees that we then use for programmes in a budget. The argument, again, that it is for 'the big boys' and so on is a weak argument by the Opposition at best.

I want to address some of the issues raised by the Hon. Juretha Fernandes in her presentation. The first thing they spoke about was non-oil gross domestic product (GDP) of 4.6%. I do not know if we do not understand economics or if we do not know how to analyse an economy, but if you are going to speak on the economy, at least recognise realities. When the budget was prepared for 2021, nobody could have dreamt or had a glass ball they could have peeped into and seen that there would have been a flood. That was not a 100-year event. It was a 1000-year event. The entire country was flooded. You do not look into a glass ball and say, oh, we expect a flood. It was a natural occurrence that we had to deal with, which gave rise to a whole host of ailments.

Ms. Fernandes spoke about sugar being down. What she did not understand was 35% of the standing cane was destroyed and 4,300 hectares of cane were destroyed. She does not understand that. They do not understand, but they come, and they grandstand and they speak. They have to read. The Hon. Member should have read the budget, as she accused my Colleague. They spoke about the GDP. Nowhere in this God-given earth can you find a country that projects 47.5% growth in GDP. Nowhere. Look, turn, [*inaudible*], run down in a rabbit hole, you cannot find it. Guyana projects a 47.5% growth in GDP, and we have just closed the year with a 19.9% economic growth. Three countries in the world can claim that kind of growth – three. The non-oil economy grew by 4.6%. What you all have is a weak analysis of the economy – a very weak and novice analysis of the economy.

I want to speak some more about the matters that the Hon. Member raised about inflation. Again, this bunker strategy that the APNU/AFC employs does not work anywhere. It seems to me that they *stick their heads in the sand* to realities. Now, you have an issue about inflation. What is driving inflation? Do we not know that there is a global supply chain issue? When a 20-foot container from China and other parts of the world that are producing goods used to cost \$3,300, now it is \$20,000. Do they not know that? If they do not know that they should read and research before they come to this honourable House and grandstand and stand on pedestal and speak things that are novice in nature. The other thing they spoke is about fertilizer costs. It is the

same thing. Who manufactures fertilizers? Where does it come from? **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** The Hon. Member spoke about fertilizer costs. Natural gas prices went up globally. Are you guys not checking? What is it that is used to make fertilizer? Then, it has to be shipped. We do not control shipping lines. I never knew that Guyana had its own shipping line, Hon. Member Ramjattan.

One of the most grotesque things that I just heard – grotesque is the word I use—is the 2% removal of the tolling tax. They say that it is for the ‘boys’. These people really do not understand what they are talking about, I am sorry to say. I cannot use the word nonsense in this House, but I will use another word, *kangalang*. *Kangalang* is the word. It is a *kangalang* analysis. Do you know who pays 2%? It is the man who is cleaning the trench. It is the man who get a *lil fine* job. Two percent is from the people... **[Mr. Ramjattan: If your big contractors come (inaudible).]** Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you do not understand this matter and so do not speak about it. This bunker strategy that you are all employing to *stick your head in the sand* to realities does not work. It does not work at all.

The Hon. Member also raised some other issues about corruption and gold. Let me first talk about the gold issue. They talked about the rise in gold production in their time in Office. Gold production rose because there were large producers. Check who the smaller, medium-sized miners were and what their outputs were. Those are the guys who go into the village economy, buy the rations, buy the parts, and get the workers. I am not guessing this. I was in the industry; I know how it operates. I was in the industry, and I am saying to you that they boast about that. I wonder if, because they thought that production rose under them, they had the God-given right to sell out all of the gold that we had in the reserve at the Bank of Guyana (BoG). They sold out \$25 billion worth of gold and spent out the money. They did not put the money in the reserve; they spent it out. The worst part of it was that they spent out the money and contracted the asset base of the Bank of Guyana. They contracted the asset base.

They talked about bauxite. The Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat, is here. He will tell you that they ran the Russian Aluminium Inc. (RUSAL) out of the country. We had to bring in the Aurora Gold Mine (AGM) and Troy Resources Limited to counter that. They put over 1,000 people out of jobs. They did that, and they talked about the extractive industries and their management. I am sorry, but the Hon. Member seems

to have *mistic* from the House. The Hon. Member spoke and *mistic* from the House. I want to address them. There was a calculation that the Hon. Member made about the withdrawal from the Natural Resource Fund. Let me make it clear: there is \$126 billion in the tables of the revenues in the estimates that is from the Natural Resource Fund. Her calculation that it is debt on our people is actually a useless calculation, an absolutely useless calculation. Let me say this to you, Mr. Speaker. That Natural Resource Fund money forms part of the total budget. In the total budget, there are massive amounts of infrastructure works in energy infrastructure, air transport, in river transport, in education, and in health. The money goes into projects that are delivering to the people, and the Hon. Member talked about debt burden. Again, she has not read this document that the Hon. Minister presented. In this document, it is a 38.7% debt burden. The debt-to-GDP ratio measures the debt burden, and it is 38%, the lowest in this hemisphere. I do not know where they get their numbers from, but they come here, and they speak, and they grandstand.

The worst I have heard this morning is that the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, does not understand poverty. That is what I heard this morning. I reject this nonsensical... I do not want to use that word again, but I reject this in the strongest term. The budget process does not only rest with the Minister of Finance. It is every single Member here who puts estimates down and reviews it, and we consult with everybody. The budget process is a massive one; it takes months. Everybody here has to recommend programmes to the Minister of Finance, who then puts it together and then comes back and discusses it. That is how we move forward. So, to say that the Hon. Minister does not understand poverty, I can reject it. What I want to say is that I understand poverty, and I am not ashamed of it. I, Deodat Indar, went to school bare feet and hungry. I understand poverty, and I worked with the Minister of Finance in helping to prepare this Budget. So, they cannot come here and lecture anybody about understanding poverty. I do, and I wear it as a badge of honour because it has crafted the man that I am.

I want to talk about the issue of sectoral performance that the Hon. Member raised. These are only my opening remarks. There was a 9% reduction in agriculture. The bunker strategy is at work again. They *stick their heads in the sand*. This particular sector was ravaged by a flood, crops were destroyed, thousands of acres of rice land were destroyed, cane lands were destroyed, personal properties were

destroyed, people's garden crops were destroyed, and livestock like goats, sheep, and fowls were destroyed. I was on the ground; I saw it with these very two eyes. That is what affected this sector. If the sector reduced by 9.1%, it means it was the effects of that horrific flood that we had for two months straight. This bunker strategy that they continue to employ, to *stick their heads in the sand* and find two small rabbit holes to run down and argue does not work. The people of this country felt the flood. They know. You cannot fool people anymore. This is the time of the information age. The information age is where everything is on social media and people can see for themselves.

I want to talk about another matter that the Hon. Member Fernandes raised about corruption. They talked about corruption, Mr. Speaker. I do not know if it is *pot telling kettle he bottom black*, but I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, that if they...the highest form of corruption I will explain to you. If you check the same document here, you will see a part that deals with the public debt. In that is the domestic debt, and in the domestic debt is the issue of debentures. For the people who are listening across the country and who are interested, a debenture is a debt instrument. Our Government had to put a debt instrument to securitize on the bank overdraft that we found at the Bank of Guyana that we are now correcting. It is the highest form of corruption. They drew money from the Bank of Guyana and carried up the overdraft. We, our Government, had to fix it. That is an addition. This is what the Hon. Member and the former Minister of Finance, who is not here... But they have Members of the former Cabinet sitting here. Mr. Ramjattan is here, and there are some others there. They were around the Cabinet, and they were spending out this money from the Bank of Guyana, writing cheques and driving up an overdraft. It is either that they knew, and they did not say anything, or they just did not care.

I want to use some time to look at the infrastructure that this Budget put forward. Last year, public works had \$44.6 billion in the budget – the original plus the supplement. This year, that figure has grown. The envelope for infrastructure has grown to \$96 billion, and out of that, \$88 billion is for capital works, capital formation, that will help people. I heard, this morning, again someone say, I think it is Mr. Vinceroy Jordan, that this Budget is not a people-centred Budget, it is for the 'boys'. In this Budget, again, if they actually took the time to read it, they will see \$73.2 billion allocated to the health sector.

12.04 p.m.

Everything about the health sector is designed to help our people. Healthcare is free in Guyana from the public side. Everything here is designed to help people. It also has \$74.4 billion for the education sector. Everything in the Ministry of Education is designed to help students become productive members of society. **[Dr. Anthony:** Every vaccine.] Everything, including every vaccine. All that money is geared directly towards delivering to the people. It is a direct interface with the population set. For them to say that it is a 'private sector big boy budget' is weak at best.

When you look at the housing sector, our Government has put \$12.4 billion to deal with housing for people so that the poverty that we have, which the Hon. Member spoke of, is addressed. The people who are squatting can get a house lot and build a house. The money is there for that. The sum of \$3.1 billion is for Amerindian and hinterland development. That is money directly for people to deal with projects that will benefit their lives. For them to say that the Budget is not people centred is hogwash.

On the infrastructure side, the first thing I want to talk about is energy where we are putting a lot of money, \$29 billion, in energy infrastructure. Apart from aviation, transport, and road infrastructure, we have energy infrastructure. Energy infrastructure will see works in the hinterland communities. All seven satellite generation companies that we have in Mahdia, Mabaruma, Linden and Lethem will see improved generating assets so that they can get more reliable power. We will have a buildout of the Kumu, Moca Moca as well as the Kato hydropower projects. That deals directly with people in those regions. We also have \$1.1 billion for solar farms. We will be putting 33 megawatts of power grid tie solutions in Essequibo, Berbice and Linden to tie into the grid. That is money, US\$85 million, that was locked up under the APNU/AFC. Our Government unblocked that from the Norway Funds and that is going directly to reduce the cost of power for people. We have \$20.8 billion going to the Gas-to-Energy project under energy infrastructure. That is designed to cut electricity by half, but that is a long story to tell. They came to this House, the Opposition, to block that very project, denying Guyanese people cheaper energy and denying businesses cheaper energy. People should now see what the APNU/AFC is doing. They are trying to stop development in Guyana, but we will not allow it in the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. We will not allow it.

I want to talk about some of the big projects that we have, but also some of them that deal directly with the community. We have a lot of highways that we are redoing. Let us just take one, for example, the Palmyra to Crabwood Creek highway- \$8.3 billion. That will use a lot of sand. You have to get a lot of sand, a lot of loam, a lot of stone, a lot of workers, machine and machine operators. A lot of people in Region 6 will benefit from this project. It is a massive project, and it is a big spend that will increase the roads and reduce the travel time. The Linden to Mabura road: only last week Friday I was on that road. I went to check it. There is \$6 billion in the Budget for that road. Thousands of persons use that road to traverse, bring goods and carry goods and go to their forestry concessions or their mining concessions. That road is catered for in this Budget and it is designed to help people and it is designed to benefit people.

There is \$3.4 billion for hinterland roads. The flood destroyed most of this infrastructure. At the beginning of the year, when some of the APNU/AFC people were still *sporting*, I was on the Puruni road. There was destruction to the road and the people wanted the road to be done. I was there. These moneys are to help the people. The miners cannot work, and the forestry people cannot work. This road is vital. Moneys are there to help and to fix it. When mining and forestry does not have proper access, the value towards the economy is reduced because the people cannot access the land and so they cannot produce. It is simple. There is \$4.1 billion for 32 bridges from Kurupukari to Lethem. Thirty-two bridges will be built using the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (ASSHTO) international designs. That is helping people.

I want to talk a little on the New Demerara Harbour Bridge for \$21.1 billion. The amount of stone, cement, concrete, cables, cable trays, wires, floating barges, and workers that we need to build that bridge is humongous. That project alone will see the entire Region 3 and Region 4 revving with economic activity. That single project will be revving with economic activity. The benefits that it will derive...if anybody is to calculate the amount of wait time that persons have to do when they commute in the morning and back in the afternoon, the economic loss to the country is huge. This bridge is not just about fixing travel problems; it is about fixing other social problems. The time one would take to get home, an hour and half to meet, one could be spending it with one's child teaching him or her some homework, but we have to spend it on the road in traffic jams. This bridge is a big thing for our Government and we will get it done. We

are not the Government that promises things and does not get them done. We will get it done.

There is a figure of \$15.2 billion in this Budget for urban and community roads. If you walk this entire country, in every single community, roads are being built. The man or woman in his or her house does not care if we have five or six big hotels. It does not bother him or her. He or she cares when he or she drives on the road, he or she has a good road, his or her drains are cleaned, and he or she gets proper electricity. These are the kitchen table issues we are fixing. This community road spending will see a massive number of roads. Last year, which was 2021, we built 339 roads with \$8.89 billion under this programme. This year, it is \$15.2 billion. You will see more roads, in more communities and in more housing schemes, which were left dilapidated for years under the APNU/AFC. They did not go back...Again, them with their bunker strategy where they would sit in their high offices, come out to grandstand, and talk about things that they do not have any responsibility for, but we are getting it done.

One of the things that we suffered, in the past, was flooding when the river ended up in people's land. This year, we have \$5 billion in the Budget and the people of Grove will benefit; the people of La Resource will benefit; the people of Marias Delight will benefit; the people of Zealandia will benefit; and the people in Leguan will benefit; and the people in Essex and Bengal will benefit. When the water comes in, it destroys the land. Because it is the salt water you cannot plant anything anymore. If they have chickens, it will destroy the livestock too. We are fixing these things. The Hon. Members on the other side said the Budget is not people-centered. These projects are designed directly to help people. So, for them to come here and talk about it not being a people-centered Budget, I say, again, it is weak at best.

I want to talk about river transport. We have \$2.1 billion in this Budget for a new vessel. Some of the Members of the Opposition have never been to Region 1. They do not know where Morawhanna is. They do not know Kumaka and Port Kaituma, but when you go there, the people of the communities of the region want this ferry and they want the stelling fixed. This spending will directly benefit the people. It will carry more goods and it will carry refrigerated goods. This project will benefit them, and it will end up rehabilitating the stellings to bring them up to standard. The people of Leguan, Bartica and Fort Island have suffered because of the stellings that they have there. In this Budget

there is \$456 million to deal with those projects. Every time there is a rice crop and the people of Leguan have to move it off the island to sell it, there is a problem with loading. You cannot load certain weight on the stelling because the members are weak. This will help that. If they carry less amount on the canters and the trucks that they move, it carries up the freight cost. I have dealt with this matter personally. This spending directly benefits the people of Leguan and the same thing applies to Bartica. The stelling is old and we have to get a contractor to finish the work there to benefit the people of Bartica. Moving on river transportation helps a tremendous number of people from Parika to Supenaam, Parika to Leguan, Parika to Wakenaam, and Parika to Bartica. For that leg there, we have a number of vessels. This Budget has \$562 million to repair them and keep those vessels in operational mode. Some of the vessels that we have are there since the 1950s. When they break down, you cannot find parts for them.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, to keep you in operational mode, you need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Indar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to touch on two more projects. The first one is the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). In our budget for air transport, we have about \$2 billion set aside. With regard to the CJIA, my Colleague, the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, said that anything to go wrong with a project went wrong with that project. I am repeating his words. It is true and there is evidence that it is true. For the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, to come here and talk about corruption, that project is rife with corruption. We found 1,500 defects when we picked up that project. It was not moving. We will be modernising the airport and that, again, will ease when travellers come in and when they go out. That spending will be directly benefitting Guyanese people and those who come to our shores.

The media, from time to time, will report incidents and sometimes accidents in the hinterland because when aircraft land on these airstrips, a wheel would blow out and they

have would have an excursion. In this Budget, there is \$600 million in capital work for four airstrips. In Karisparu, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Pauline Sukhai, had to do a special intervention to get goods for the people there. This Budget is addressing that airstrip that is directly benefitting the people of Karisparu. At Ekereku bottom it is the same situation; at Eterinbang the same situation; and at Paruima the same situation. These moneys are designed to be spent to help with getting goods into these communities so that our Amerindian brothers and sisters can make sure that they get goods as well and they can get fuel to run their operations. If they do not work, it will stifle those communities.

The last thing that I want to talk about is the Demerara Harbour Bridge, the current one. The Demerara Harbour Bridge has seen the utmost neglect under the APNU/AFC Government like a stepchild. Our Government, when we came into power, put moneys to have that Bridge running. On any given day, thousands of commuters and people move across that Bridge, whether they are taking passengers or they are taking goods because Region 3 and Region 2 depend on moving into the city and back. We have \$946 million for that Bridge in 2022. We have some issues with the pontoons, and we have some issues with spans 9 and 10. This money will assist in making this Bridge operational so that it does not break and cause disruption of commerce between Region 2, Region 3 and Region 4 because the people from Essequibo also bring over their produce to Georgetown too. With that being said, I want to close my arguments and my comments on the 2022 Budget, which is a template for industrialisation of Guyana. The Budget reflects every aspect of society's needs and it addresses them.

12.19 p.m.

This Budget addresses the needs and our commitments to our international partners and international bodies like the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030. It addresses those needs and the requirements that are placed on our country. Lastly, the Budget caters for the effects of global warming on floods. It has in it mitigation adaptation measures, and it addresses the matter of the environment. I want to close by commending this Budget to this House for approval. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister, Mr. Deodat Indar. Hon. Members, the Opposition Chief Whip informed me that the Hon. Member, Dr. Nicolette Henry,

would not be speaking on this Budget. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.20 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.37 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please be seated. Hon. Members, just before we adjourned, I announced that the Hon. Member, Dr. Nicolette Henry, would not be speaking. I want to apologise to the Hon. Member. She told me that she is going to be speaking. The original schedule which we have will be maintained.

The Speaker's line up is the Hon. Member, Ms. Coretta McDonald, Mr. Lee Williams, Ms. Maureen Philadelphia, Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, Dr. Nicolette Henry, Ms. Priya Manickchand, Mr. Richard Sinclair, Dr. Tandika Smith, Mr. Dineshwar Jaiprashad and Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo. Hon. Member Ms. Coretta McDonald, you can now proceed to make your presentation.

Ms. McDonald: Those whom the Gods wish to destroy will certainly be made mad first. I rise this afternoon to respond to the highly politicised Budget speech presented to this honorable House by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. I wish to use this opportunity to thank our frontline workers who continue to labour under unprecedented challenges during these COVID-19 times. We salute your efforts. Please be reminded that the APNU/AFC Coalition will never give up the fight to give you the 'good life'. My thoughts and prayers remain with the families of those who succumbed to the dreadful COVID-19 due to negligence on the part of those on the other side of the House.

Ever since this great nation made its first oil discovery and started production in as early as 2019, the anxieties of workers all across this country were in high alert. Rightly so, they have toiled and laboured for decades under the promise of receiving a decent and livable wages. The David Granger Administration started the process of providing the 'good life' and making the small man a real man. We anxiously await the opportunity to continue what we started.

The working people of this country were of the firm view that the first Budget, based on the revenues collected from oil, would deliver something that they have never seen or experienced before. For months they have been subjected to sound bites such as 'the next Dubai of the Caribbean', and

'Guyana poised to be the richest country in the Caribbean and South America'. Because of this, we were convinced that the installed Administration had no choice but to announce something earthshattering. We, on this side of House, were not convinced that the installed Regime's shamelessness could reach to new low levels. I wish to speak directly to those who say that the Opposition simply opposes the Budget because that is what we do.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, 'shamelessness' did not pass for me. I would ask you to withdraw, or I will strike it. Thank you.

Ms. McDonald: I wish to speak directly to those who say that the Opposition simply opposes the Budget because that is what we do. Such viewpoints do no justice to the hard work and genuine concerns which we raise. It is in that regard that I wish to highlight why this Budget is disrespectful and deceitful to the people of this country. We expected the Budget to announce game changing programmes such as: free electricity for poor families, the subsidising of their mortgages, free housing, free housing vouchers, earned income tax credits, a supplemental nutrition assistance programme with debit cards to buy food at designated supermarkets to stop the massive starvation, a supplemental security income programme which would provide cash to low-income families, and a temporary assistance for needy families programme where non-cash benefits such as child care and job training would be available. We expected that poor women, who cannot access free childcare, would have been given, in *Budget 2022*, a special package for free childcare by the oil producing nation of Guyana.

Unemployment benefit programmes: After being battered by the fallout from COVID-19, former workers of the public sector and the private sector were hoping that *Budget 2022* would offer them some assistance for being out of work for months, no fault of theirs. What about a government grant and loan programme? The working class was hoping that the Government of the oil producing nation would have offered loans and grants to the people for housing construction and more, a food stamp programme that would allow poor families to cushion the high prices in the market, a full coverage payment by the State for those with special health emergencies, and free education from nursery to university. None of the above were announced, and it is for this reason that I, a mother; I, a Guyanese woman; and I, the representative of so many people in this country, especially

our Indigenous women, cannot support this Budget. It is clear for all and sundry to see that the people of Guyana will not feel the benefits of oil unless they return the APNU/AFC Coalition to Government. For five hours and more, the people listened via radio, television, social media and more, with bated breath, but it never happened.

The Hon. Member kept sipping on water every now and then. He sipped ten times, but that was still not enough for him to swallow the pill that he sought to impose on the nation. Little did the people know that a Government for the Private Sector Commission (PSC) and Government created by the Private Sector Commission will never feel the pain of the poor and the working-class people. This Government cannot deliver the 'good life' to the working-class people, Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall. The people of this nation and *Budget 2022* are yet to prove this again. To the people of Guyana, I say that the evidence has been laid bare with the presentation of three budgets. It is no longer up for debate, the APNU/AFC remains the only hope for the poor and the working-class people of this country. A people-centered budget cannot come from the Members of that side of the House. As a result, it is there for all to see. The people of Guyana will not see any change in the high prices and in sufferings, unless they return the APNU/AFC to Office.

As the painstaking five hours of disappointment and Government stinginess went on, it got worst for the working people of this country. There was no submission for job creation, rather, the Minister of Finance used this important forum to spout political rhetoric befitting a street corner gaff or a rally. The working-class people of this nation were forced to listen to propaganda of the highest degree. Some had to pinch themselves and ask if the honourable man was speaking about Guyana. This is what happens when one is isolated from the suffering and the hardships of poor people. They cannot feel the pressure. They have no clue what hunger feels like. The Members on that side of the House in their Armani suits and Gucci shades, living fat off taxpayers, cannot feel what we are feeling. Hence, they begin to sound like the Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. The Hon. Member daringly declared that democracy has prevailed. I am wondering where. This level of delusion needs clinical treatment. The people of this nation had their will to return the APNU/AFC Government to Office for a second term, but that was snatched from them and were bullied into accepting an installed Regime. Please be reminded that, in his report which led to a declaration, which in turn gave rise to the

Twelfth Parliament, the Chief Elections Officer (CEO) stated:

“In accordance with Article 177(2)(b), it is worth restating that Order 60 of 2020 revealed that the numerical count of the ballots cast for each list of candidates does not reflect the true will of the electors.”

The Members on the other side of the House must know that the report and statistics are not going anywhere. Some of these are: valid ballots changed to rejected ballots, rejected ballots changed to valid ballots, electors voting with oath of identities not listed on the official list of electors, extra ballot papers without the prerequisite documentation, ballot boxes not sealed or improperly sealed, missing pollbooks, unstamped ballots, and 47 ballot boxes from polling stations in sub-district of the East Coast Demerara with no documentation. Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall, 11,566 votes were allocated to the nine list of candidates and that is impossible. There was voter impersonation all over the regions. According to the Chief Election Officer, 36% of the votes cast at the election 2020 were affected by voters' impersonation.

1.50 p.m.

Numerous electors who were out of the country on elections day miraculously voted. This was confirmed by the Chief Election Officer. Documents from the General Register's Office (GRO) confirmed that numerous deceased persons voted. Therefore, this Regime continued to lace the nation with untruth and propaganda about elections 2020. I want to take this opportunity to urge my good comrades on that side of the House to repent first and change their ways and to be guided by the sage of the words of Proverbs 12:19 which states:

“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment”.

No amount of rhetoric could take away the stench of what occurred at the March, 2020 elections. Ballot boxes without statutory documents will never prevent or represent democracy. Poor people in their homes with bills over their heads and high food prices... Guyanese were forced to listen to a presentation that was on the other side of truth. The fact remains that the David Granger Administration won the 2020 elections but were bullied out of Office by big geo-political interest, and that is a fact. While this Budget

engages our tension, we must not forget that, one year ago, the Hon. Minister came to this House with a Budget titled: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. We could all agree that, one year later, instead of economic dynamism, we got starvation and economic damnation. Instead of resilience, the Guyanese people got the high food prices and nothing but pressure and more pressure.

Budget 2021 has left barbers, hairdressers, taxi drivers, vendors, fishermen, labourers, tour operators, airline workers, and more, bawling and crying for help. Where are the 50,000 jobs which *Budget 2021* promised? Therefore, after the failures of *Budget 2021*, it is reasonable to expect that this Budget will not follow the same the path of the PPP/C promises and failures. If *Budget 2022* resulted in tennis rolls and plantain prices rising by almost 500%, it is frightening to think about what will happen by August of this year. The people of this country are estimating that a bag of five tennis rolls might reach \$500 by September. There is no chance for the poor and ordinary people under the yoke of the installed Administration. The people are now looking to the A APNU/AFC Coalition to rescue the situation. We stand ready. I say to my folks out there, I say to the Guyanese people, get their Identification Cards (ID) and stand by. Your alternative Government stands ready to return this country to the glory years from 2015-2020. This is not a back-to-work budget. This is a back-to-the pressure budget.

I turn my attention to the state of labour. *Budget 2022* continues with the same theme that encompassed the other two budgets – overpromising and under delivering. This time around, there is the boast of the biggest budget ever. The 2021 Budget was supposed to end all the suffering, but what were the results? It was more suffering.

According to the *Bureau of Statistics, the Guyana Labour Force Survey – May, 2021*, unemployment rate was 15.6 %, which is an increase of almost 3% from the rate in 2020. In the same Report, youth employment is listed at 31.4%, which is an increase by 1.2% from its 2020 rate. One wonders whether the folks on this side of the House and their elite friends really do understand what these numbers mean. People are not working and there is no source of income in many households across this country. I know that it is difficult for the Members on that side of the House to understand the situation from the standpoint of their champagne and steak life. I must admit that things are tight. *Budget 2022* does not speak to this labour crisis. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

Civil Defence Commission (CDC) Report titled: *Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of Covid-19 on Households in Guyana*, in a survey of 1,200 persons, it states that 22% have skipped meals since the pandemic. Added to this, some are spending 60% of their income on food.

Interruption due to Power Outage

Mr. Speaker: Hold a few minutes for the lights to come back. The power outage might be beyond the Arthur Chung Convention Centre (ACCC). Just hold a few more moments, Hon. Members. We are trying to restore the live feed. We are given the thumbs up. Hon. Member, it is now 2.04 p.m. We lost seven minutes which you will get back. You could continue now.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Added to this, some are spending 60% of their income on food; and 52% have gone into their savings. Is the installed Regime reading these reports? Is the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance paying attention to the carnage taking place? There is no more hope for the people of this country.

The Ministry of Labour – This Budget themed: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building One Guyana* is dubbed as the biggest budget with a whopping \$552.9 billion allocation. These allocations will fall on the sword of inflation and skyrocketing prices. For example, the allocation of \$25,000 ‘Because We Care’ grant will not make much difference in the long-term lives of the people.

2.05 p.m.

It would provide for a temporary *lil* stretch, but it cannot be compared to a programme such as the Five ‘Bs’ programme – boats, buses, bicycles, breakfast and books. That is a programme that can transform the lives of people. This money will go to the purchase of a few small items from the community shops. We urge the people of Guyana to take this money because it is theirs, but, on the issue of transforming lives, these crumbs, these *lil frecks*, cannot affect the suffering of the people. This Budget is one of the most anti-poor and anti-working-class budgets to have been tabled in this honourable House over the last five years. A cursory glance at this hastily scrambled document would reveal undeniable intent to reward the haves and to punish the have-nots. The intellectual authors, who concocted this wanton assault on the working-class, did not even attempt to hide their attack. The only way to transform lives is to

increase the wages and salaries of the people. not to offer handouts here, and there, and there.

This installed Regime would be well advised to follow the path that the APNU/AFC Government had in 2015 to 2020. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that, on 29th January, 2016, the former Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan, presented *Budget 2016* to this House. It was entitled *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. On 28th November, 2016, this House received another budget for the fiscal year 2017 which carried the title *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. In November of 2017, we presented *The Journey to the Good Life Continues* for the fiscal year 2018. For the fiscal year 2019, we presented *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People, Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*. In doing so, the minimum wage was increased by 61.74%, from \$39,570 in 2015 to \$55,000 in 2016. Public servants were guaranteed interest in every budget presented. We have demonstrated that we would always present a people-centred budget, and we stand ready to rescue the people from this beating that they are receiving.

I now go on to co-operative societies. The only way for the people of Guyana to benefit equitably from the oil wealth is to change the fundamentals of this economy. [Mr. McCoy: (Inaudible)] While the Hon. Member over there is shouting and heckling, I wish to remind him that *I doan watch on nobody man, ah got muh own house and land*. The only way for the people of Guyana to benefit equitably from the oil wealth is to change the fundamentals of this economy. This cannot be done only through equality; it has to be done through equity. There is a big difference, one which I doubt the Members on that side of the House can appreciate and understand. There is no point passing a Local Content Bill when the people lack the equity necessary to compete and access the opportunities that may arise. In this regard, for some people who like to hold waiters and bring water and coconut water, co-operative societies presented a structure for equity to be realised in this country. To that end, it is sad that *Budget 2022* did not even see it fit to make any significant mention or programme for the resuscitation of co-operative societies. As one may know, co-operative societies can serve as the engine of growth for any village economy and provide the type of transformative economic empowerment that cannot be easily matched. This is the avenue through which the ‘small man’ can become a real person. This cannot be achieved through handouts. Handouts

are not transformative. Anyone who does not understand this should not be in the seat of Government. It is for this reason that the APNU/AFC Government encouraged the expansion of co-operative societies.

The David Granger Administration launched four new models of co-operative societies with funding from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) as part of a Rural Agricultural Infrastructure Development (RAID) programme. In 2019, thrift societies were reintroduced in the schools at both primary and secondary levels to rekindle the spirit of cooperativism. Added to this, we worked closely with the United Nations (UN) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to ensure that the practices of co-operative societies are aligned with the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals. This led to the creation of 1,268 co-operatives under our watch. This is what real transformation looks like, not handout here and handout there, but real programmes that can lead to significant social mobility. It seems that we are asking for too much from this installed Regime which is bent on ruling for a few. It seems that we are here *crying in the desert, barking at a flying bird, or chasing the wind*. There can be no people-centred budget under this Regime. The people of Guyana will not see any change in the high prices and sufferings until they return the APNU/AFC Coalition to Government.

I now go on to occupational safety and health (OSH). That is a sore issue. *Budget 2022* offers nothing significant on occupational safety and health. This follows in the same footsteps of the previous budgets. Guyanese workers continue to suffer under uncaring companies that are only concerned about their profits and possess little care for their workers. I do not blame them because, if this is what our own gives to us... Death of a teacher – no compassion, the teachers’ quarters in Upper Mazaruni... If we see all of this that our own is giving to us, what do we expect to get from the foreigners? It is unacceptable. I would like to say to us in this House that, at that time, no one could have anticipated that, years after the game changing legislation, the nation’s most precious workers, our teachers, would receive zero protection from this Government. The tears of teachers and their kids are on you – every one of you over there. The nation’s tears are on you. This Government, and particularly the Ministry of Labour... they are upset that they have no clue of how to deal with our workers. Could you imagine that this Ministry of Labour, which we have here now, instead of working with the Guyana Teachers’ Union and

trying to mitigate issues, the Minister stands there to send out a threat to our teachers?

The Ministry of Labour was created to respect the people of Guyana and to respect the workers of Guyana, but the Minister of Labour, I am convinced, has no spine to confront his colleagues on the other side. A specific programme...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we need an extension for you to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Speaker, we are not surprised that the biggest budget in the history of this nation has not provided a specific programme to ensure that our teachers receive adequate occupational safety and health and protection. There is no reasonable justification for forcing teachers to remain in the classroom when the highly contagious Omicron variant is spreading and killing at will. Reports have shown that over 500 of our teachers contracted the Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) and most of them did at their workplaces. Over 685 students and pupils have contracted COVID-19, and what did they receive? Absolutely nothing.

In conclusion I would like to say that, since August, 2020, Guyana has never been the same. It seems as if there is a dark cloud that continues to hover, permanently, over the affairs of this nation. Death and despair have returned. Hope has been replaced by hopelessness. Prosperity has been transformed into economic carnage. Things were bright then; now things are tight. Inflation is everywhere. Food prices continue to rise and will not stop. This is not global phenomenon; it is a PPP/C phenomenon. This installed Regime has no answers, and they are not interested in finding answers. *Budget 2022*, as we see it, will bring more trips to Dubai for the ruling elite and crumbs for the poor and working-class people. It is for this reason that the only solution for the people of this country lies with the APNU/AFC.

Finally, I would like to say to you in closing that we, on this side of the House, will not support *Budget 2022* in that form because it does not cater for the poor and working-class people. I thank you. [Applause]

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

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I sat in this House for the past two days, I listened to the Members on the Opposite side who come to this House to speak about nothing, but they spoke about their track record. The person who spoke just before me is delusional, very delusional. She spoke about the Upper Mazaruni teachers' quarters being in bad condition. That is the track record of the APNU/AFC between 2015 to 2020 before we took Office. We have to fix that. We will fix the damages that the APNU/AFC has done in Upper Mazaruni when they were in Government.

I rise to give my contribution to *Budget 2022* but, before I can go further, let me, at this time commend the competent Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, staff of the Ministry of Finance, and also the competent Ministers in the various ministries, and their staff, for bringing this people-centred *Budget 2022* to this honourable House. I listened to the debate for the last two days from the Hon. Members of the House on the Opposition side who spoke of projects that are of no substance, no value and clueless relatively to *Budget 2022*. The APNU/AFC Opposition, as I speak now, sits in this House as passengers with no driver, no captain. I can even go further to say that they were left at the orphanage, fatherless and motherless.

2.20 p.m.

The Hon. Members on the other side seem to have a reading and Mathematics problem. They cannot understand the content of *Budget 2022*. The Budget is too big; they cannot call the figures. They all get mixed-up with United States (US) and Guyana dollars. They find all sorts of excuses and said that they were given two working days to examine *Budget 2022*. I want to inform the Hon. Members on the other side that this PPP/C Government is a caring 24/7 Government, to make sure that the needs of the people are met. Hon. Members on the other side spoke volumes of speeches describing the Budget as the biggest and the worse budget. I want to remind the Opposition that the worse record we have had in the history of Parliament was when the Leader of the Opposition resigned as the Leader of the Opposition, just hours before the competent Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh could present Guyana's biggest and historic \$552.9 billion Budget to this honourable House.

The theme, *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*, speaks for itself. We, the PPP/C Government, are preparing to stand steadfast against all challenges, whether it be the COVID, flood or even the Opposition, the APNU/AFC – the new variant in this country – that attempts to undermine the developmental agenda in voting against the Amerindian development budget in 2020, interrupting the consideration of *Budget 2021* and interrupting the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) Bill 2021. The Opposition, APNU/AFC, has a record of cutting budgets but adding new taxes to Guyanese citizens. Hon. Members of the Opposition side come to this House with the aim of dividing the Guyanese population. All the speakers who spoke for the last two days before me, stated that 50% of the population belongs to them. But let me make it clear, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is for all Guyanese – 'One Guyana' – regardless of gender, religion, ethnicity and affiliation. We are a 'One Guyana' Government.

Budget 2022 is a landmark for building Guyana's future. When the history of our country shall be written, the future generation will consider that 2022 was the year in which Guyana's great transformation began. I turn to the question frequently asked about our PPP/C Manifesto. I have in my hand here our Manifesto: *Our Plan For prosperity; One Country, One People, One Future*.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

It is a plan for 2020 to 2025 and not an annual plan. However, the People's Progressive Party Civic led by His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and the Hon. Prime Minister, Brigadier (Ret'd) and Former Chief of Staff, Hon. Mark Philips, has already delivered to the Guyanese population on its commitments within this 18 short months. We, the PPP/C, in 2020, restored the schoolchildren's Because We Care Cash Grant to \$15,000 *per* child and \$4,000 for uniform allowance to all public schoolchildren and extended it to private schoolchildren. Because we care, we increase the schoolchildren's Cash Grant in 2022 to \$25,000 and \$5,000 for uniform allowance. The sum of \$30,000 *per* child will go directly to the pockets for all Guyanese children.

Hon. Members on the other side of this House issued a concern about the pensioners, but lest we forget, that same APNU/AFC Government, now trying to show concern for the pensioners, increased pension for the elderly by \$1,000

in 2019. As soon we came into Office, we increased pension to \$25,000, plus we give a \$25,000 one-off cash grant to elderly people of this country. Now, we raised the pension to \$28,000 in less than two years. Because we care, we will do more as stated in our manifesto, *A Plan for Prosperity, 2020–2025*.

The Opposition side spoke about budget cuts in certain regions controlled by the APNU/AFC. I want to put on the record that Region 7, controlled by the APNU/AFC, has seen major developmental projects even more than before. Schools were built at Dagg Point, Issano, Waramadong and Kurutuku; a teacher's quarter was built in Paruima; a health facility was built in Bartica and Kamarang; a health centre was built in Batavia; a doctor's quarter was built in Bartica. They were all undertaken by the PPP/C Government.

The Budget speaks about roads and bridges. Again, I want to put on the record that the bridges at 70 Miles, 72 Miles, 73 Miles and Batavia, and the road from Kamarang to Waramadong, that were ignored by the APNU/AFC, were done by the PPP/C Government while in Office. I want to inform the honourable House that the Amerindian development is on the move in all Amerindian villages. The Presidential grant has been increased. It was increased by the PPP/C Government. The village economy grant raising from \$5 million to \$15 million was a booster shot to Amerindian villages economy. If I go on and on, my time allocated to me will be exhausted.

I move on to water. As we know, water is life. Again, in our Manifesto, the PPP/C plans to improve access to and enhance the quality of a great water system in the hinterland. As I speak now, the residents of Kamarang and Jawalla, where the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, resides – she could attest – now enjoy the flow of water in their yard under the PPP/C Government. In *Budget 2022*, \$94.5 million is budgeted under the Hinterland Water Supply Programme, which will make provision for the new water supply systems to be installed at Warwata, Phillipai, Isseneru and Tasserene in Region 7. What a caring PPP/C Government we have.

Air transportation is every critical in the hinterland villages, especially in Region 7 and 8, where the residents rely on aircraft to transport their basic food and medical supplies into their villages. As I speak now, there are food items and medical supplies laying at the airport but cannot be transported due to the airstrip conditions. These airstrips

were reported to the Hon. Patterson who was the then subject Minister, but he failed to improve those airstrips. Today, I want to commend the Ministry of Public Works for allocating \$600 million for the upgrading of four airstrips in hinterland communities – Eteringbang, Karisparu, Ekereku Bottom and Paruima. That will improve the lives of the Amerindian people and miners, and provide medivacs in emergency cases.

Hon. Members of the Opposition are keeping their eyes on the oil money, but they forgot they are the ones who interrupted the passage of the Natural Resource Fund Bill on the 29th December, 2021, but were unsuccessful. The NRF Bill is a Bill that is paving the way for all Guyanese to be beneficiaries of the NRF. The APNU/AFC seems to be worried and troubled because they know that the PPP/C Government will do more and will continue to do more for the people of Guyana. They very well know that they will remain in their rightful seat as Opposition. Guyanese are confident that Guyana is in its rightful place under the stewardship of His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and his Government.

Guyanese benefited from cash transfers more than any other Caribbean country; this is a World Bank report. Also, Guyana has received cash transfers to cushion the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A new World Bank report has found that the cash transfer provided in Guyana were much more than in several other Caribbean countries. From data by the World Bank, Guyana is the third highest country in the group of countries studied. Guyanese are in a safe place. The PPP/C Government will continue to provide services to all Guyanese populations without discrimination.

Let me further put on the record that Caribbean countries are largely dependent on exporting goods, and providing services like tourism has been beset by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) is projecting greater economic recovery with the new oil producer, Guyana, leading the region's economic growth. This projected outturn is dominant by Guyana. Growth in Guyana is projected to be massive at 47.5%. As I close here, I would like to support the \$552.9 billion Budget. It is the people's budget and it is for all Guyanese – 'One Guyana' – even for Hon. Members on the other side. I, thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, I notice that the signal is down again. Our next

contributor is the Hon. Member, Ms. Maureen Philadelphia. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Philadelphia: Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to *Budget 2022*, but I first want to thank the staff of the Ministry of Finance, who had worked tirelessly to ensure the completion of this Budget document. I say a special thank you because I recognise their value.

I want to look at a few comments made by Hon. Members of the other side. The Hon. Faizal Jafferally spoke of Guyana being the breadbasket of the Caribbean. I dare say, it was the PPP/C that destroyed that legacy built by the Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, the founder of the People National Congress (PNC) – a visionary – during their 23 years in Government, and carried this country to an impoverished state. In fact, they are referred to as the 'punish poor people party'. It was a Member of the PPP/C who once said that he wished there was an outbreak in Georgetown while Georgetown was being referred to as the garbage city.

The Hon. Kwame McCoy spoke of call centres being closed in Region 10, but I wish to remind the Hon. Member that it was the PPP/C Government that closed the Bertram Collins College. It was the PPP/C Government that withdrew support from night schools. It was the PPP/C that cut subventions from other institutions. Yes, it was the PPP/C. As a matter of fact, 30 community health workers were dismissed from Region 4. And they come here crying foul as if they are the innocent ones. Yes, look in the mirror.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture *took pains* to outline to us the communities that received flood relief, but what he did not disclose was the money received by one person of those communities as against others of the same community and other communities.

2.35 p.m.

I wonder if the criteria used to provide those flood relief are the same criteria used to provide quarter of a million to the sugar workers? The criteria then were care, compassion and love, which was said here. What is even more worrying, the Hon. Minister is responsible for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and he said little or nothing about that sector during his 30 minutes of deliberation. I am quite certain before the end of this year the Hon. Member will come once again asking for an increase for GuySuCo as was done in the previous years. I will not allow myself to be

burdened by the fallacies of those who seek to portray themselves as apostles and pastors. Dream on.

I now turn my attention to the Budget which was presented to this noble House by the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance on the 26th January, 2022. This Budget was presented under the theme, *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. I do believe it is not by accident this theme was chosen, but rather, it is the intent of the PPP/C to continue along the path of providing chicken feed and peanut to our working-class people in this country. The truth of the matter is that men and women in uniform, teachers, nurses, doctors, Sweeper/Cleaners, *et cetera*, waited anxiously to see what is in the Budget for them but, sad to say, an uncaring group of people once again shattered their hopes. The Budget has not only added frustration and depression to our nation, it further seeks to maintain the economic hardship and widen the gap between the super-rich and filthy poor

I tried to dissect phrases. I recognise the word steadfast, and I also realise it to be loyal, committed, devoted, dedicated and even dependable. What the Senior Minister and the installed PPP/C has said to the Guyanese people in this 2022 *Budget* is, 'hold a strain the worst is yet to come'; Hakuna Matata. Yes, Mr. Speaker, disrespectful and discriminatory to the working class of people in this country. Against all challenges, three budgets, one that speaks to 'economic dynamism', and another 'building our one Guyana'. In the rise of COVID-19, nothing to ease the economic hardship and other social issues brought to bear. In fact, all the PPP/C Government is concerned about is syphoning off the patrimony of this country to their friends and supporters, while the small man – yes, the real man – continues to see hopelessness and despair. Is this the oneness and 'One Guyana' of which we speak? Certainly not. Your attitude says the direct opposite. One would have taught that with the feedback after 18 months, this Budget would have been people centred.

The phrase 'One Guyana' is being used by all the Members of the other side. It is worrying to see how this 'One Guyana' is being realised when there is the continuing dictatorial and discriminatory practices of senior Government officials and their cronies being used to control every aspect, which lends itself to lifting all Guyanese out of poverty.

I now turn my attention to Region 4. The Hon. Member, Mr. Vinceroy Jordan, used a broad brush as he outlined to us what has happened in all the regions of Guyana. I will focus my attention on some specific issues. It is a travesty to see how the 'One Guyana' is demonstrated for this Region when the elected officials – elected by the people and for the people – were locked out of a process which determines what is in this budget for them. Let me tell you Sir, the Hon. Member, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall, the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development was warned in this very House to be mindful of the legacy he will leave behind and not to return this country to a green and red state. Tell you what, the same thing has continued.

I want to look at a term that was used some time back and coin it to modern-day language. You can take a pig out of the mud, dress him up in Gucci, drive it in a Lamborghini to the most exotic places, provide it with the most expensive meals and all of that. That pig will drive that vehicle down in the mud because that is what the pig is accustomed to. The pig will remain a pig. Whether you use lipstick or you use lip gloss it will remain a pig. That is the characteristic of pigs. I am not surprised by the actions portrayed for the Region and municipality that is not controlled by the PPP/C. These regions are being discriminated and marginalized against. It is ashamed to know the most populated Region is seen as insignificant to the people who are asking us to be resolute in building 'One Guyana'.

The offices of the Regional Chairman and the Mayor of Georgetown continue to be disrespected, even though they continuously ask to be allowed to do their jobs without interference. Worst, the Regional Chairman office of Region 4, the largest region, was provided with the least funding with this largest Budget that is being touted in an oil-booming economy. As a matter of fact, what was received by Region 4 is a decrease from last year and the other years. Added to that, \$3 million were given as subvention to the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). When the Coalition took Government in 2015 these subventions were increased from \$3 million to \$5 million. The management of that sum has now been taken away from the RDC and placed back into the hands of the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, who dictates how that money is to be spent. Is this how we promote 'One Guyana', when we want to manage and control things from the centre? I have listened to councillors of NDC's along the East Coast and East Bank corridor and stories given to you are the same. They said they cannot do what they have to do for the

citizens because they are controlled and confined to what the office of the Minister wants them to do. Those subventions were used for capital work, bridges, patching of roads and even the purchasing of machinery, tractor trailer, *et cetera*. Here we have that ‘daddy’ who is saying to the elected officials that they must purchase streetlights and or aggregate, and also dictates how much of that money is to be spent on what. As my Colleague Hon. Ganesh Mahipaul said, the light on my phone is brighter than those \$35,000 lights. I now turn my attention to the healthcare services.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you could turn your attention there, we would need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Philadelphia: I now turn my attention to healthcare services, Mr. Speaker. These services were boosted under the APNU/AFC. In the rise of COVID-19 we recognised that there are a couple of things that needed to be changed. I had visited with Ms. Tamara who had gone to the Paradise testing site to be tested. Ms. Tamara said to me that she reached there at 7.30, waiting on 9.30 for services to be provided to her. At 11.00 o’clock Ms. Tamara was still there waiting.

Because of time constraint – I only have five minutes at hand – I wish to point to another area. I stopped to grab a couple of bags of food for my dogs. There I interacted with the saleswoman who told me her name was Sunita. Ms. Sunita had three children there by her side. As the conversation ensued, I learnt that Ms. Sunita was also employed as a Sweeper/Cleaner. She said that as a single parent, in order to be able to send her children to school and adequately provide for them, she had to revert to alternative means of sustenance. This moved me, and I salute her with both hands; a strong woman, a mother who is willing to give her best to her children, in spite of the economic hardship being faced. I heard of the Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha’s rant and rave about dog food sellers. May I remind him, it was Ms. Sunita who said to me that she prefers to sell dog food rather than to be selling cocaine and her name goes down in the statistics of Guyana. As a matter of fact, she also said to me that she

applied for public assistance since January, 2021, and to date she has not received any feedback.

2.50 p.m.

Is this the ‘One Guyana’ that we talk about? As I conclude, I bring to you the real experiences faced by citizens of this land as a result of the economic hardship that was brought to bear. I say to you, because of this and other reasons, time did not permit me to give you all the facts I have here. So, I will not support this Budget, since it did not prepare and cater for the real issues and needs of the small man. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Our next speaker is the Hon. Member, Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy.

Ms. Veerasammy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, please allow me to congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, who delivered so eloquently *Budget 2022*. He described the PPP/C’s, vision for Guyana under the theme, *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. This Budget is entrenched in the PPP/C’s manifesto. It is a promise kept to the Guyanese people, notwithstanding who they are, where they are, or where they live. As we forge ahead to implement the transformational agenda outlined in *Budget 2022*, we know there will be many challenges but as a team, we are stronger together. We will stand resolute, and we will work to build our ‘One Guyana’ for every Guyanese. I would also like to recognise the hard work of the staff at the Ministry of Finance and the staff from all governmental agencies across Guyana, who are responsible for the preparation of their agencies’ budget estimates.

I must rebut a few half-truths, half-lies and misleading information that has been pedaled in this House in the last couple of days. It boggles one’s mind as to why intelligent people, who are elected officials in this country, who stand at the helm of 700,000 or 800,000 other people who look up to them, would come here and tell these people that they are representing them but in order for them to do that, they must lie, they must spin the truth and they must weave this concoction of...

Mr. Speaker: Did I hear, lie earlier? You have to withdraw that.

Ms. Veerasammy: The concoction of the truth in our society is something that we ought not to do as legislators. We are people who, when we walk in our communities, people look up to us. They look to us for leadership. When one does not read the budget presentation that was given to us in this beautifully prepared documentation, one cannot blame oneself for ignorance. If one reads the budget, one will see that there are to be six new-brand hospitals built across this country. Who do you think the six hospitals are going to serve? It is going to serve the ordinary, man, woman, and child. It is going to serve the young, the old, and in between. It is going to provide healthcare for all of us so that we do not have to run to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) to seek medical help. How can we stand or sit in this House and forget that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change Government in 2015–2020 rented a house and paid \$12.5 million? When the time came it was proven that not a single tablet was stored in that house. Check the amount of money. It could have probably refurbished or built a few health centres around the country.

The COVID-19 cash grant was given to every household in this country, yet a legislator came here, spun the truth, and produced a list that there are people who did not get the COVID-19 cash grant. What was the list doing in her hands and why was this list not given to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance so that it could have been fixed in a timely manner? Where is the truth in that? Where is the representation in that? That particular Member of Parliament (MP) should not be in this House because he/she did not represent the people that he/she is supposed to represent. The Member spun this to make it look like it is a racial thing – only one kind of people are getting certain benefits than the other. Then you have the right to go and tell your people that all the benefits to come out from this Budget let them, your supporters, not take any.

We sat here so many times and we heard about how much Linden has been left aside and discarded. Sir, I am surprised because if they had loved the Linden people so much, then they would have not allowed the Russian Aluminum Incorporated (RUSAL) to close its doors and thousands of workers to be thrown on the breadline. They would have not closed the call centres and they would have not thrown about 400 persons out of their jobs. We love the people in Linden much more and we will continue to work with them. The people in Linden are going to vote for us more and more come 2025.

This budget was labelled with so many names, and not one of them is a name that I want to repeat. I want to say that for four years I was an MP, a legislator sitting in this National Assembly. From 2016 downwards, I sat and listened to Mr. Winston Jordan, the then Minister of Finance present budgets. Do you know what was the most important thing that was missing from the budgets? It was women. Fifty percent and over of this population in Guyana are women, and there was nothing in those budgets for them. We called him out many times on it. I declare today that the People's Progressive Party/Civic is in the driver's seat of this Government, and it will take this country to prosperity. We promised that in our manifesto. People have the audacity to come into this House after trying to rig an election in front of local and international televisions. In front of local and international television, they tried to rig an election and install a dictator. Mr. Speaker, there is a democracy that is here, and it is going to stay here. The people of this country are going to work very hard to make sure that dictatorship is never going to take hold of the reigns of this country. I would like to quote from the Hon. Minister. This is what he said:

“Budget 2022 is the third budget that this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government is submitting to this Honourable House in our current term of office. It comes to this House a mere eighteen months since the culmination of that epic struggle to defend democracy that was waged for five months following the unforgettable March 2020 elections. History now records it indelibly that that struggle secured the triumph of democracy over dictatorship and safeguarded the supremacy of the will of the People.

Over the eighteen months that have elapsed since democracy prevailed, pessimism has been replaced with optimism. Lethargy has made way for energy, superficiality has made way for substance, and pomp and pageantry have made way for humility and hard work.”

That is what the 33 people who are sitting here represent – humility and hard work. Guyanese people are intelligent. They can only be fooled some of the time, not all the time. Guyanese people realised that the APNU/AFC's promises of a ‘good life’ between 2015 and 2020 were a fallacy. Can you remember that in the Coalition's 2018 Budget the Minister of Finance, after promising a ‘good life’ in all his previous

budgets' told this House that he never said that the APNU/AFC will deliver the 'good life' in the first five years in Government? Mr. Speaker, that was a good lie, not a promise of a 'good life'.

Budget 2022 heralds in a new era. The era of oil and gas. It is a pathway for development and expansion. It is a pathway through which the plans and projections would transform Guyana beyond our imaginations and, more importantly, no taxes were imposed on the Guyanese people. Records show that the Coalition increased the salaries of public servants during its tenure. This was welcomed by all, but the more than 200 taxes and fees that were imposed on Guyanese took back those increases in a very sneaky manner. In reality, Guyanese were poorer. Sir, can you remember the 14% value-added tax (VAT) imposed on all zero-rated items such as stationery, school items, drugs, medical supplies, electricity, water, internet, and food? Food – when I think about the VAT on food, I am catapulted right back into the 1980s when there was no food on the tables of people. This was when the police came and took one's pot away when one cooked potato curry because one had a wedding. That is what they want to happen here again. It will never happen. No one was spared. Mothers paid 14% VAT on milk for their babies and school supplies for their children. Worse than that, Guyanese had to pay 14% VAT on drugs and medical supplies because they dared to get sick. Sir, can you imagine if we did not remove VAT from medical supplies in this COVID-19 environment in which we live...? The PPP/C is its 2020 and 2021 Budgets restored taxes and fees to their pre-2015 levels. Those Budgets returned more than \$50 billion in disposable income to the pockets of people. The 2022 Budget continues in the same vein.

In 2021, because we care, the PPP/C gave a one-off cash grant of \$250,000 to sugar workers who were callously discarded from their jobs like old rags by the APNU/AFC. Everybody is groaning about that \$250,000. I would like to say this, that for hundreds of years Guyanese – the economy of Guyana – stood on the back of sugar. If we as taxpayers can reimburse some of that money into sugar to make it once again a viable entity, then I do not see the problem with that. We all listened to the responses of sugar workers and their families. Did the APNU/AFC hear of their untold economic suffering and how they could not have sent their children to school? Did they ever look backward to see how the men were emasculated when they could not provide their families with money, clothing, rent, medical supplies, or any other thing? Did they do that, Sir? Of course not. All workers

across the Government structures received their 7% increases in salaries, retroactive to January, 2021.

3.05 p.m.

Further, the tax threshold increased from \$65,000 to \$75,000. The month of December, 2021, workers got an increase but one is not hearing them saying anything that with the threshold the workers also got an increase in their wages. Those taxes are now left in their pockets. When the People's Progressive Party/Civic make a promise, believe me, we will fulfil it. We will not stand here and promise the people a good life; we will work 24/7 to ensure that the people get a good life. That is what we will do.

I would like to congratulate the Ministers of the Ministry of Housing and Water for achieving the PPP/C manifesto target of 10,000 house lots in 2021. Many of those persons are busy applying for bank loans to build their dream home. I come from a family of construction people and I will tell you what they said to me, they said that it takes a minimum of five persons to build a house – three skilled workers and two labours. Sir, I do not have to go far to do mathematics, I learned this in Prep A and Prep B. If I were to multiply 10,000 by five, the PPP/C already achieved its 50,000 jobs for 2022. They already did that and that is simple mathematics – multiplication.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, however, the simple mathematics is that you will need an extension to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Veerasammy: Thank you, Sir. It is because we care, the PPP/C will fulfil its promises of the 50,000 house lots in the next three and a half years. All aspiring homeowners will be given a house lot. When we speak about our country and its infrastructure, I can imagine that. When I go overseas, I look at places and admire them, then I always look backward and say, why can my country not look like that? Now, I have a vision in my mind of what my Guyana is going to look like in the near future. Building roads and bridges will not only improve communication between and among hinterland and coastland communities; they will beautify our country; they will save time and time is money. This investment will also create more jobs for people. Jobs created will put moneys in

the pockets of our people. Again, we would achieve more than those 50,000 jobs that we have promised our people.

Budget 2022 has a hefty sum allocated to the Ministry of Education. Every single parent I have spoken to so far which includes APNU/AFC supporters welcome the increase in the Because We Care cash grant and school uniform voucher which is now going to be \$30,000 per child. Parents welcome the support of the textbooks in schools for their children; parents further welcome the proposal of the School Feeding Programme. When moneys are not spent by families to buy books and so forth, mother have more disposable income on hands to buy essentials for their families.

The section of our population that is most vulnerable is our elders. They give us life; they worked hard; they educated us; and they made us into the people we are. They do not need much from us. They just need us to pay attention to them and offer them love some time. My Colleagues, on the opposite side, in the past few days made all sorts of representations for our elders and their needs. I would like the pension of our elders to increase too but what happened to APNU/AFC in their five years of tenure? This is what they did and this is what I would like to remind the House. They callously took away the water and electricity subsidies from our elders. They forced our elders to pay 14% VAT on that water and electricity on top of everything. They imposed 14% VAT on the internet. Many of our elders are internet savvy and they know to use the internet because they use the social media to keep contact with friends and families. They were robbed of this. Could you remember that 14% VAT was also imposed on medicine and medical supplies for our elders and people who use more medication than anyone else? They went and put VAT on those medication, yet they come here and talk about elders. The People's Progressive Party/Civic has removed that 14% VAT on almost all of those things I spoke about. Do not forget that we give the elders \$25,000 for their Christmas – a one-off cash grant.

I would like to say that I am very pleased with the projection in our healthcare system. Giving \$600,000 to people who are on dialysis, that is an ace. I want to commend the Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance Within the Office of the President and I want to commend the PPP/C Government for keeping the people at heart with everything they do. The PPP/C Government is known to remove hurdles from the path of women and girls. Since 1992, we have been doing it. We have passed some of the most modern legislations; we even changed the Constitution of Guyana in

2001 to make sure that women can enter this National Assembly. Now, 1/3rd of the candidates on any list that contests the elections are women.

Before I close, I must touch on the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship. There was a time when we had to go to Guyana National Service (GNS) before we could get a tertiary education. Today, the PPP/C Government made it possible that a girl child can sit in the luxury of her home and be educated because internet is available. That is what the People's Progressive Party/Civic is all about. I commend this Budget for approval by this House. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I now call on Dr. Nicolette Henry to make her presentation and again to apologise to her for the announcement prior to the suspension.

Dr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your leave, I am pleased to fulfil my sacred duty as a Member of this honourable House in making my contribution to the 2022 Budget Debate. I pray for the day when our women and girls can be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. I refuse to be silenced. I begin my presentation, of course, by thanking the many public servants and other stakeholders who contributed to putting this Budget together. I continue to give thanks to almighty God for this beautiful gift of life, for health, strength and the opportunity to serve the people of Guyana.

In my presentation, today, I will touch on the programmes and initiatives in the education sector being advanced by the Government of Guyana. I will propose the Coalition's recommendations on how these can be adopted to better deliver to the needs of all our learners thereby improving performance across all levels. Most notably absent in this year's Budget is the mention of any specific intervention to address the learning losses brought on by the pandemic. I do not know anyone who would agree that the disruption to the education system occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic has created learning gaps that absolutely need to be bridged. Unprecedented times call for unprecedented solutions. The routine of the past that is captured in the 2022 Budget is unlikely to be adequate. I have to say that a structured thoughtful approach to covering this content and providing interventions and remediations will help our students to catch up. I believe carefully managing resources will also help to fuel that effort.

In looking at *Budget 2022*, I noticed headlines such as: ‘Improved School Building Infrastructure, Improving Access through Cash Grants, textbook, science kits, *et cetera*’. These are routine measures which are important and which we are important here in Guyana but which, by themselves, cannot provide the transformational shifts required to rebound the sector especially during and after the pandemic. From the numerous analyses done locally and beyond, a number of areas were identified as requiring interventions in order for Guyana to have an effective human capital development effort that will transform the nation’s knowledgebase; skillsets; and attitudes, particularly, among youth population.

The history of the education sector suggests that the identified weaknesses in key academic areas such as English, Mathematics and Science, unprepared sector staff, inadequate infrastructure and equipment can be remedied by time and money, given the countervailing strengths and opportunities. By the same token, history suggests that mere time and money will not remove or even reduce the threats such as inherent inefficiency and ineffectiveness. There are also diverse distractions that may lead to dispersions of positive energy and the other challenges that have stymied progress, and all of which are more likely to be effectively addressed through significant behavioural change in diverse groups.

Effecting significant behavioural change in education will require re-orientation, retraining, attitudinal shifts, shifts in perceptions, public education, socio-political dialogue, and discussion accommodation and acceptance of diversity in thinking and doing. Effecting such change would require even more time and funds and would not be a purely linear technical process, with relative predictable inputs and outputs relationships. Additionally, several of the non-school based interventions which also have to be implemented to allow for more holistic approach, I am on record to say and I repeat again, that the people of this country have every right to believe in a better life as we proceed to develop our nation from year-to-year and from administration to administration.

Along the way of this journey, there have been and will always be highs and lows, twists and turns, but that is life. It is how we respond as a country that will determine the efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness of the leadership, which is brought to bear on our circumstances, whatever they may be.

3.20 p.m.

I am saying today that special emphasis must be placed on our most vulnerable children and we must take every opportunity afforded to reach those further behind first. I will deal with that more aptly later in my presentation. I have to say that the Coalition is proud of its record in the education sector and I stand here, today, to defend that. School attendants and school performance improved as a result of initiatives such as the Public Education and Transportation System (PETS), which was aimed at combatting high truancy and drop out rates by providing boats, buses and bicycles. There was also the public education nutrition service, which we called here the School Feeding Programme that provides breakfast to our children.

We must leverage the gains we have made as a country. We cannot rest and we should not rest, as a nation, until every child’s need is addressed and every child’s potential is fulfilled. The Coalition’s Decade of Development Plan for education adumbrated the need to transform the education sector into a vibrant, viable 21st century, ready and able to support national development and to afford the opportunity of every Guyanese to benefit from an education of the highest quality. Some of the policy shifts, as they currently are, will not allow us to realise these aspirations. I have to draw the attention to the information such as the InterAmerican Development Bank (IDB) Report, which highlights that although enrolment at the primary and secondary level continues to be relatively high, the quality of schooling varies as our children’s performance at the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) is below the Caribbean’s average. Similarly, we must not dismiss or take lightly the World Bank’s concern that due to the pandemic, student engagement has been lowered in Guyana, leading to concerns of learning losses. It is further projected that these losses and dropout rates will have great implications for the accumulation of human capital in countries.

In light of this projection, the education sector should outline in its 2022 programme, the strategic interventions that can avert the great implications. Central to such an intervention to be a national human capital development scheme, the Coalition is proposing that this national human capital development scheme addresses a key strategic aspiration that must be achieved if Guyana is to remain viable, even after the oil and gas era and, more importantly, if Guyanese are to be competitive in and outside of Guyana. A national human capital development scheme is a public good that generates

significant returns at individual household communities and national levels. The proposed national human capital development scheme is intended to fast track the recapitalisation of our human capital base, which in turn fuels public education. This has two critical dimensions – speed and reach – both of which will anticipate and address national demand for post-secondary expertise. Thus, the national human capital development scheme would, one: move 100% of our children through all stages of basic education.

Secondly, it will ensure that 100% of children earn a terminal secondary credential, whether it be the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), Guyana Certificate of Education (GCE) or whatever it is equivalent.

Thirdly, it will move 100 secondary school graduates through some form of post-secondary education, whether academic, professional, technical or vocational.

Fourthly, it will move 90% of holders of bachelors' degrees to some form of postgraduate or specialised academic professional or technical education, including terminal professional degrees.

Fifthly, it would move 80% of graduate holders of masters' degrees to doctoral degrees and it should ensure all public servants or a specified number of ours continues education for the green period.

Finally, if we look at numbers three, four and five, which together are essential to maintain, sustain and enhance the education and training of Guyanese, they are not standalone interventions, and they should intersect and interact with all other initiatives.

While there is no mention in the Budget to indicate how the licencing of teachers will be operationalised, it is something that is publicised by the Ministry of Education to be undertaken in 2022 and, of course, it is one of the recommendations that came out of the education Commission of Inquiry (CoI) by the Coalition. In this regard, the Coalition proposes that a national evaluation licensing and certification system be established, as the proposed national evaluation, licencing and certification system will provide the platform and means to support professional associations, established standards and mechanisms for evaluation, licensing and certification in line with international standards, and best practices. This will also

allow for better stakeholders' engagement and knowledge management that will be integral to operationalising the plan. It will enhance professionalism across the productive sector and support professionals in remaining current in their professional. The national evaluation licencing and certification system can also provide support for the review and audit of standards and procedures for self-evaluations and preparation for accreditation. I trust that we will get a better understanding of this important initiative when the subject Minister delivers her presentation. I am calling on the Government that given Guyana's new economic realities and the fact that they are still dense but significant pockets of this population who cannot afford to support their families' education, I can tell you it will take more than cash transfers to improve access to quality education.

In 2022, this Coalition is calling on the Government to relook at its programme and ensure more targeted interventions are included as we understand the benefits of the public education transportation services and public education nutrition services that provided our children with breakfast. We understand that these have far reaching effects and they are also evidence base. According to the United Nations (UN), there is evidence to show that public education and nutrition service programmes enhance enrolment in schools and better educational outcomes. I wish to add that increased educational achievement will improve students' potential future of productivity and earnings, all of which are important to a good life.

Let us remind Members in this honourable House that it was the Coalition, in 2018, for the first time in over a decade reintroduced training of all teachers in Region 8. I listened then to my Colleague, who is now the Minister of Education on the other side of the House, saying that seven per cent of trained teachers would not help us. Today, that Hon. Member is singing a different tune because she is in a different seat. I have to say that the literature is replete with evidence of the benefits of having trained teachers in classrooms. This measure will not only help us but would also ensure that all of our regions throughout the length and breadth of Guyana are reached. I am happy to see that this measure to widen the breadth and scope of teachers training is still on the cards. Our collective efforts should always be to put the people first.

I realise, perhaps more than many others, that transforming the education system will not be easy and that we are likely to encounter a lot of challenges along the way. I had a lot of

fixing to do, as a Minister and a Member of the Coalition. We had to make things more appropriate; we had to ensure that they reach acceptable standards, such as we know the fixing of the Kato Secondary School. Let me say to the people of this country and, I wish to repeat, when one lives in Lethem or Linden, Babu John or Cove and John, all benefitted from the Coalition's holistic plan in education. Transforming the education system is a necessary journey that we all have to take as one people, one nation, with one destiny. There must be continuity for maximum efficacy.

It was during the Coalition's term in Office, for the first time in over a decade, we conducted a condition survey of all our schools across this country and we used that data for maintenance and infrastructural works to be undertaken by the Ministry of Education. We need another survey in keeping with international best practices for a high performing education system. The Ministry of Education needs to continue to prioritise special education needs, as numerous children in this country were needlessly enduring the horror of academic underperformance due to that lack of appropriate cognitive social and emotional support, care and treatment options. The evidence is saying to us that these conditions are treatable and perhaps preventable. With early diagnosis and treatment, we need to pay attention to that cohort of students.

It is for that reason in 2018 that the Coalition, under my stewardship, outfitted the newly constructed Special Education Needs Diagnostic and Assimilation Centre at Turkeyen with appropriate equipment and furnishing. Too much too long because of the absence of a specific diagnostic and assimilation facility, many of our children were left to develop into full-blown conditions at a tremendous personal cost and at a society loss in later years. The education sector must go into every community and reach those students requiring special education needs because they were put at a further disadvantage due to the pandemic.

As I have always posited, another strategic and operational shift is required to achieve division of first-class education in Guyana is the strengthening of the technical and vocational education, particularly, in our hinterland regions. That is why, in 2018, the Coalition initiated construction of technical and vocational education and training hubs at Bina Hill, Mahdia, Lethem and Mabaruma to bridge the gap between hinterland and coastland while enhancing hinterland access to post-secondary education opportunities. Speaking

of post-secondary opportunities, the modernisation of the University of Guyana (UG) must continue to be a priority for this country. I have to say here that when we came into Government, as a Coalition, even the University of Guyana's most ardent supporters had admitted that the University was in danger of stagnation.

3.35 *p.m.*

To bring a sense of pride and augustness to this institution, we have, among other things, accomplished in 2017 the regional accreditation of the medical school and this is long overdue. We will, on this side of the House, continue to advocate for alignment along the entire education value chain as we harness our resources. As I seek to wind up my presentation, please allow me to quote one of the world's greatest political icon of this 21st century. It would be the great Nelson Mandela who said:

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

There is a lot of work to be done, in the education sector, with the sole purpose of making a difference in the lives of the people in this country. The people in this country are looking at you and they are counting on us. As a responsible Government, it is your duty to make the difficult strategic decisions and we, as a country, will have to continue to find innovative solutions to close the gaps and reduce disparities in education.

For us, on this side of the House, every child matters and it is for that reason that we have, among other things, provided direct and targeted services. Again, I will refer to the boats, the buses and the bicycles that were provided to some of our most disadvantaged communities, such as the Pomeroun, Baracara, River View, Bartica and Moraikobai where our children are at greatest risk of being left behind. I still remember vividly, the example I shared as a Minister of that child in Baracara whose parent under the Coalition was saving \$5,000 a week in transportation cost by travelling daily to and from school in a 'David G boat' and who after benefiting also from breakfast, at a cost of approximately a thousand dollar a day. When you looked at the total, it represented more than \$40,000 a month. Call it what you may it is a measure and it is measures such as these that will mitigate against perpetual intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

As a sector, education needs to seriously address the structural determinants of inequality which, includes poverty, deficient policies and inefficient delivery of systems that prevent our children from realising their full potential.

As I conclude my presentation, Mr. Speaker, allow me to place on record a few thank yous. In light that this is my final budget presentation in this honourable House. Of course, I begin by thanking none other than His Excellency, the former President, Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger, who reposed in me the confidence in this honourable House. I am forever grateful to the people of this country who afforded me the opportunity to serve them with professionalism, dignity and accountability. I thank the Coalition partners Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan for their unwavering support and guidance. I thank the former Leader of the Opposition, My Friend and Colleague, the Hon. Member, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Joseph Harmon, for his unwavering support. I thank each and every Member in this honourable House, for the commitment and dedication they bring each and every day sometimes under the most difficult of circumstances. I thank my family who have always held my back and who have supported every decision I have made. Today, it is with those words that I part company and I conclude my contribution to *Budget 2022*. I thank you. [*Applause.*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. On my own behalf and on behalf of everyone, we, thank you for the service you have provided to this Parliament and to this nation. Thank you very very much. Hon. Minister of Education Ms. Priya Manickchand.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Your Honour, I want to begin by thanking the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, for crafting and presenting this Budget. Dr. Ashni Singh was coveted by international financial institutions across this world. His service was sought out. He went and he served as a citizen of the world. We are very happy to have him back here with his expertise and we see how that expertise unfolds in this Budget titled: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*.

We are all Members of this House and we are expected to come here with some level of dedication, knowledge and commitment, but simply being in here does not entitle us to claim those qualities. We must serve as such. Just now, I have failed to hear in this entire debate, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when education around the world has

been the most topical just beneath health issue, any sensible debate. We are in the House and we are expected to come here. We have different policies, ideologies and we debate them. We are diametrically opposed from APNU/AFC or People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) or whatever they are styling themselves as now, on particular issues. They are a party who believe in taxing the nation into prosperity, so they applied 200 taxes. They have to defend that and own it. That is what you are here for. We are a Party who believes that we can bring goodness to the people of this country without taxing the ordinary man, so we removed the 200 taxes that you placed on the backs of Guyanese, that cost the people of this country \$60 billion. Last year, the measures that the President and Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance announced, we saved the people of this country \$65 billion.

The APNU/AFC does not philosophically believe in cash grants. Come here, own it and defend it. There is no debate around issues like that. There were a lot of *ad hominem* attacks like which Hon. Members they do not like, whose hairstyle they do not like, whose lipstick does not match who, whose weave does not match the other; that sorts of thing are useless, senseless and heavily beneath the calibre that is expected of this House especially, in this hard time, when we must all climb out of the consequences of COVID-19 together or perish together.

The APNU/AFC does not believe in the opening of schools. You heard it here; close down the schools. The gentleman and the Hon. Member, Mr. Sears, said yesterday that it is so hard for children in the hinterland whose parents are already not as highly educated to do online learning. Then, we heard from the Hon. Member, today, that we must close all the schools – close them.

The APNU/AFC philosophically appears not to believe in the vaccination of the population. I am going to say 'in the vaccination of the population' and not 'in vaccination' because they all went and took it. Clearly, they believe in vaccination. They have done everything they can to discourage parents and children from taking the vaccines. That is a philosophical difference from what we have. We believe vaccines work and we believe that we should spend every moment in this time encouraging people and administering vaccines. We have philosophical and ideological differences in this House that should be debated. If there is a position, come here, defend it and do not waffle. I have not heard anything in that regard.

We believe in the Ministry of Education that this Budget theme was made for us: ‘Steadfast Against All Challenges’. There has never been a time in the history of this world that the education sector, the livelihood of children and the survival of children have been more challenged than at this present moment. If we do not take decisive action, it is going to prolong into the rest of their life. When we came into Office, in 2020, the Hon. Member, who has dishonourably left her seat just after she had spoken and breaching a parliamentary practice and which all the Hon. Members over there have been doing repeatedly in this last week, came here and spoke about all these high ideals about what should happen and what should not happen. The Hon. Member was occupying the chair of the Minister of Education and the people and children of this country depended on her for five months. There was not a single intervention from the APNU/AFC when they closed schools to look after the rigged attempt – not a single intervention.

We closed schools here in March, 2020, like most countries around the world. At that time 109 countries had endured countrywide school closures. By September, 2020, just after the Hon. Member left Office, only 40 countries around the world were still under countrywide closure. By November, 2020, 30 countries had countrywide closures. Guyana was not one of those countries. We had partially opened schools. By June, 2021, 22 countries had full closure. By September, 2021, 22 countries more had closures. By November, 2021, eight countries in the world had their entire school population closed. By January, 2022, three countries in the world remain closed with their school doors closed. This backward APNU/AFC, without any care for the children, come here and cry, want us to close the schools. Why? Tell me why when the good teachers of this country are going to school and teaching the children? The APNU/AFC themselves have admitted, that our internet infrastructure does not allow for children to get the full benefit of online classes. Our reopening has been very consistent with how the world behaved during this pandemic. We, on 9th November, 2020, partially opened for the higher grades. Then, by June, 2021, we opened for grade six. Then, by September, 2021, we opened for everybody but on a rotational basis. By 3rd January, 2022, we opened from grade eight to grade 11 because we had offered the vaccine to all of our high schoolchildren. We had to be resolute. We had to close our minds to the noise and do what was best for our children.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what was the APNU/AFC’s position? Up to two weeks ago, it issued a statement stating to close all the schools and that was its response to COVID19. On 24th January, an article appeared on the internet and I did a copy for all of the Members in the House. It is titled *100 weeks into the pandemic: the importance of keeping schools open and investing in learning recovery programs*. It was written by Stefania Giannini, Robert Jenkins and Jamie Saavedra:

“We are heading toward the 100th week of education disruption around the world. On average, each country has experienced 20 weeks of full school closures, plus another 20 weeks of partial closures. School children have lost an estimated 2 trillion hours – and counting – of in-person instruction since the onset of the COVID-19...”

“More than half of ten-year-olds in low-and middle-income countries were unable to read or understand a simple story.”

“Real data confirms that students have incurred substantial learning losses during the pandemic, in countries from all income groups. The recent World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO report *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery* compiles studies on learning loss from 28 countries. The report shows that school closures affected girls, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, those living in rural areas, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities more than their peers. The youngest learners were often left behind in remote learning initiatives, as were children experiencing dire humanitarian crises prior to the pandemic.”

“The staggering effects of school closures reach beyond learning. This generation of children could lose a combined total of \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings in present value – a sharp rise from the 2020 estimate of a \$10 trillion loss.”

“The costs of closing schools outweigh the risks of keeping schools open. Evidence suggests that with strategies to minimize transmission in place, schools are not a driver of community transmission, nor are they high-risk environments for staff. Mitigation measures like improved ventilation,

physical distancing and mask-wearing when appropriate can help reduce transmission in schools.”

The report went on to strongly recommend that countries invest in learning recovery. It stated:

“Collectively, we need to make education and learning a political priority. We must reopen schools, keep them open and support learning recovery. We cannot afford to lose this generation of kids. Our future depends on it.”

All children back to school, recovering learning losses, preparing, and supporting teachers. This article came in anticipation of the International Day of Education on 24th January, where the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank co-hosted the webinar mission: Recovering Education - What is needed to avoid losing a generation. We do not need to rely on international data. For all the persons who are asking for schools to keep close... Right here in Guyana, in 2020, 11,944 children registered to write the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and 494 were absent. In 2021, out of 9823, 553 were absent; one is risking losing these children forever. The highest number the Ministry recorded was more than 70 children pregnant. A particular secondary school reported yesterday, that while its grade 10 has 130 students registered on roll, five have registered for Caribbean Examinations Council (CSEC). When a person comes here with his/her wild and politically motivated calls to close the schools, I want the person to understand that he/she is harming and hurting the children of this nation. A person could do that if he/she wants, but we will not let that person. We are standing here for the children of Guyana, and we will stand in front of that person’s harm and protect them from it. Any other affiliate or acolyte he/she brings to represent that position, is backward, useless and cannot serve the people of this country.

What was our response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) closures and the learning losses? How are we investing through this budget in the learning recovery because that is what we are doing? When the Hon. Member stood there, it was very hard to be harsh with her, given that her own party is not being very kind to her right now. When the Hon. Member stood there and said she wants a plan... The plan has been defined and outlined in many different documents,

but I will say this, under the Hon. Member’s tenureship/ministership, that is the first time since 1993, that this country went without a published education sector plan. We published it last year, five years after it was out and five years after it could not do it. No COVID-19, no floods, and even prior to its hurried attempt to rig an election, it still could not get it done.

How are we investing in learning recovery? In the article that everybody is going to get on their desk, one would see that we are way ahead of the game. One of the things it recommended is that we consolidate the curriculum, shave off things that we do not need and keep the things needed for the appropriate level. This country, Guyana, engaged international experts and our local experts, and we have already done that. What we have to make sure it happens and it is being implemented in the schools. We have trained more than 1200 teachers without oil money to implement that consolidated curriculum. We bought textbooks and one would see in the report it states to give as much resources to children. For the first time in the history of Guyana, the Grade six children had all the textbooks they needed in 2021, and in 2022, all primary students will have all the textbooks they need, because this budget is providing money for us to buy that, as well as for most of the secondary population.

We wrote our own Reader series. I was on the floor of this House begging on behalf of the nation, for the Reader series be completed. We started it in 2015, and we published Readers one, two and three by 2015, however 18 months later the Hon. Member and her Coalition decided that was not important. It dropped the entire publication, replaced it with nothing, and come here now all loftily to tell us what we must do for our children. One cannot come here and talk service; one has to perform, children must feel the service, and they will through this budget because we will give them their textbooks, and that is an investment in the learning recovery. We bought two textbooks from a local author called Johnathan Benn. He wrote two books that only private school children were getting, *Social Studies Made Easy* and *Science Made Easy*. We bought the rights from him and gave it to all our public-school children.

In this budget, we are investing in 11,000 devices, 11,000 tablets and flash drives. It was rather disappointing to hear two Members from the hinterland come to say, do not bother to buy it because they do not have electricity there. That is so backward and selfish, while you sit down with your parliamentary approved tablets in your laps. We do not have

to wait until all the conditions are right. In any event, before the end of 2022, all primary and nursery schools across this country will be connected with electricity and the learning channel, as well as cable to be able to access that channel, so electricity will not be a problem. We are investing in learning recovery by expanding the learning channel. In the article that Members have on their desks, one of the things it strongly suggest should happen is extra tuition and extra hours or what we call lessons. The PPP/C Government of Guyana and this budget is preparing itself to give the entire school population lessons through the learning channel and the radio. When a person come here and say he/she do not know how this budget is going to help with learning loss... There is no line item named learning loss. It is the policies and programmes we have put in place that would fund the recovery of the children in this country.

School feeding is an investment in the recovery of learning loss. I heard the Hon. Member said that she is very proud of her record, and I really want to remind her of what is that record. The other Hon. Member who began by saying David Arthur Granger had won the elections, thereby discrediting everything else she said, but let us repeat what she said. She said that the 5 B's programme was far more superior to any cash grant. The Hon. Member who just spoke said \$40,000 it was saving somebody from Baracara every month. When we came into office, there were 12 buses under the Granger's 5 B's initiative. The student population in this country is close to 200,000. At one point before the buses broke down it was 21 buses. At the best of the highest point of its 5 B's programme, it had 21 buses to fetch the children of this country and it thinks that was a superior programme. Here is the thing, we are not stopping the bus programme, in fact, we are reinvesting in the bus programme. For example, Region 7 is getting a brand new 36-seater. We are keeping that programme and we are still giving the cash grant. That is how much we love children.

Let us talk about this equitable distribution and how everybody receives the school feeding, because one would recall that we were told in 2016, the cash grant was being abolished, so that it could go into school feeding because it was replacing the cash grant. Members heard the Hon. Member just now, who was very lyrical, that it was from Lethem to Linden, from Babu John to Cove and John, however Babu John never got anything. Three schools in Region 6, benefited from the breakfast programme. It was the same region whose parents the Opposition threw out of work. Do you know how many benefited in Linden? Zero

benefitted from the programme because it did not start the programme in Linden. Do you know how many benefited in Region 2? Zero benefited from the programme because it never started the programme in Region 2. Do you know how many benefited in Region 5? Six schools benefited in Region 5. Do you know how many benefited on the East Bank? Zero/None/Naught school benefitted on the East Bank.

This year, while we give the cash grant, we are also expanding the school feeding programme and \$2 billion is being invested in that. When a member come here with his/her lofty ideas about how he/she is proud of its school feeding record, he/she should hang his/her head in sorrow for what was done to this country's children.

4.05 p.m.

In 2017, this Ministry of Education returned \$2 billion to the Consolidated Fund. It could not have spent it. Out of that time they were doing all kinds of doctorates, scholarships, and everything else but the peoples work. That \$2 billion could have done the cash grant and more. We come to the cash grant, as we are talking about it. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change has had all sorts of not personal conviction because everybody in here who was entitled, collected. If one strongly feels the cash grant is a bad investment, then do not take it. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] How did you poke into the line to get it first?

We have heard the complaints that the cash grant was given to East Indians only because as one knows the race talk got to happen for it to be legitimate. That was debunked when every other race knew that they came there— we did not ask them, and we did not even look at them when we were signing up them — we gave them. The people debunked that for the Opposition. The cash grant was given only to the People's Progressive Party/Civic supporters. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] There is no way you could support that.

The crowds gathered and they should not have gathered. Parents did not use the money on their children. This one really bothers me. It is like a deadbeat dad. Any lawyer here who went to court looking out for mothers would know. They go to court, and do you know what they say — we do not want to give her money for our children because she will spend it on her hair and nails. Men, your eyes pass women. All of you over there who do not want the people to get their cash grant but want us to give vouchers are like the deadbeat dads. The Opposition cannot look after this country's

children, and it should never be given the responsibility to look after the country's children. The people will make sure that the Opposition never have the power again until it reforms itself, which it does not seem like it plans to do, to even sniff an opportunity to look after them again.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, please refer to the Hon. Members as Comrades or Hon. Members. I was wondering if one included the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly in 'all of you over there'.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I think all the Members here have legitimately attached to their seats the word 'Honourable'. I see a lot of people using it for their personal name, but you are an Hon Member of Parliament (MP). You have to earn being an honourable John Doe. I will say without reservation that whenever I fail to say honourable, please attach it for me.

Yesterday, Gordon Mosely who is a very popular Facebook news person, ran a poll where he asked how many persons would like the cash grant in a voucher, like the deadbeat Politicians are suggesting, and how many want cash? Four hundred and twenty-seven persons said they want cash and 60 said they want vouchers. Of the 60, I will be happy to see how many of them actually have children and how many of them are deadbeat dads. We listen to people. Before we implemented this programme in 2014, we travelled this country and there are archived photographs and news reports about it. We asked the people how they wanted this, if they wanted us to give it to them through the banks or do, they want it in vouchers like the uniform grant or do you want it on a card? What is the name of it, a Debit Card? Persons said 'no, give me my cash'.

There are different ways and different things I could buy to look after my children. Most of the people – entire families benefitted from this. It was the mothers who turned up to pick this up. If the Opposition is going to suggest that mothers do not know how to spend money on their children, then we are going to stand in its way when it tries to insult them further. One cannot do that.

When the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan stands here and suggests that there is massive corruption, he must tell us how? We got the register from the school, which is a legal document that has to be collected in a certain way every day. The Headteacher had to check; the education department had to check it; the parent had to come with an Identification Card (ID) or a Power of Attorney or an authorisation and

signed as collected. Where is the massive corruption? If you are going to claim corruption, please know it is not me. I did not give a single dollar. I arranged it and the Government made sure that it was in the budget. It was people like Mr. Dineshwar Jaiprashad, the Hon. Member of Parliament that spent days of his life– while you were *lawled* off in front of a television– sharing out this cash grant to parents who needed it.

One would remember the APNU/AFC through one of its affiliates calling on teachers not to turn up to share out this grant and that the teachers must not handle money. Do you know what the teachers did? If there are people in this country who know how that cash grant could benefit children, it is the teachers of this country. The teachers turned up in defiance of that open call. If the question is that we should put it on a website, then that is a fair question but do not come here to get some sexiness and some headlines and claim corruption because you are accusing the people behind me who spent their whole lives trying to serve you, and did a better job than you did when you were in Office, Hon. Member.

We are not opposed to putting all the names of recipients on a website. We have to make sure parents are comfortable with that but philosophically we do not have an opposition to that. We have call on the private schools –we have already identified that publicly–that it would now have to keep registers, that is not a regulation right now, in the same manner and way and submit perhaps quarterly reports of its attendance to the Ministry, so we could be more accountable. Thirty thousand dollars would be given to each child in this country and \$25,000 in the 'Because We Care Cash Grant', in addition to the school feeding and the buses and boats that we are continuing and expanding \$5,000 on the uniform programme to each child. We believe that is going to help significantly. Parents would be able to bring their children back to school. Sir, you just showed me your two-minute pen. There is so much that we could talk about in this sector.

Mr. Speaker: One could get an extension of five minutes after.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, in an attempt to keep our children in schools, we launched Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Education (CAPE) in the Anna Regina and the West Demerara Secondary schools. The conversations we started in 2011 to 2015. Yesterday, for the first time in the history of this country, nine high schools were registered

under the Caribbean Vocational Qualification Programme (CVQ), so that our children could go and get qualified at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) standard. We started that conversation in 2011 to 2015. The lofty call by the Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings, pleading for a high school because the Upper Mazaruni needs a high school. It needed one in 2011 and 2012. We identified it. It also needed one in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 but she was not there. I do not want to get personal but she was closer to the seat of power and influence where that could have happened. We do not need power and influence. We are serving the children of this country and the Upper Mazaruni is going to get another secondary school but not through this budget. We have identified resources for the acquisition of universal secondary education in this country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, now is a good time for someone to ask for that extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask for the Hon. Member to have 15 minutes more, but I know I have to follow the rules. Therefore, I will ask for that five minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member stood there in her personal pain, which we must acknowledge but that is a written speech and that is deliberate. The Hon. Member stood there and said they trained, and they want to see that continue. The teachers at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) had some special programme. When I came into the Office in 2020, the CPCE was closed, with no prospect of opening and no plan for opening. This year the CPCE graduated its highest number of graduates ever, something that would not be possible for any of those teachers.

This budget provides \$500 million plus for us to go fully online with CPCE. When we went fully online, we were able to move our intake from 535 at its highest to 3,000, giving the Amerindian teachers all over this country the chance to get degrees and education and not just Trained Teachers Certificate. We expect 100% trained or teachers in training by the time 2025. I do not want to go into Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) because I believe Hon. Minister Parag dealt with it. For an Hon. Member of this House, perhaps a philosophical debate for us to have is the

importance of belonging to a Party. A person must have a Constituency before he/she come here, or he/she will come and spend 10 minutes in some dream thinking he/she cleverly attacks the speaker because he/she had some personal problem with the speaker.

The Hon. Member stands at the podium, accepts that she had a scholarship from the Government and does not deny that she never completed the course, that the Hon. Minister Parag levelled from the floor. She stands there and says unless we could give people jobs, we must not train them. One clearly has a fundamental misunderstanding with why people want training. There are teachers who already have jobs, but they want to better themselves, they want to better their understanding of their skill and craft and they want to earn more for their families, if they can. The barefacedness and bold facedness of the issue is that the APNU/AFC will come here, having awarded themselves scholarships and not serving in the Public Sector, and I do not know where they are serving, and say except people could serve back they must not get the scholarship. How selfish. We have 6,200 plus persons who benefitted from the GOAL last year and another 4,500 who will benefit this year, and these are Guyanese citizens.

When one look at the spread across this country it epitomises equitable distribution of services. We cannot allow people who see before them no future in politics because of what they know was a damaging thing to have done following 2nd March. No future in this country is political life. Try to be a sour grape and *cut off your nose to spite your face*. The Hon. Minister Mr. Benn called it a ‘zerosome’ game – ‘*we can’t get people, we gon bruk it all up*’. We will not let you. The people of this country will not let you. Please understand that in this time, what we require for Guyana to move forward is, if you say you love your supporters, a level of unity on purpose that we want to see what is best for all our children. There might have different ways of doing it, but we could discuss that. Do not come here with nothing. I have heard nothing proper to criticise this budget.

I want to speak directly to the teachers here before you give me the sign, Sir. I, thank you from the bottom of my heart for turning up for this nation’s children in a time when they needed you the most. This was always going to require your best as a teacher and my best is a political leader and our best as a Government. I know that you are looking too for leadership from the Opposition. I thank the teachers who in defiance of people some of them support went out back to

school, who in defiance of their union's call went out to school.

4.20 p.m.

I thank those teachers and I would like to say to you that never in the history of the People's Progressive Party/Civic's budget or the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change budgets has increases for public service been defined. It has never been defined. It never comes in the budget. When one has member after member standing here and saying that there is nothing for public servants, it is a lie. It is an untruth. It is a misrepresentation. It is playing on your emotions. Do not be misled. At the end of the year, we always come and say what the increase will be. The APNU/AFC has never listed what the increase for the next year will be in its budget. What it did was say what the increase for that year would be retroactively, as it came with a budget in November and December. Do not hoodwink, mislead and be dishonest with people who are looking to you for leadership.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will have to withdraw the words hoodwink and mislead.

Ms. Manickchand: Do not tell the people something that is not true. I withdraw the words hoodwink and mislead. Do not tell public servants that they are not getting an increase because one will look foolish when they do. Do not tell public servants, teachers, nurses, and the disciplined services that this has always been done, when that is not true. One becomes extremely incredible and hard to believe when you stand here and say things that are easily verifiable as an untruth, as something that is not based in reality. Sir, I am really trying hard to please you and not use bad words. This is going to require from all of us, our very best. The Opposition has a chance, it is not too late. The Opposition has a chance to show love for the children of this country by supporting the 2022 budget. I quote here from the article that is laid over before this House which states:

“Collectively...”

Parents, teachers, Government, Opposition, Education Ministry, education departments...

“...we need to make education and learning a political...”

And other...

“...priority. We must reopen schools, ...”

We must...

“...keep them open and...”

We must...

“...support learning recovery. We cannot afford to lose this generation of kids. Our future depends on it.”

I thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you for that presentation, Hon. Minister of Education. It is now time to hear the presentation of the Hon. Member, Mr. Richard Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I stand to make my contribution to *Budget 2022*, allow me first to express thanks to the hardworking public servants who have contributed to putting this together. I also wish to express best wishes to all Guyanese for the new year. Allow me to also express condolences to Guyanese across Guyana who continue to fight an unprecedented wave of a pandemic we wish never happened.

As a geographical representative of the Potaro-Siparuni Region, I wish to highlight the plight of the people of that region as they continue to struggle despite us now debating the biggest budget in the history of this country. We wish to put on record, before the former PPP/C Minister of Education, there was a programme called the literacy programme that was closed by people under her watch. [**Mr. Seeraj:** They thief out all the money.] Yes. That is corruption. *Budget 2022* presented under the theme *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana* and that One Guyana, as much promise and expectation by the ordinary Guyanese.

Let me begin my contribution by first addressing public works in the region and that hinges on the fact that we have two Hon. Ministers of Public Works. I understand from the good books about the rapture, and I thought that the Hon. Bishop Edghill can tell us more about the rapture. Two will be on the housetop, one will be taken and the other left. The APNU/AFC while in Government focused heavily on education and in the hinterland infrastructure. The people of Region 8 would like to see a continuation of those initiatives such as maintenance of the roads and public buildings. Over the past two years, the region has witnessed the deterioration

of roads such as 17 Mile, Tumatumari and the Brian Sucre Junction to Mahdia. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*) fixing the road now, Mr. Sinclair.] It is dry now, so it is all right. When it rains, the Hon. Ministers over there should walk the walk. The enhancement of the roads will greatly improve the lives of people and the residents who traverse that road.

As a member of the Regional Tender Board in Region 8... Of course, I never reported to a subject Minister by way of pictures. It was asked by the regional engineers to design a water system in the teachers' quarters to ensure that the teachers in the delivery of education will not be out of water on a daily basis. It took this person and another person to ensure that that system was properly replaced.

At this juncture I would like to thank the David Granger-led Administration of the APNU/AFC for delivering infrastructure to the residents of Mahdia. There was a campaign there where a resident was asked if they are going to eat concrete roads. What we need to understand here is that there was a road prior to that, and the road was built of tar and bricks. We welcomed that road under the PPP/C, but it only lasted for two years. We now have a road there with strong infrastructure that will last a lifetime and more, thanks to that system of building proper infrastructure. The project was praised by residents who wish to see those days return. All the region had known was that piece of tarred road from the secondary school to the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) compound. After those two years, it was slush and red dust once again. The people are asking, are we going to return to those days? Luckily, there is a continuation of the road from Wrong Turn Junction going to the airstrip. I wonder why some of us in this House would dare walk on that road that was built by the APNU/AFC. It should haunt us.

One Minister who spoke earlier mentioned that the APNU/AFC had plans but the PPP/C delivered. I wish to remind this Hon. Member that the water situation in Mahdia is a bugbear. I wish to say to this honourable House that the PPP/C had the plans, but it took the APNU/AFC Granger-led Administration to deliver the goods to the people. As we speak and as we sit in this honourable House, water is delivered into the homes of the residents including mine. There was a fire in Mahdia and a fire hydrant was built. That is corruption. This fire truck or hydrant or whatever it was, I am not sure where the engineering skills came from, but it would have taken a crane to lift that hydrant onto a tractor to take it to out fires. [**Mr. Persaud:** The big fire hydrant.]

That is what was built by the PPP/C. That particular fire hydrant serviced the residents in 'School Street'. Today, as we speak it is used to deliver water for the building of a castle. One of two streets that is designed for the residents of Mahdia. Instead of giving money to the Mayor and Town Council to build the roads and infrastructure necessary for the people of that town. The Hon. Minister there continues to flout the rules like he did when there was supposed to be the election of a Regional Chairman. He believes in the separation of powers. However, that road is going to be built to service only a Comrade. A Comrade who is going to build a disco for himself and his workers. However, we welcome that because quite a few persons in that street will also benefit from the road.

I now move to education delivery. Education delivery is still a challenge in most remote communities in this region. There was the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) initiative and this has given rise to the One Laptop Per Teacher (OLPT) initiative. Teachers were equipped with the skills and tools necessary, including myself, to deliver to children of schools. We are asking that this honourable House use some of those resources available to education to facilitate special attention to the poor children, not only of Campbelltown but the most remote of the remote areas in Mahdia and the North Pakaraimas. We like to see that every child... I would like to encourage the Hon. Minister of Education to ensure that this is put in place. I admire her for that because I know that she will make sure that every child gets a laptop with the necessary data so that he/she can benefit from education. This is the cry of all the people in the hinterlands. I now turn my attention to something that was delivered. As the Hon. Member said that the APNU/AFC planned and the PPP/C delivered, the water is one situation where the PPP/C planned, and the APNU/AFC delivered.

4.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, permit me, I will address the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, in a short while. He will walk there with heavy security, but I would not. I also call on this present Administration to establish more wells for potable water for the remote communities of that region. These communities should include Princeville and the North Pakaraimas.

I wish to touch a little on capacity building. In preparation of this Budget, I wish to state, clearly, that the consultative process that was involved here was the signing of the documents and that is why some changes had to be made.

This is how it is done in Mahdia and Region 8. I was a part of this, where the Regional Executive Officer (REO) sent things for you to sign, and you do not know what you are signing. I wish to state, clearly, that we need to have parliamentary involvement in everything we do. Democracy is not only winning an election, but it is also about good and inclusive governance. Until this Administration is serious about this consultative process, the people will continue to pay in spite of the vindictiveness of this present Administration.

I wish to highlight that during the selection of the Regional Chairman – and the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, ought to know about this – when the REO meets with his councillors they select the chairman, and then, of course, in private or on camera, announced it to the public. I was there. That process was not honoured [Mr. Dharamlall: You were part of it.] No, I was not even recognised by you. In fact, I was only given a bottle of water. That was all they did. I wish to highlight that, during the election of the Regional Chairman, it was an autocratic intervention by this Minister of Local Government and Regional Development and was obviously, *cooked up*. This is because he separated the folks. Some stayed at Roger Hinds International Hotel and the others stayed at Baksh so that they could have done what they were supposed to do to ensure that the Regional Chairman was given that privilege. That is corruption and bad governance. The Hon. Minister does not believe, even though he practises it.

However, in this Budget provision, there should be a provision for capacity building. We need to retrain these people so that they could understand where we the Ministers go wrong.

Mahdia has great potentials for development in the hospitality industry. Having said this, I now call on the Government to make provision for the development of this sector, where training is an integral part of the creation of jobs in that industry.

I think, there are some things that are void in this Budget. There needs to be upgrades to roads from Monkey Mountain to Paramakatoi (PK), Mango Landing to Mahdia and Konawaruk to Black Water.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, as you sort out the geography, we will need to give you an extension.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. You can continue with your presentation and conclude in five minutes.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I think is needed in this Budget is for ... There is a parent that travels from Princeville to Mahdia and the cost for transportation is \$7,000. I want to join with the Hon. Members on this side of the House to say to this honourable House that this Budget needs to be redone and take into consideration the wishes of the people of Region 8. Thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

Dr. Smith: Before I go into my presentation, I wish to register my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ashni Singh and his committed team at the Ministry of Finance for delivering an excellent budget to this nation.

Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana, Budget 2022, is the answer to the call by our Guyanese brothers and sisters to further strengthen and rebuild with a solid foundation that which was devoured and plundered under the previous APNU/AFC Administration. In any democratic nation, it is the people who choose their government. We in the PPP/C recognise and understands that we were democratically elected by the people of this country. We will not disappoint, but rather continue to deliver on our promises to ensure that the livelihoods and wellbeing of every Guyanese are preserved through the provision of policies, plans and programmes that would see their dreams and aspirations become a reality.

For the past two days, I sat in this honourable House and all I have heard from the main Opposition were incoherent utterances, utterances of development. I am yet to see, and I am sure that the people of this nation are still looking for the development that they were talking about. We must never forget that it was under the previous APNU/AFC failed Administration that the Because We Care cash grant was taken away from our children. Seven thousand sugar workers were rendered jobless. Heavy tax burdens were placed on water, electricity, food items, building materials, data plans, mining equipment, even on the men operating the donkey cart and horse carts were not spared from the APNU/AFC monstrous tax mania they embarked on. Our senior citizens saw their water and electricity subsidies taken away, while members from our Discipline Services endured similar a

plight as their one-month tax free bonus became a mere memory. The APNU/AFC Coalition continued on their path of destruction of progress and development by firing 2,000 of my fellow Amerindian brothers and sisters Community Support Officers (CSOs), taking away their very right to earn an income and a decent life.

To further add to the hopelessness and the agony we were placed in under the previous Administration, even our freedom of choice, yes, our very free will that we so comfortably enjoy as Guyanese came under threat and was trampled upon, as the harrowing events surrounding the 2nd March, 2020, Elections unfolded in plain sight and on camera, where there was the incautious and brazenface attempt to alter the results of an elections and prevent our people from electing a government of their choice. Five long months passed while we were placed on our knees as our democracy was under siege by the very Members sitting in the Opposition today.

We saw, we know and, we lived, and we do not want to relive the series of events that we were forced to endure under the previous Government. Hence, I implore my fellow Guyanese, especially the young generations to never ever in their lifetime entrust their wellbeing, livelihood, pride and dignity as a Guyanese and their right to choose in the hands of an untrustworthy and careless bunch as those sitting on the opposite side, of course, with the exemption of the Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman. I would like to take this opportunity, once again, to register my sincere gratitude to every single Guyanese, both at home and in the Diaspora, who stood out for democracy in those five long months that we were held hostage as a nation by the previous APNU/AFC Administration, who has now, rightfully, taken their position in the Opposition seats and will age gracefully, as we on this side of the House continue to lead this country on the path of progress and development.

As we examine *Budget 2022*, we will see that contrary to the narrative dispelled by the Hon. Members of the opposite side of this House that this Budget lacks vision and substance, we will see that all sectors within our country were catered for as we are not a takeaway Government, but rather give back to the people Government and we increase 10 folds that which were devoured.

As I take a look at health, the injection of \$552.9 billion will see the health sector being allocated \$73.2 billion and will cover all areas in health such as the National COVID-19

Response Programme, where healthcare workers will continue to have access to adequate personal protective equipment (PPE). Our vaccination programme will be further strengthened as provisions will be made for an additional 260,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine booster shots and for those pending to be vaccinated. This is progress and more progress.

For the first time, our country will benefit from a major boom in the health sector as \$16.1 billion will go towards the construction of healthcare facilities, which include the state of the art paediatric and maternal hospital and the upgrading of the West Demerara and Bartica Regional Hospitals. Also, we will see six new additional hospitals in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. This speaks of progress. A total of \$1 billion will be allocated to ensure the upgrading of health centres all across Guyana as patients will be able to have access to health facilities within their attachment area. This is more progress. Our national referral hospital will see a total of \$39 million going towards the extension of the Mental Health Ward. Under the APNU/AFC Regime, the health system was heavily plagued by drug shortages. This year we will continue to right this wrong by injecting \$17.9 billion to procure supplies and eradicate the incidents of drugs shortages. This speaks of progress. Every single dialysis patient in Guyana will benefit from finances of up to \$600,000 per annum, through a Dialysis Support System. This definitely shows our strong support for the healthcare system in Guyana.

Youths – we on this side of the House recognise that our youths are some of our country's most valuable assets, our future. Therefore, a total \$841.3 million has been allocated in this Budget and we will see \$85 million go towards the expansion of youth entrepreneurship and mentorship programmes, which will accommodate 85 grants in 2022. This speaks of progress.

Support for the vulnerable – our Government will continue to support vulnerable groups and, thus, the monthly public assistance programme will see an increment from \$12,000 to \$14,000 and will allow over 18,000 persons to benefit from the same.

4.50 p.m.

Thus, providing a total of \$432 million in disposable income to its beneficiaries. Our senior citizen will see an increase in our paid pension from \$25,000 to \$28,000. Thus, affording

65,000 pensioners a total of \$2.3 billion of disposable income.

The PPP/C Government will always ensure that our Indigenous brothers and sisters continue to enjoy equal access to development as every other citizen of Guyana. Therefore, \$3.1 billion will go towards core Amerindian development programmes. A sum of \$561.6 million will see the acceleration of the land titling programme and achieve a target of 20 certificates of titles. Another \$660 million will go towards the training of 650 CSOs to serve in 220 communities across all the regions in Guyana. Equitable access to education and skills will see a total of 31,295 students benefit from the Because We Care cash grant, as \$93.3 million will be expended across Indigenous communities to make this a reality.

I now turn my attention to some of the major developments in Region 3. Looking at the health sector, so far we have seen a 50-bed capacity COVID-19 unit commissioned at the West Demerara Regional Hospital in November, 2021. This will provide care for COVID-19 patients not only in Region 3, but also in Regions 1, 7 and in any other region we may need to add this unit. We must also note that this unit was constructed with sections to cater for maternal patients, children and there is also an Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

The Lenora Cottage Hospital is just days away from being commissioned and handed over as a smart hospital facility, which will see the reintroduction of services of a 25-bed capacity maternal unit, a digitised X-ray system, laboratory, ultrasonography, dental services, eye care, voluntary counselling and testing, increased bed capacity of the Accident and Emergency Department, amongst others. All of this will provide services for over 18,000 residents in Region 3. Our Government has also ensured the removal of thousands of expired drugs hoarded at the Tuschen Health Centre, the Leonora Cottage Hospital and other health facilities across Region 3 which, like many other areas, were neglected under the previous APNU/AFC Government and did not see the removal of same as important.

The non-functional X-ray machine at the Leguan Cottage Hospital has been restored and is now offering services to residents as this too was a victim of neglect under the previous APNU/AFC Government. Our robust COVID-19 vaccination programme has seen to date a 56.6% increase in eligible persons being vaccinated against this dreaded COVID-19 disease. Even in a pandemic, we continue to

offer inter special medical outreaches to residents in riverain areas such as Karikari, Bonasika, Saxacalli, among others.

The newly constructed \$1 billion state of the art West Minister Secondary School now accommodates approximately 1,000 students from across Region 3. It is fully equipped with 32 classrooms; language, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Home Economics, Agriculture, Science and Information Technology (IT) Laboratories, dance studio, a theatre room, which all forms part of this state of the art secondary school.

A total of 875 young people have benefited from the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship in 2022. We will see hundreds more benefit in 2022 in Region 3.

Our Government ensured that every farmer affected by the recent floods across Region 3 benefited from the Flood Relief Grant. For the very first-time residents of Lust-en-Rust and La Parfaite Harmonie areas have been afforded the opportunity to access light, drainage and potable water in their communities. Already our hard-working Ministers of Housing and Water, the Hon. Susan Rodrigues and the Hon. Collin Croal have ensured that house lots were allocated to residents. Today, 2,000 residents have gained access to house lots in areas such as Cornelia Ida (CI), Stewartville, Meten-Meer-Zorg, Zeelugt, and other areas. This is in keeping with our promise to provide 50,000 house lots to all residents across Guyana in our first term in Office.

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

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I invite anyone of the Hon. Members on the opposite side of this House to visit random areas in Region 3 and they will see clear evidence that the PPP/C Government is working for everyone, not only for our supporters as you have been. Every single Guyanese will benefit from our projects, plans and programmes that we have set out for this country.

We in the PPP/C will continue to work assiduously towards the development of every sector in our goal to achieving a 'One Guyana' that will solidify the foundation of our

nation's human resources, our economic growth, our dignity as a people, our democracy, our culture and every valuable asset that defines us as a unique Guyanese nation. Over the next few months, the areas of Regions 1 – 10 will be filled with the smell of fresh paint and asphalt as roads and buildings rise, such as schools, hospitals, and hotels will hug the skyline of this beautiful nation of ours. Once desolated and garbage ridden areas will see streets and roads traversing its face. A smile on the faces of our farmers, children, senior citizens and Guyanese as a whole will tell the story of the level of commitment we hold as a Government towards the development of this nation under the PPP/C Government.

A new era beacons as *Budget 2022* will see the manifestation of visionary, inclusive transformational and people-centred development all across Guyana. I, therefore, have no reservation in commending *Budget 2022* as passed to this honourable House. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Jaiprashad: Hon. Members of the National Assembly and brothers and sisters, a pleasant afternoon. As I stand here this afternoon representing the constituency of East Berbice-Corentyne, I am very much happy to say that the Hon. Minister made mention that I have worked with the cash grant for Region 6. I wish to say that I have worked with all the systems so that the people of East Berbice-Corentyne could be able to receive what is duly theirs.

Listening to the Hon. Minister of Education, the indication was made that there were 12 big buses, the 'David G' buses. I wish to state that we had 29 buses across the country and five for Region 6. Sadly to say, recently, the PPP/C Administration downed two of the 16-seater buses which is putting a very much difficult task on the poor people of East Berbice-Corentyne. My duty is to bring the facts, and that is where my presentation will be based on. As I indicated, I am here to bring some information basically as it relates and affect East Berbice-Corentyne – Region 6, and to do that, I take infrastructure. Infrastructure is very important for any economy. We know that the people cannot eat roads; the people cannot eat buildings. Even though we need the infrastructure, we need to put systems in place that whilst we do the infrastructural work, we afford the people to have enough cash so that they could spend on themselves and on their families and, more so, increase and improve their standard of living. We are seeing here a lot is being done for infrastructural work, but little is being given to the hands of the poor people.

I must say, for the past 18 months that the PPP/C has been holding Office, they have changed a few contractors who did some work about five times in the Numbers 46 and 48 areas and the Numbers 54 and 59 areas in the Corentyne. To date, we have not been able to benefit because the substandard work continues. There is a large proportion for the Corentyne highway – \$8.3 billion. The people of East Berbice-Corentyne requested a new highway. This highway was built when we had about 20 cars – 20 vehicles. Imagine from the 1960s to now, we have multiplied in terms of transportation. The people of East Berbice-Corentyne are asking for a new highway, not to rehabilitate the existing one.

Referring to the Budget Speech section 411, the Hon. Member made mention of the rehabilitation of four vessels which will facilitate the traveling public. It is also critical for the movement of people and cargo. I wish to say this afternoon in this honourable House that you are saying that you will facilitate the travelling of the public which is critical, and this same PPP/C Administration downed two of the speedboats that were travelling, transporting people – old people, pensioners, children, working people – from Rosignol to New Amsterdam. How could you bring a budget now to say that you will put in place four and we had two? You did not maintain it you just pull it out. This is putting our brothers and sisters both in New Amsterdam and in Rosignol, Region 5 and Region 6 at a very high cost. They have to traverse the Berbice River Bridge which costs them approximately \$300 to cross one time. If these two boats were serviced and maintained, then the Guyanese people or Berbicians, to be specific, would have been very much impressed. I have not seen in the Budget any major transportation for the people of Barbaraka. There is also no upgrade for transportation in Orealla/Siparuta.

5.05 p.m.

I wish to turn my attention to health in East Berbice-Corentyne. For the past 18 months, we have not seen the construction of any new health centres, but we are faced with the run-down service that we have at many of the health facilities. I wish to say that if it was not for the private medical facilities, then Region 6 would have been in a bad state. We have just passed a Bill for which we will be involved in organ and tissue transplant, but we have not put in this Budget, an infectious disease hospital for Berbice or Essequibo. Thanks to the APNU/AFC Government, the Infectious Disease Specialty Hospital was built in Region 4

and it has been of great service to the people of Guyana. We are asking now that the people of Berbice and the people of Essequibo be given an infectious disease hospital as well so that we will be able to have state-of-the-art medical facilities. Page 47 of the Budget presentation reads:

“Our clear policy mandate is that every health facility across the country must be sufficiently comfortable, functional, and equipped with all the basic amenities.”

We want to move from that. The people of East Berbice cannot settle for basic amenities in the health facilities. The private institutions are too costly. That is why each health centre and each hospital in Region 6 must have, not basic amenities but the best amenities so that the people can be able to enjoy them. Electrocardiograms (ECG) machines, cholesterol testing machines, X-ray machines, and ultrasound machines must be at all the health centres and public facilities so that the people will have... We had part of this without oil but now we have the Natural Resource Fund so we are appealing for the Hon. Minister of Health to put systems in place so that the people of East Berbice-Corentyne will benefit from the money that belongs to all of us.

I wish to turn my attention to education. It is a very important ministry for the growth and development of any nation. I wish to say that the cash grant initiative is a good one. I wish to further state that the amount allocated to the children is not enough. We are proposing that it can be amended and, in this Budget, we should have at least \$40,000 for our school children so that the children of this country and East Berbice-Corentyne will be beneficiaries of the funds from the Natural ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the amount missed me. Could you just repeat that for me – the amount that you said?

Mr. Jaiprashad: It is \$40,000, Sir, thank you. When we look at our neighbouring country Trinidad and Tobago, which is an oil-producing nation, all school children have free lunch there. We now have a newfound revenue, why is it that we are only catering for a portion of our school population as it relates to meals? It would be good if 174,000 of our children – all of our children – receive meals supplied to them. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** I did not know you all studied that.] We are studying food for the children, *bai*.

Mr. Speaker, \$1.2 billion is set aside for textbooks and science kits. We are moving in a technological era and there is \$1.2 billion for textbooks. We know that our children have been receiving textbooks for the past 15 years and these are things that do not disappear, they stay in the system for many years. We are saying, let us try to put more money into the electronic and computerised system so that our children can have preloaded tablets, computers or gadgets and be anywhere in the country and utilise the service. We know that we are moving in a technological era and our children do not have internet access. We want our children to receive the gadgets so that they could be anywhere. Once they have electricity, they can charge up, have all the schemes, notes, the past examination papers and everything there, so that all the children will be on par with what is happening in education.

It is evident that the PPP/C will not provide more public transportation for our children. We have not seen that in this Budget. I want to appeal to the Hon. Minister of Education and the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to ensure that we have at least 100 big buses in this country. Without oil revenues, we had 30 big buses transporting our children across the country. According to the Hon. Minister, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall, now we have ‘*ile* money’. It would be very good for us to ensure that we have, at least, 100 buses and all our school children – 174,000 – can travel to school free.

As it relates to transportation in the East Berbice – Corentyne, to be more specific East Bank Berbice, we had a 60-seater bus there bringing children from Mara to New Amsterdam. We know that things ... [**Mr. Ramsaroop:** Tight.] We know that things are ‘tight’ and we know that the people in East Berbice – Corentyne are suffering. The Members of the PPP/C Administration scrapped that bus and claimed that it had mechanical and engine problems. *Lo and behold*, the engine disappeared from the bus. Apparently, the engine went to somebody else. It is causing the parents of East Bank Berbice at least \$1000 a day to bring their children to New Amsterdam. The \$25,000, plus \$5000 that they will be receiving is just for one month’s transportation. We are asking the Ministry of Education to put systems in place so that the people of East Bank Berbice will have at least \$190,000 a year and for the 39 weeks, the children can have transportation. [**Hon. Members (Government):** (*Inaudible*) sugar workers.] I wish to say that the sugar workers in the Skeldon area had a bus too. Do you know what happened? The PPP/C scrapped it. They had a bus

without any resources and any newfound oil money. The people in Skeldon had a 60-seater bus that transported the children from Skeldon to the schools in the area. [Mr. Persaud: What was the name of the bus?] It was the Region 6 School Bus. I know you have a problem with the colour of the bus, but it would be better if you painted it red and let it continue to work for the people.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it would be good if we give you an extension so that you can conclude.

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

Motion put and carried.

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

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying about the transportation in the Skeldon area, without the oil revenue we know that the people there were having a difficult time and a 60-seater bus was provided. The PPP/C scrapped it. We have oil now and we are hoping that the Region 6 children will receive the various subsidies so that they can be able to go to school free.

In closing, I wish to say that we are not seeing any reduction in the toll for the Berbice River Bridge. I wish to bring to the attention of the House that it was the APNU/AFC that subsidised \$300 for every car or bus travelling on the Berbice River Bridge. With oil revenues now, we are not seeing in the Budget that the toll for the Berbice River Bridge will drop to \$1000. The people of Regions 5 and 6 will be happy if tomorrow the PPP/C says that it will drop the Berbice River Bridge toll to \$1000. We are appealing that the minimum wage be \$100,000. Workers of all categories and classes should have at least a 10% to 15% increase. The income tax threshold should be moved to \$100,000. The cash grant should be moved to \$40,000. Subsidies of up to \$5 million should be given to small businesses. There should be an increase of public assistance from \$12,000 to \$20,000. The Berbice River Bridge toll should drop to \$1000.

In closing, just imagine our senior citizens receiving \$100 a day. This is a token given by the PPP/C Administration. That is \$100 a day from oil revenue. A loaf of bread in Berbice costs \$340. They are giving pensioners \$3000 a month, which is \$100 a day. Oil revenue Guyana is giving our old

folks who have worked all their lives' for this country, \$100 a day. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Dr. Mahadeo: Mr. Speaker, before I get to my presentation, I must say that when I listened to my fellow Region 6 Member of Parliament (MP), I thought I would have a lot of things to rebut but there is nothing for me to rebut really, other than to say that we cannot continue – it does not make sense – fixing a bus when the cost of doing so is more than the cost of the bus itself. I advise the Hon. Member to read the Report of the Auditor General and to be so informed.

For an infectious disease hospital in Berbice – the Hon. Member is my good friend – I want to advise him to travel around Berbice and he will know that in Skeldon we have a facility set up specifically to deal with infectious diseases, more so with COVID-19. The New Amsterdam Regional Hospital also has a section to deal with COVID-19. As for building new health centres, these are constructed based on the needs of the population and the catchment – the numbers of persons that you have to serve or the distance they have to cover. Again, I would advise the Hon. Member to do some reading and he will become familiar with those things.

5.20 p.m.

Increasing the Because We Care cash grant to \$40,000. I have been listening to the Members from the opposite side and their suggestions and comments are so diverse, there is no common thread that I can find.

Before I go to my speech, there are couple of things that I need to clear up. Thanks to internet and social media and thanks to Parliament for streaming this debate live, people could hear what we are saying. I received a document, via email, from representatives of 5274 Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC), the Corriverton municipality and the Crabwood Creek NDC. They basically asked me, as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Region 6, to rebut to what the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul:

“NDCs were instructed to spend their subventions on streetlights and crusher run. It was like a racket. One of the streetlights cost taxpayers \$35,000 in total and your cell phone light is brighter than the light that was erected.”

First of all, they asked me to say that they live in the area. They invited the Hon. Member to visit and see that the streetlights are as bright as any streetlight in Georgetown or

any that was established before. Some of them are council members and they advised me that these streetlights were the request of the people of these areas, the NDCs and the municipalities. They met as council, and they made the decision. The request was made to the Ministry. This request was satisfied, and they said that they are quite happy with it. I will also ask the Hon. Member, the Hon. Ashni Singh, to have some training sessions with the Members over there and let them understand what programme budgeting is. Let them understand that if one budgets for something and the money has been given, then it has to be used there or one has to get permission to change it. The 128 lights in Crabwood Creek and the 201 lights that were installed in 5274, thanks to the Government of Guyana of the day, are all working and working well, and we have met the needs and the requests of the people.

I also have to deal with another issue. The Hon. Member raised issues about health in Region 5 and Dr. Nicholson has replied. I have the information here and I can share it. In 2022, land ambulances were purchased; in 2021, another land ambulance. Together with the one that they have it will become four. There was a new boat and engine for the work of the Health Department in Moraikobai, a minibus for the work of Vector Control Department, and one 4x4 ambulance for the residents of Moraikobai. This will help, when the water is very low, to move the patients either to lower down the river or to Linden. There was one minibus for the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Department.

The Hon. Member said that the laboratory needed to do more tests. This is what Dr. Nicholson wrote, we continue to perform haematology, biochemistry, parasitology, urinalysis, et cetera, at both labs. In 2020, we saw 21,039 patients completed 91,091 tests. In 2021, we saw 24,000 patients and completed 114000 tests, proof that our service has been improved. This is from the Regional Health Officer (RHO) himself, Mr. Speaker. Talking about Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), the Hon. Member said that there are not enough PPEs for the workers in Region 5. The region currently has a six-month supply of PPEs, all categories, and is still collecting more from the Material Management Unit (MMU). The health centres actually have surplus of PPEs that was sent to them, and we have a 3-month supply in every health centre.

In fact, we have to find extra storage. Now, PPEs are being stored at one of the empty doctor's quarters. The drug situation... [**An. Hon. Member:** Who is Dr. Nicholson?] Dr.

Nicholson is the RHO of Region 5. In August, 2020, our suppliers across the board were at 50% maximum. At this stage, we are 85% and above across the board – vital, essential, non-essential Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), malaria and Tuberculosis (TB) drugs, *et cetera*. This is the answer. I would advise that Hon. Member to also visit Region 5. Go and talk to the RHO and health workers. Get the truth and then come and let us talk. Monthly outreaches and specialist outreaches were done, again, in Region 5.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to begin my substantial presentation. First of all, I want to congratulate Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and team for this well-put together Budget. Congratulations to all the Ministers, Ministries and Departments for your hard work has paid off. This is not only the biggest budget, but also the best budget. Dr. Ashni Singh, a great presentation.

Let me say, from the outset, that I support this Budget, and as the geographic MP of Region 6, I also bring the support of the residents of Region 6 in supporting this Budget. I would like to inform the Hon. Minister that the residents of Region 6 said thank you. There is now a sense of optimism in Region 6 that was absent in the period 2015-2019. I am not going to go back to those taxes, the banned used tyres and the banned old cars and things like that. We are already back on track. Three successive PPP/C budgets – progressive, people-oriented and people centred. The three Ps, Mr. Speaker. Sadly, we still have to do some repair work for the tsunami that was the APNU/AFC Government for five years. We still have work to do, and I will deal a bit with that later. I have listened to presentations for three straight days. I have heard a few Hon. Members vehemently say they will not support this *Budget 2022* with all the measures that it has to reduce the burden on people, including health and education, delivery, building of infrastructure, *et cetera*.

I challenge the Hon. Members in the Opposition, who have issues supporting this Budget, to name even one measure in this Budget that will negatively affect the people of Guyana, especially the poor. Name at least one. Since you cannot, then you are opposing just for the sake of the opposition and there you shall stay.

We have heard some of the Members of this House talk about poor handling of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Please allow me to speak a little bit about this. Mr. Speaker, starting March of last year and up to July of last year, COVID-19 information was a big secret. It was

even bigger than the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and those agencies. [**An Hon. Member:** In 2020.] In 2020, sorry. Imagine, a test was done, and the result was then taken to the Minister of Public Health who, at that time, was not a medical doctor. That Minister then decided when she was going to release that information to the medical staff who were treating the patient. That is criminal. Do you know why? Those medical staff do not know whether they were treating a positive patient or not. Those persons who were in contact with that positive patient were walking around the streets maybe positive, with or without signs and symptoms, and infecting other people.

Over the months, we can safely say that by the end of July, 2020, COVID-19 was ceded across this county. So, let them not come and talk about COVID-19 and what is happening now. You messed up at the beginning and you caused it to spread. Just a reminder, we knew we had won the elections because we had our Statements of Poll (SOPs) and we were already planning, preparing and performing as a government in waiting. A committee was set up. We started producing masks, reusable masks, and sending it out to the community, ensuring not only that we gave it to people to use – and that was throughout Guyana on the coast in the hinterland – but also, there was instruction on how to use one’s mask. We had our comrades going out there advising people on how to take care to prevent getting infected. On that committee, my good friend, the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony, played a lead role. So, when we took the reins of Government in 2020, we could have hit the ground running. We first increased the testing capacity. When they used to test in single digits per day, that was the capacity, we increased it to hundreds per day. Currently, we have the capacity to test thousands of persons per day. As soon as vaccines became available, our PPP/C Government invested heavily in vaccines because we knew how much it meant to save the lives of the people. The previous government, the APNU/AFC, should be careful about bringing figures to this House where COVID-19 is concerned. Mr. Speaker, PPE was limited, but like you heard from Region 5, we have adequate amounts in stock for the next six months. How is our Minister handling COVID-19? He started by having meetings everyday with all the relevant personnel, the RHOs. He was sharing information every single day with the public. We have vaccinated persons. We have tests being done in all the regions.

Mr. Speaker, I saw that you showed me a white pen. Let me move on.

Mr. Speaker: That white pen just says that you have two minutes remaining in your original time plus the extension.

Mr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was talking about the destruction that we still have to fix. Look at the New Amsterdam Hospital. At the New Amsterdam Hospital, the entire sewage system collapsed. Do you know why? Now we are finding out. The hospital is supposed to have eight, two-horsepower industrial grinder three phase pumps. Those were taken out over the five years, and they were replaced by half horsepower, 110 volts domestic pumps. It has collapsed. Now, we have to fix that.

The Ophthalmology Hospital: the large units that we have there for centralised Air Conditioning Unit (AC) were damaged because they were using replaced substitute parts. Last year, we had to replace those units at a cost of over \$10 million. The management of New Amsterdam Hospital continues to find serious issues.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at sugar, those 1300 sugar workers who have come back on the job are now providing meals for their families. The vendors in the market will have more business and other small businesses will benefit. The National Insurance Scheme (NIS), we were told by the previous Government, was at a critical state. The NIS will now have more contributors with a projected infusion of approximately \$253 million per annum. This is what it meant. More than that, sugar is not just about profits, as the last Government saw it. They put profits before people. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) is now functioning. There is better drainage and irrigation in Region 6 and Region 5 because GuySuCo played an integral part in that. So, people’s lives and village economy are better, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it is a good time to seek an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: 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, Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Member, you may continue to your conclusion.

Dr. Mahadeo: I will jump to the hinterland. I work in the Ministry of Health, and it has been a mandate of this Government and a promise in its manifesto that we will

provide better services. We will bring the hinterland services up to the standard of that of the coast, and we are well on our way to doing that. Let us look at Region 9. During the period 2021, specialist outreaches, which included ultrasounds... It is in the manual that pregnant women should be seen at least once by the doctor and should have at least one ultrasound during the course of their pregnancy.

5.35 p.m.

We found women who had more than one pregnancy, more than one child, and they had never seen a doctor or never had an ultrasound. So, we took specialist outreaches that included ultrasounds, eyecare, dental care, rehabilitation, audiology, speech and language therapy, and environmental health. We took all these things and more to the villages.

In Region 9, all 57 villages were serviced, and that will continue this year. We not only did that; we collected a list of the persons who would need cataract surgery, who would need pterygium surgery, and who would need other surgeries like hernias and hydrocele. There are 45 persons with cataracts and 39 with pterygium. We are going to bring these people out, get them treated, and take them back in there. This is a caring Government, Mr. Speaker. In addition, we gave three all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), two four-by-fours, and one two-wheel bike to Region 9 in 2020. In 2021, one minibus, four two-wheel bikes, six ATVs, one four-by-four vehicle and one ambulance were given. The ambulance was placed at Sand Creek. There were ATVs at Karasabai, Aishalton, Rukumuta, Shulinab, and Sawariwau.

Region 1: I must refer to the presentation of Hon. Mr. Cox, the Member of Parliament from Region 1. If the Hon. Member was visiting the communities, he would have been told that, at the request of the residents or Moruka, there is now a functioning x-ray machine. At the request of those same residents, we are completing a theatre and we will start surgeries. At the request of the residents of Manawarin, we have obtained an ATV that will be sent in. If the Hon. Member had gone to Saint John Creek, he would have known that was one of the first villages that had 100% vaccination for the COVID-19. If the Hon. Member had visited Whitewater, he would have been told that at the request of the residents there, the building was expanded, moved up from a health post to a health centre and has a new incinerator. There is a whole list more. There was a new dental surgeon in that region. In addition, the Hon. Member would have known that 52 community health workers were

trained in 2021, and eight communities had a health care worker for the first time – for the first time. I am sure the Member, honourable as he is, would have mentioned these things had he visited and known of them.

Here, I must mention that we also did training for 62 community health workers in Region 9, and those are now across the area. Again, some of the facilities there have a health worker for the first time. Now, we are setting up permanent health facilities and permanent training facilities in Region 9 and in Region 1. We are not only going to train community service workers, but we are also going to train Pharmacy Assistants, Laboratory Technicians, Patient Care Assistants, and Nursing Assistants. We are taking training to where it is needed, not bringing out four persons from here and four from there to Georgetown and then we get problems for them to go back. We are training, in numbers, in those communities because we know the hinterland communities also deserve these opportunities, and we are making it happen. Surgical capacity has been restored at Lethem and will soon be restored to Mabaruma. We are building surgical capacity in Aishalton. This year, it will be completed in Kamarang, in Moruka and in Port Kaituma. All of these facilities will be providing surgical care to persons.

Just recently, we heard news of another discovery from the CGX Energy Incorporated again. Is it that this Government is lucky? Or is it that the PPP/C was meant for the people of Guyana for good things to happen? It cannot just be by the way. I want to say that with the CGX, a thousand jobs are going to be created, and we bear in mind that exploration work will be continuing.

In closing, I join with my Colleagues in wishing MPs across the aisle all the best in opposition. The people of Guyana enjoy the benefits of our budgets. Three budgets so far, and the Government is moving further away from those sitting on the other side. By the time we present the fifth budget, Government will only be a hazy dream for you, because each budget of this PPP/C Government is better than the previous one. So, dream in Opposition. Upon this Budget, the foundation of the future of Guyana is being built. The best is yet to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause.*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. This is a good time, having concluded our business for today, to ask the Hon. Prime Minister to move the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10 a.m. on Thursday, 03rd February, 2021.”

[Prime Minister]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m. on Thursday, 3rd February, 2021.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

Adjourned accordingly at 5.41 p.m.