



OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2025) 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

3RD Sitting

Monday, 14TH September, 2020

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.03 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (68)

Speaker (1)

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

(Virtual Participation)

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (35)

(i) MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE’S PROGRESSIVE PARTY/CIVIC (PPP/C) (35)

Prime Minister (1)

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret’d) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,
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Vice-President (1)

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
Vice-President,
Office of the President,
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Georgetown.

[Absent]

+ Cabinet Member

* Non-Elected Speaker

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

+ Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, M.P.,
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Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
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+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
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+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight’s Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.
+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
Minister of Health,
Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
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Ministry of Education,
Lot 26 Brickdam,
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+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
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* **Non-Elected Minister**

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+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
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+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
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Office of the Prime Minister,
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Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight’s Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
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Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,
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Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,
Lot 590 Good Hope,
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Shulidnab Village,
South Central,
Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)
Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini),
Mabaruma Compound.

[Absent]

Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,
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Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,
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Craig Milne,
Cove & John,
East Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Vincero H. Jordan, M.P.,
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C/o Christopher Jones*

Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
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Wismar, Linden.
Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
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A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)

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

Officers (2)

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A.,
Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.
Ms. Deslyn West,
Assistant Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
Condolences to the Clerk of the National Assembly

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on behalf of the Members of the National Assembly, myself and my family, I wish to extend sincere condolences to Mr. Sherlock Isaacs, Clerk of the National Assembly, on the death of his brother, Mr. Lennox Isaacs, who died on Thursday, 10th September, 2020.

Addressing the Technological Challenges of Virtual Sittings

I would also like to crave your indulgence for many persons, including myself, as we continue to work with the new experiences of hosting the National Assembly virtually. There will be a few glitches, but I want to assure Members that the Clerk and his staff have been working diligently, especially since our last sitting, to put every technological challenge in place, so that we can continue to have the National Assembly’s business conducted in the manner in which it should be.

Let me apologise, I personally had forgotten to do the decorum, nevertheless we have started today.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

- (1) Annual Report of the Ministry of Agriculture – Fisheries Department (Programme 3) for the year 2018;
- (2) Annual Report of the Guyana Livestock Development Authority for the year 2018;
- (3) Annual Report of the Guyana Marketing Corporation for the year 2018;
- (4) Annual Report of the Guyana Rice Development Board for the year 2018;
- (5) Annual Report of the Guyana School of Agriculture for the year 2018;
- (6) Annual Report of the Guyana Sugar Corporation Limited for the year 2018;
- (7) Annual Report of the Hope Coconut Industries Limited for the year 2018;
- (8) Annual Report of the Hydrometeorological Service (Programme 4) for the year 2018;

- (9) Annual Report of Agriculture – Administration (Programme 1) for the year 2018;
- (10) Annual Report of the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Agriculture Development Authority for the year 2018;
- (11) Annual Report of the National Agriculture Research & Extension Institute for the year 2018;
- (12) Annual Report of the National Drainage & Irrigation Authority for the year 2018;
- (13) Annual Report of the Pesticide & the Toxic Chemical Control Board for the year 2018;
- (14) Audited Financial Statement of the Pesticides & Toxic Chemicals Control Board for the years ended 31st December 2012 to the 31st December, 2017; and
- (15) Audited Financial Statement of the Guyana Marketing Corporation for the years ended 31st December 2008 to the 31st December, 2016.

[Minister of Agriculture]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will continue nomination of Members to comprise the Committee of Selection (COS).

Leader of the Opposition [Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon]: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I wish to nominate the following Members to serve on the Committee of Selection of this Assembly; Mr. Raphael Trotman, Ms. Annette Ferguson, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir and Mr. Sherod Duncan. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any other nominations?

There being no other nomination, I declare the four Members to be nominated to the Committee of Selection. Hon. Members, the motion is proposed for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for 2020.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Excuse me Mr. Speaker, the nominations made by the Hon. Mr. Harmon must be seconded.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Cde. Speaker, I beg to second that nomination.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, and thank you Hon. Chief Whip. I now formally declare, after the nomination has been moved and seconded, that the four Hon. Members are nominated to be Members of the Committee of Selection.

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2020

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2020 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2020-09-09.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2020, of a total sum of three hundred and six billion, two hundred and seventy-one million, two hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars **(\$306,271,285,000), excluding twenty three billion, two hundred and seventy-three million, and eight hundred and forty-six thousand dollars (\$23,273,846,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.

[Minister of Public Works on behalf of the Vice-President]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the debate on the budget speech for 2020. The first speaker today is the Hon. Member Raphael Trotman. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Mr. Trotman: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise proudly on behalf of the Coalition, A Partnership for National

Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), the only solution for Guyana, to lead off on this historic debate – historic because it is the first time that the National Assembly has met in this building. It is the first time we are meeting in the height of a pandemic with the sittings of a hybrid feature of physical and virtual participation and, moreover, it is the first time that a presiding officer, the Speaker, has presided over any sitting of the National Assembly remotely, and by electronic means. On that note, Mr. Speaker, accept our wishes for your speedy recovery.

With that said, this is neither an enjoyable nor momentous occasion that gives rise to celebration. While we gather to exchange barbs and criticisms at and of each other, in what has become a yearly pantomime, our nation mourns, our nation is anxious and on edge, and our nation expects that we, the highest decision makers in the land, would not pull it further into darkness, but rather, provide the much needed light of reason and leadership that points the way forward.

For the moment, I put aside my partisan positions to say that we must take a moment to pause and reflect on our words and actions, and the consequences of each, and take positive action accordingly. Equal rights and justice are the recurring themes that have resonated ever since the discovery of the savaged and mutilated bodies of Joel and Isaiah Henry last Sunday, followed on the heels by the discovery of the murdered body of Haresh Singh last Wednesday.

Yesterday, it was comforting to see the President, Mr. Irfaan Ali, the Leader of the Opposition, Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon and other leaders such as Ms. Volda Lawrence, Mr. Nigel Hughes, Mr. Vincent Alexander, Mr. Lincoln Lewis, Mr. Hubraj Narine, our very own Member Dr. Henry, and representatives of the African Cultural and Development Association (ACDA), and others, being present and voicing an opinion that says, “enough is enough”. I listened to the words of them all and mostly to those of former Minister and current member of this House, Dr. Nicolette Henry, a member of the Henry family – the boys who were slaughtered – when she spoke of prejudice and inequality being the drivers of hate in Guyana. I sought her permission to quote, a little more extensively some of her words, and I wish with your indulgence to do so. Yesterday morning, she said:

“Their death is another example of how brutal and evil our society can be. It is a frightening reminder of the prejudice and inequalities that exist right here in Guyana, and if you think otherwise, then quite frankly you have probably lost touch with reality.

Prejudice and inequalities are real issues that have to be dealt with because they cannot just go away or be wished away. It requires real and genuine actions by each and every one of us as Guyanese.”

I do not stand in judgment today, but in acknowledgement, that those of us who have been at it for some time have a duty to leave this beloved country in a much better place before we depart public life.

Mr. Nigel Hughes reminded us yesterday that if we are to forge a common destiny, as our motto describes, then, in his words, “its cornerstone must be equal rights and justice”. As national leaders, we must meet and talk with each other and place ourselves in the shoes of those we see as opponents, and try to understand the true nature of the fear, the distrust, the misunderstanding, and even the hatred, that has existed for too long. Guyana is not unique in this regard, but it is unique for allowing a festering sore to go untreated for too long, with only bandages being placed on it whenever it erupts.

10.18 a.m.

It is regrettable that it takes the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Commonwealth of Nations (Commonwealth) or the Carter Centre to get us to talk to each other, but if it must be so to get a beginning then, we say, yes.

Though absent from the reading of the budget last week, we considered it to be of national importance to be present today to raise the call of equal rights and justice for all Guyanese and, more particularly, for justice for Joel and Isaiah Henry and for Haresh Singh.

We are here, also, so that we could set the record straight and to expose the untruth and half-truths that are likely and, most importantly, to protect our proud legacy as we are already aware of attempts to rewrite the history and to make us believe that the period of 2015-2020 was the worst in our post-independent history. We declare that no weapon formed against A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change or its members and its legacy, will prosper.

The APNU/AFC Coalition has begun the filing of elections petitions, and is acting responsibly by being here, notwithstanding, its petitioning of the court to declare the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) as illegal in the seat of Government. We are here because we believe it is our duty and we are confident that our complaints would be deemed valid, just and accordingly remedied, and that no

right-thinking, unbiased and impartial tribunal can rule otherwise.

We are here today, not simply to act as an Opposition to oppose and to expose, but also to make propositions and, where in the fleeting instance, there is something to commend, we will do so. At the outset, permit me to state that as a responsible party, there are several matters to which the APNU/AFC would give its unreserved support. Foremost, among these are: one, forging greater social cohesion and racial and ethnic unity; and two, the protection and preservation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity. There should be little or no dissonance or distance between us as leaders on these two matters.

With respect to the first matter, social cohesion and ethnic and racial harmony, we place this on record, and I believe that we speak on behalf of the entire House and the Parliament, our sincerest and deepest felt sympathy to the relatives of Joel Henry, Isaiah Henry and Haresh Singh, who were mere boys, on their way to being men, when they were savagely killed. At present, while there is little to point to, or to point us away from, the belief that these barbaric killings are reminiscent of something we see in horror movies, were anything but crimes of hate and bigotry. We again join and commend the call of their mothers and fathers; brothers and sisters; uncles and aunts; villagers and friends; and of President Ali; Prime Minister Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips; former President David Granger; Leader of the Opposition, Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Joseph Harmon; People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) Chairman, Ms. Volda Lawrence; the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC); Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA); Guyana Bar Association and others; and every right thinking Guyanese in and out of the country, for justice to be served and to be served swiftly. Too much time has passed and, as we know Hon. Attorney General, justice delayed is justice denied.

We are about to become the richest State in the world on a *per capita* basis and we cannot continue to just kick this can down the road any longer. To quote one commentator, whom I do not always agree with, “the happenings in West Berbice are a symptom of deep underlying fears and uncertainty in our two major ethnic groups”. I believe in these words, as they are worthy of repetition.

I turn now to the budget, [**Mr. Nandlall:** Now you are dealing with the budget speech?] Yes, if you find anything I said offensive, please object. This Budget is strangely entitled: *Our Plan for Prosperity*. It is set against an indelible

backdrop of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and social upheaval and tension within the country. To the extent, therefore, that is meant to be an emergency budget, one would expect that it would have adequately addressed these two immediate crises - cohesion or the absence thereof, and COVID-19, which are imminent threats facing Guyana at this time.

All the scientific data and analysis available describe COVID-19 as the worst pandemic of our time. Globally, 28 million persons have been confirm as having being tested positive and nearly one million persons have died. In Guyana 56 persons have died. In the first four months of the pandemic, of that 56, 20 persons died and a whopping 36, almost double that amount, have died within the last six months. That gives us something, not only to ponder, but of which to be petrified. By the Ministry of Public Health own statistics, we now have 1,812 confirmed cases and the number is growing, exponentially, by the hour.

We have not started off on a good footing with regard to this Budget and we are surprised about this. In its first appearance in the National Assembly, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic has audaciously committed multiple statutory breaches, if you will, when it purported to pass the budgets for the constitutional agencies in clear violation of the Financial Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) of 2015. This Act clearly states the procedure to be adopted by the Minister of Finance, presuming one is appointed; the role of the Speaker of the National Assembly; the Clerk of the National Assembly; and the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

At the time of the presentation of those Estimates for the constitutional agencies, to the best of our information and belief, there was no gazetted Minister of Finance, no elected Speaker and no Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Further, the law, in section 80(b)(2) of the amended Act, speaks to providing sufficient time to enable Hon. Members to consider the Estimates. It is well-nigh impossible for the Hon. Members to have taken the oath of office and, within minutes thereafter, be able to sufficiently consider these vast sums for the numerous constitutional agencies. It would also be foolish and futile to argue that sending the Estimates out in envelopes, a few days before 1st September, 2020, was sufficient, as before that date, there was not a single elected Member of Parliament, as we all took our oath of office on 1st September. It is worrying that the PPP/C would cast aside the Constitution and Laws of Guyana so early and so blatant. The question remains as to whether you would find a way to

remedy the situation before the Appropriation Bill is passed as per the letter and spirit of the law.

The PPP/C took over an economy that was described as the fastest growing in the hemisphere, if not in the world. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in November, 2019... [Mr. Hamilton: State the source of your (*inaudible*)] You may go to its website. ...predicted an 86% growth in 2020 though, because of COVID-19, this has been revised downward. For the past five years, there has been sustained and envious growth in our economy. These are the fundamental and inconvenient truths that some among us do not want to come out. We were not a *deh bad* country that we used to be or as some are trying to make it out to be.

There is a tale of two narratives for Guyana: one that states we will be the Dubai of this hemisphere in a few short years, and that every Guyanese is going to be wealthier than their wildest imaginations; and two, that we are faced with economic ruin and rot. We have a choice to make a decision as to whether to believe the purveyors of dread or the purveyors of wealth. I believe the numbers are already proving the naysayers wrong. We are well on our way to achieving these as international headlines have already proclaimed.

In fact, no Houdini or illusionist could conjure up a \$330 billion budget, the largest, I believe, in our history, if our treasury was empty. It is sickening to hear the untruth being repeated over and over that the APNU/AFC left the country bankrupt; far from it. [Mr. Nandlall: Far from the facts.] Facts? Tell us, where did you found the money from to produce a budget in 30 days?

Guyana, under the Granger-led Administration and with Mr. Winston Jordan as Minister of Finance, experienced five straight years of sustained economic growth at an average rate of 3.6%, with the highest being 5.4% recorded in 2019. I quoted from the Estimates, which the Hon. Member presented to this House a few days ago, these are not lies, but statistics.

This, I can say without successful contradiction, it is the best average in the entire region and, yet, thanks to Mercury and it friends, some would want to believe that Guyana was the most destitute country in the world. It is a shame that people who call themselves patriots would indulge in such reckless misrepresentations.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to quote some of our rankings. In 2015, according to the Transparency Index, Guyana ranked

119 out of 198 countries. In 2019, we had moved that ranking downwards, where today we stand at 85 out of 180. In 2015, according to the Human Development Index, Guyana ranked 127 out of 188 countries and today, we are 123 out of 189. In 2015, according to the Press Freedom Index, Guyana ranked 62 out of 180 countries and today, we are 51 out of 180.

Much has been said and even quoted, in the budget speech, about the natural resources sector, which I will say very little about. Guyana recorded its highest gold production figures in its history, during the period of 2015-2020, with declarations of 2016 exceeding 700,000 ounces, the highest declaration in any single year. Between 2015 and 2019, the Guyana Gold Board (GGB) recorded declarations as against production only, figures of 3,068,648 ounces were declared from which there was generated revenue of \$3.8 billion. What is more impressive is that these numbers climbed, even as we recorded our best figures ever for forest conservation, under the Guyana/Norway agreement.

10.33 a.m.

Under the mining syndicates initiative and the lotteries, spearheaded by then Minister Broomes, thousands benefited directly and indirectly. Do not be fooled by the cry of woe. The numbers speak for themselves. In fact, the Budget itself accepts that mining was not in a parlous state. If I could be given just a moment to read the first sentence of the speech presented last Monday, page 12, I believe the Hon. Member, Bishop, Edghill said:

“The mining and quarrying industries expanded by 10.6 percent in 2019...”

Bishop Edghill went on to speak about the contribution of small and medium scale miners. The numbers speak for themselves. We recorded the highest levels of declaration in our history.

A word about bauxite: where bauxite is concerned, professional studies and assessments were done and the industry was largely affected by uncompetitive world prices. Nonetheless, through hard work and dedication, we were able to bring a new entity, First Bauxite, into production at Bonasika mine in West Demerara.

On forestry, for which much has been spoken of, let me just make a statement about some of the achievements. Konashen, the largest Amerindian area of 600,000 hectares, was brought under the protected area system in 2017. The European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (EU-

FLEGT) programme was finalised in 2018 and 2019 and included Amerindian communities and supported governance structures at the village level. The Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) led during this period, giving out the largest ever direct land management allocations to local ownership in the history of forestry management.

In 2017 and 2018, we completed the redraft of the National Forest Plan and Policy and these were approved by Cabinet and laid in the National Assembly. The forest sector moved focus beyond timber and emphasised the importance of forest-based services and the green economy. I should mention as well, thanks to the excellent stewardship of the forest, the Kingdom of Norway released the final tranche of US\$45 million, congratulating Guyana as the flagship nation of all the partnerships that it has entered around the world. The GFC began the inevitable transformation from being a money collector to becoming a true regulator and conservator of our forests.

I take a moment, as I said I would, to commend some of the emergency measures introduced to assist the forestry and mining sectors in these difficult COVID-19 times. However, we must sound a loud caution that, while you incentivise miners to rush back to the *backdam*, be mindful of the environmental impact on the lands and the contiguous communities near to them. There is a moral hazard that is associated with these measures, as gold is trending at US\$1,900 per ounce and is likely to go higher. Every person is going to want to become a miner, and everyone is going to want to go into the *backdam*. We trust that the necessary monetary regulation will be put in place to safeguard the environment. I will also urge that these measures receive periodic reviews. *[Interruption]* Do you have a difficulty with the measures that I commend?

Let us go forward into these measures. We are told that, as good emergency measures, frontline workers will be given \$150 million to share among them. By our estimate, both in the private and public sectors, there are approximately 200,000 such frontline workers. We trust that, though the description of frontline workers was left deliberately vague, though they are the people who are out there fighting to keep us alive, and themselves fighting off the dreaded disease as it has been described, all of them, as I said both in the private and public sector, will benefit from this measure. We ask the question when we speak of frontline: are we speaking of all the nurses, nurse aids, assistants, auxiliaries in every hospital and clinic and health-hub and public and private hospitals in all 10 regions? Are we speaking about taxi drivers and bus

drivers who take them to work? Again, are we, when we speak of the disciplined forces, not including them? We note that a mere two-week bonus has been given. Why not a full month? What happened to that promise? [**Bishop Edghill:** They had one month and you never paid them; you take it away.] What happened to the promise that you made?

Likewise, the Ethnic Relations Commission of Roshan Khan fame, will receive a paltry \$220,000,000 for its overall current and capital expenditures. This is a drop in the ocean when one considers the scale and magnitude of our ethnic challenges. Maybe, if it were sufficiently resourced, a member who should be spreading a message of hope and peace, would not be calling on people to arm themselves. The Department of Social Cohesion, a novel and futuristic department, arising out of the fertile mind of past President Granger, has been completely disbanded and nothing remotely comparable has replaced it, except empty words. We cannot be serious about racial and ethnic unity if we are going to disband an entire Ministry of Social Cohesion.

It behoves me to say a word about the environment. This Budget makes a passing, almost grudging mention of the environment. It is one of the more shocking aspects and disappointments of *Budget 2020*. After all, we were told that they had the better plan. The fires of Australia, California and Oregon, and the highest number of named Atlantic storms in a year, just to name a few, tell us that, like COVID-19, global warming is an existential threat. One would have expected a much, greater emphasis in this Budget on the environment, but alas, we are disappointed and being put at serious and tremendous risk.

The *Stabroek News* editorial of Saturday last, 12th September, 2020, was titled *Apocalypse Now*. It asserted:

“Political will is the main obstacle to progress on this issue. The science is clear and so, to a large extent, are the range of measures that would enable mitigation or management of the current situation.”

It is clear that this would be frighteningly absent, that is, the will in this Government. As I begin to conclude my conclusion, I wish to speak about the absence of some of the broken promises which *Budget 2020* has begun to reveal. There has been no mention of free university education, no mention or to put it another way...

Mr. Speaker: Before you conclude, you will need a bit more time. Could someone move the extension?

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Trotman: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the time that you afforded me. There has been an insufficient meeting of the promise of \$50,000 in the ‘Because We Care’ grant. We have not seen the reversal of the 200 taxes that was promised. The former Minister of Finance recently described this Budget as deformed, defective, deceptive, divisive and discriminatory, and he is right. We see as well that, having brought the deficit down to \$17 billion in 2019, it has now ballooned to \$75 billion. We are asking: how this four-fold increase is going to be financed?

I would like, in the last few minutes, to turn to two important areas which the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, would appreciate - foreign affairs and constitutional reform. The work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the indefatigable Mr. Carl Greenidge, was stellar, and these works were continued by former Minister Karen Cummings. We trust that the many gains made in this brief period will be built upon. To this extent, the wise decision to retain Mr. Greenidge in an advisory capacity is commendable. You will find in him a true patriot, a dedicated technocrat and a skilled statesman.

We are aware of the imminent arrival of certain foreign dignitaries. We must be careful that, in the height of the pomp - no pun intended - and ceremony, we do not lose our dignity and self-respect and trade our sovereignty, statehood and hallowed stance of the right to self-determination and non-interference, in the affairs of other states, by agreeing to some unhelpful and unholy agenda that is meant to boost electoral prospects elsewhere later in the year. There has been too much progress made in the last five years as we took our case to the national court of justice seeking a peaceful solution. It would be a travesty of monumental and epic proportions if we found ourselves in hot a mess and threatened.

I turn quickly to the matter of constitutional reform. We have had several iterations over the years, with the liveliest and productive being the period between 1998 and 2001. Admittedly, there were heaps of unfinished business, and we, believing that we had turned for the better, relaxed and put them away, but we were wrong; the issues remained just below the surface gathering strength and becoming more putrid by the day. One day, these eruptions, unless there are direct interventions, will go much further; we hope not.

A mere three sentences were used to portray the PPP/C’s intentions on constitutional reform in the Budget. While it may be premature to measure intention by the length of words, we intend to hold them to their words and to see whether the will is there to carry on the work that was left too long unfinished.

I close and know that my Colleagues will develop these arguments much better, and with more emphasis than I did. Thank you and may God bless and keep us all. [*Applause*]

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Mr. Speaker, let me start off by saying my preference would have been that I come to this National Assembly and speak on the programmes and plans for the future, for the re-established Ministry of Labour that was promised by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

10.48 a.m.

Before I get there, I would like to deal with some utterances coming from the Member who spoke before me. Firstly, he said, and I agree, that all of us must work to ensure that Guyana becomes a better place. The statement is, a man is not judged by what he says, he is judged by what he does. Two Saturdays ago, one King David and little Joe, who wants to be a warlord, went up to a certain place. After they spoke, mayhem took over this country. The judgement, Hon. Member Mr. Trotman, is not on what you say, it is what the people over there do. My Hon. Friend, Leader of the Opposition, Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon, I would say this to you: you are at place that you have to determine whether you want to be a creditable constitutional office holder or a warlord. You have to make that choice, very shortly.

Let me further say to you, for all the people who believe they are warlords, there are still several cells next to Charles Taylor at the Hague, and on that matter, I say nothing more. The Member, in passing, mentioned the General and Regional Elections that have passed. What is the story about the General and Regional Elections? All of you tried to thief a Government. That is the story about the elections and it is as simple as that. You took this country through agony and pain for five months that it will never forget you. You knew you had lost on 3rd March, 2020, the night at Congress Place. Your question and your problem were, how do you say to your supporters that you had lost? You knew you had lost. **[An Member (Opposition): Inaudible]** Yes, I am getting to the budget speech. I have to deal with Mr. Trotman’s tribe first. **[Mr. Jones:** Is this an election debate?] Yes. It is an elections debate because Mr. Trotman started it. Let me say

this to the Gentleman who clamoured over there, I can assure you that none of the young people on the Government’s side of the House has any barber chairs in their houses. I can assure you of that.

The facts are, and you need to be reminded, that the results of the General and Regional Elections of 2nd March, 2020 were that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic got 233,336 votes and the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change got 217,920 votes. We are on the Government’s side because we won the General and Regional Elections by 15,416 votes.

What is sad is that what we saw today is how far the Coalition has fallen from grace. The fact that the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, came into this National Assembly to speak on financial and economic issues, informs us how far the Coalition has fallen from grace.

Secondly, Hon. Mr. Trotman quoted Mr. Winston Jordan. The fact is, if you had that confidence in Mr. Jordan, he would have been sitting somewhere in one of those benches. As it regards many of the issues mentioned, my Colleagues will speak to those matters, I am sure, in the next couple of days.

The Ministry of Social Protection, over the period of five years, saw four Ministers shepherding that Ministry under the Coalition Government. There were four Ministers: Ms. Amna Ally, Ms. Volda Lawrence, Ms. Simona Charles-Broomes and Mr. Keith Scott. You will note that none of them is sitting over there. What did they do with it? **[Dr. Henry:** Excellent.] Excellent, a Member said over there, *a fool’s paradise*. The fact is, today, every department that was under the stewardship of this Coalition, has senior officers who are not appointed. There are vacancies. The Chief Labour Officer (CLO) is also the Deputy CLO and the two assistants. The Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Department had to bring back a retired public servant because there was no one to be appointed – no deputy. I could go on and on. I am told that the gentleman who just left the Ministry, one Mr. Keith Scott, who incidentally did not even qualify to be in the National Assembly, got a lot of visitors at the Ministry of Social Protection, Department of Labour, because he had the best liquor bar of all the Ministers in the Coalition Government.

The Ministry of Labour is to be re-established as indicated. Whilst I stand, I would like to congratulate all the persons who worked on the Budget. This Budget is a people’s budget with benefits for all. The Ministry of Labour, re-established,

will be built and will stand on three pillars: capacity building; human development; and the protection of the rights of workers. [Dr. Henry: What does that mean?] If someone does not understand what human development means, then the person should not be in here.

For capacity building, we would set out to train and re-train workers. We have already put in place activities to do that.

For human development in that context, we believe that workers’ welfares should be looked after – the issues of housing, proper healthcare, education and access to education for themselves and their children. I am sure Members would agree with me that, in going forward, those things we need to do.

The course of action that we have taken is also to ensure that Labour Officers and Occupational Health and Safety Officers are trained to speak foreign languages. We believe that, for them to do their work properly and engage with the influx of persons in the country speaking Portuguese, Spanish and Mandarin, these officers will have to know foreign languages.

Presently, there is no administration, so we have to create a Human Resources Department, an Accounts Department, an Information Technology (IT) Department, a Registry Department, a Public Relations (PR) Department and a Procurement Department. [An Hon. Member (Opposition): Are these new Ministries?] Yes. They are new ministries, because you did not have any. I said when I started that we would be re-establishing the Ministry of Labour.

For 2020, the Occupational Safety and Health Department will continue to implement its programmes of activities in keeping with the objective, which is to improve workers’ working conditions and environment in Guyana and emphasise on preventative rather than curative measures. Our intention is that, every region outside of Georgetown, must have, at least, two Occupational Health and Safety Officers. Presently, they do not exist. Therefore, employers, whether in mining, forestry or whichever area, cannot be properly monitored. Workplace inspections are unheard of and were unheard of under the previous Government in the true sense of the word.

Presently, the Department of Labour/Ministry of Labour, which we are re-establishing, the complement of staff should be 147. Today, as I speak to you, there are only 87 staff out of the 146. That is the condition under which the Department of Labour was ran. That is the reason they could not have done anything tangible for the workers. You could not have had

proper workplace inspections; you could not have had proper investigations of accidents because you did not have the necessary employees to carry out the functions. The Joint Workplace Safety and Health Committee Regulation was approved by Cabinet and is expected to be brought into force. They approved it, yet it languishes. We have to bring it into force. We plan to organise and conduct training seminars and awareness sessions on occupational health and safety. The COVID-19) pandemic means that there is another set of activities that OSH Officers will have to monitor. Therefore, we have already engaged the Ministry of Health to give us the necessary guidance in this regard.

We also propose, as I said, to do staff development. That was unheard of under the last four Coalition Ministers who served the Ministry of Social Protection, Department of Labour.

In addition, the Department had already developed a basic guide for employers in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. A brochure was also developed to provide information and guidance for workers. Those are the things we plan to do as it regard the new pandemic.

11.03 a.m.

The programme outlined is between October and December. The Department will continue to build on these achievements by doing the following things: we have to fill the existing vacancies, as I have said, at the Occupational Safety and Health Department. Presently, the senior staff, the deputy and assistant do not exist and, therefore, the Director has to be four persons in one. That is what we plan to change with some recommendations we have already put forward. We need to and have planned to encourage all workplace parties in all sectors of the economy to implement and maintain COVID-19 protocols for the safety and health of their employees. We have to encourage and establish or resuscitate the joint workplace safety and health committees. We have to train members of the workplace safety and health committees. We have to create awareness for development and advertising of safety and, of course, conduct inspections.

The Board of Industrial Training (BIT) – the Coalition Government took the Board of Industrial Training from what it used to be. In 2015, it trained less young people because the resources were not made available. Many of the necessary programmes, it did not continue with in communities. The objective of BIT... We will expand the programme. Presently, BIT is constructed under a shocking regulation that I did not believe existed in 2020. The regulation is set out for the Board to only train young boys. That we will change so

that young girls can be trained, single mothers can be trained, retirees can be trained and persons who have retired at 55 years old can be retrained to come back into the work environment. This shows how far removed from reality the people over there are. Countries, recognising the loss of skill, have amended the age of retirement from 55 years to 60 years and to 64 years old. Therefore, to capture skills, we will have to retrain to bring people back into the workforce. We will ensure that such programmes happen.

Further, the Bank of Guyana Annual Report posited that the services sector, during the period of 2010 to 2018, contributed 52% to Guyana’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Thus, BIT must be a resource to continue training in the industrial sector as well as the services sector.

Our training programmes will focus on beneficiaries acquiring knowledge and skills for the world of work, thereby increasing their opportunities for productive works, sustainable livelihood, personal empowerment and socio-economic development.

During the 2020 calendar year, we will strengthen our effort to foster stakeholder’s awareness and involvement in the National Apprenticeship Scheme. We will continue to implement the National Training Project for youth empowerment. The oil and gas industry – we recognised that, also, the Board of Industrial Training must implement introductory training courses in oil and gas operations to facilitate sustainable employability.

We have already engaged the American Chamber of Commerce, ExxonMobil Corporation, Tullow Oil and International Labour Organization (ILO), that will help us to do the necessary training so that our Occupation Health and Safety Officers and our Labour Officers can be able to regulate and supervise the space in the Atlantic. Presently, they are land based. My Friends over there had five years and they never thought, in an oil economy, it was important to train OSH officers and Labour Officers in understanding that new economy. That is how much they care about labour and its output.

We have planned to implement blended learning approach to facilitate consistent skill-based learning for the effective and efficient skilling of youth following the COVID-19 pandemic. We are already putting in train... whereby training programmes can be done virtually because of the pandemic that is with us. Going forward, the Board of Industrial Training will not just be a department or an agency that trains people just in the skills of sewing, decorations, and manicure

and pedicure. We have already put in place the systems to ensure that we can train Fibreoptic Installers, Software and Web Developers, Computer Repair Technician, Information Technology and Data Management Specialists, Network Design and Network Analysts, commercial computer-aided design (autoCAD) graphic design and general office administration. These are new programmes that we will implement to ensure that, for the new economies and the new industries that are coming, our people are trained appropriately so they can participate in those programmes.

Our training outlook will focus on quality jobs, related skills training that is founded on industry needs and instituted to develop self-employment, awareness and engagement of the programmes’ beneficiaries. Therefore, all of our training engagements will systematically attempt to produce a productive, innovative labour force consistent with involvement in new and emerging industries as well as traditional engineering industry. In this regard, we have already had conversations with the Critchlow Labour College and the Kuru Kuru Co-operative College to see how best we can collaborate to have these industrial training programmes done. In going forward, we plan to collaborate with all such entities that are involved in industrial training programmes. The Department of Co-operative and Friendly Societies, again, the issue of staffing. The Director is Deputy and Assistant Director. We plan to ensure that the vacancies are filled. We plan to recruit and train to fill vacancies in regional offices, the Labour Department, the Occupational Health and Safety Department and the Co-operative Department, as I have said before. We would ensure that every region has these officers working. I have already indicated that the officers of these regions must be resident of the regions, just as what happened in education and in health where we trained people and sent them back into their regions to work. No coast lander, as they say, will be trained to go to Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. We will find young men and women who we will train and ensure that they go back into their regions to work. We plan to ensure that officers conduct inspections of societies, including credit unions, in their respective regions, to ascertain their status of being compliant with rules and regulation.

I had meetings with co-operative societies and was shocked with the asset base of many of these societies. Therefore, the question that I put to the credit union management and the co-operative societies and the friendly societies management is, why would you have all this money languishing in a bank that in the case of Republic Bank or whichever bank, they are making money on all these billions, and you are not seeking

to invest it in the members of these societies? Therefore, an important conversation to continue with credit unions and co-operative societies is that the millions and billions they have be utilised on the members to ensure that they are housed properly. It is not fair to the members, I believe, that you have all of this money and it is not going to beneficial use. In the continued conversation with the credit unions, co-operative societies and friendly societies, we would seek to see how best they can optimise the moneys they have to be utilised on the workers who should be the beneficiaries.

As I have said, we have conducted meetings with the related agencies. The administration of the department will continue to meet with stakeholders in the interest of societies and for further growth and development areas of agriculture, logging and housing, as I have said earlier. It is because of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) legislation, we have to graduate, upwards, friendly societies to co-operative societies. That is a conversation we are presently having with friendly societies because the Act was passed in 2009. It is 11 years later and we still have dozens of friendly societies that need to be upgraded.

11.18 a.m.

We will work with them to ensure that... [Lt. Col. (Ret’d) **Harmon:** You had six years.] You had five years and you did nothing, that is why you are on the benches there. Under the new Ministry of Labour, visits will be done to meet members and prospective members of societies to inform them and to deal with compliance. Visits are also necessary to ascertain the work of the regional officers.

The Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency (CRMA) has already established a *Facebook* page – what we call a “job board”. Our intention is to ensure that employers and potential employees can relate and, therefore, many of the vacancies can be filled in the private sector and also the public sector. We believe there should be a link between the employers and the employees and the CRMA just playing a minimal role of ensuring that link happens. We plan to put in place a programme to register unemployed persons seeking employment, as I said, to maintain a record and notify of vacancies, mainly, in the public and private sector; and through the job board, match job seekers with vacancies and arrange interviews for job seekers; and provide advice and carry guidance and counselling for those seeking employment.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, can someone move for an extension?

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: I ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Hamilton: I am very much aware of my time and so I was passing some things.

Legislation that is languishing in five years, the four Ministers did nothing to ensure that they were passed. The Labour Act bears a lot of subsidiary legislation to operationalise Acts which were already passed. The Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act to be amended. The Holidays with Pay Act, payment of overtime, the issue of record keeping and the Minimum Wage Order... I am presently in conversation with the National Tripartite Committee. The Coalition Government, since March of last year, has failed to conclude that discussion regarding the raise of minimum wage for private sector employers. Since March of last year, not another meeting was held and so much it cares about workers. One meeting in March and, today, in September, now we are discussing this matter to bring it to finalisation.

In conclusion, as we seek to re-establish and strengthen the abovementioned departments, under the tenants of capacity building, human development and the protection of workers’ rights, we will also engage in new initiatives with the creation of new departments. We are pleased that, in four months, the budgetary allocations we sought from the Ministry of Finance were [*inaudible*] because I suspect there was recognition of the work that this new Ministry has to do that was not done by the people in the Opposition benches. I can assure you, Hon. Members, that by June, 2021, the Guyanese people will see a Ministry of Labour that they desire.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Holder: As we gather here today, citizens all across the nation who are tuned into the taxpayers’ funded Department of Public Information (DPI) will hear all of the budget speeches. What a rude awakening when the Government instructed the DPI to halt the broadcast of the Opposition’s contribution to this Budget.

Bishop Edghill: I rise on a Point of Order. It is Standing Order 40.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Holder, you can proceed. Hon. Minister, let us hear the Hon. Member.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is insulting that this comes at a point during the presentation from a former Speaker of the National Assembly and a former Minister. This is the nature of that Administration.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I am appealing to you under Standing Order 40. The Hon. Member is making allegations where there is no evidence and that is not allowed in this House. Therefore, if he is making such aspersions, he must be able to prove it. This is not an election campaign; this is the Parliament of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Holder, the statements you make should reflect facts. If there are facts that is so, the next speaker from your side can present it or if you have it in your possession, please. Otherwise, we would have to take that off the record. Please proceed.

Mr. Holder: I rise before this honourable House as a true Guyana-man, born to a mother of Indo-Guyanese descent, a father of Afro-Guyanese heritage, while my children are of the heritage of the first people of this land. I believe that, as a Member of Parliament, I am a true representative of all Guyanese. I placed emphasis on this, not to promote myself, but to highlight the discriminatory, divisive and extremely deceptive appearance of the Budget presented before this House.

As a former President’s College student and in my days at the university, I have read many books, but this one in particular has nothing new to offer the average Guyanese. It is a flagrant attempt to hoodwink the nation by classifying it as a people-centred budget when, in fact, other than the projects and initiatives initiated by APNU/AFC, there is very little to benefit the poor and vulnerable.

There are several reasons why a budget of such poor standard was presented to this honourable House. The first reason is the total incompetence of this new PPP/C Government, by that I mean there are too many *square pegs in round holes*. Even those that happen to have some level of qualification were placed in sectors in which they have absolutely no knowledge or experience. It is a total abomination.

The second reason for this degraded Budget is the *control-freakism* that exists within the hierarchy of this Government. I, like most Guyanese, do not believe that the President is in control of his ship. The Administration has masked itself with

a few youths, on the frontline, to conceal an old Hon. Member of this House, who is really the *de facto* President in disguise. There is a saying, *you can put lipstick on a pig, but it still remains a pig*. This so-called “new PPP/C regime” is, in reality, the same old corrupt, discriminatory, divisive and incompetent Robb Street gang that ruled this country for 23 years.

One would have thought that, in the five years it was out of Office, it would have stepped down from its throne and grasped a clear understanding of what this youthful population desires. Instead, it remained out of touch with the people. Upon its return to power, through the back door, in its very first Budget, we see a return of the failed projects and initiatives that benefitted no one except the corrupt regime, their families, friends and colleagues.

One such failed initiative that it is seeking to resurrect from the dead is the highly controversial Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Every Guyanese will recall the secrecy and corruption that encompassed this project, from the hand-picked contractor with no experience building a road to the collapsing of the said road and the more than 150% cost overrun. It was an absolute disaster. *To add insult to injury*, there were numerous design flaws and numerous reports that the falls ran dry from time to time. A simple *Google* search will justify that statement. The project, at a cost of nearly US\$1 billion was slated to be the largest project that Guyana would have embarked on. The PPP/C handled it in a very casual and corrupt manner, similar to the way it handled the Skeldon Sugar Factory and the fibre optic cable. It was the APNU/AFC Government that conducted an independent fact-based assessment, which revealed numerous flaws and risks that threatened its long-term effectiveness and proved to be too costly and burdensome for a small developing State as Guyana. The PPP/C seems to be in a haste to put forward this project without conducting due diligence and without a proper plan. I would like to put this Government on notice that, if squandermania and corruption, as it appears to be, is the order of the day, then the people of Guyana will have none of it. It was due to the many reasons stated that the APNU/AFC Government, justifiably, pulled the plug on this project and quickly took a more broad-based approach towards energy expansion across the length and breadth of this country. It was this current Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon, in his capacity as Minister of State, who first announced that the Coalition Government would focus on an energy mix, utilising hydropower, solar and wind along with natural gas as a prime component.

11.33 a.m.

As this more informed approach was announced, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, in Opposition, railed against it. The then Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, in an interview with the *Guyana Times*, as recent as June, 2019, criticised the idea of purchasing wind power. To the nation’s surprise, the PPP/C Government, in its usual deceptive way, now host about a host of energy mix projects, all of which were initiated by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government.

I am pleased that there are honourable copycats on the other side of the House, who seem to believe in our ideas, which focus on progress and development, and that it did not escape them listing all the projects, as mentioned in our manifesto during our five legal years in Government.

During our tenure in Office, one of our key policies was to bridge the gap between the coastland and the hinterland. As such, the energy sector had a major role in terms of boosting growth and development, including job creation in the hinterland regions. From 2015 to 2020, the Coalition Government expended tens of billions of dollars in the energy sector, with \$8.9 billion budgeted in 2019 alone, to ensure that the road to the ‘good life’ does not only exist on the coastland but is directly connected to the hinterland regions.

In excess of 30 megawatts of energy is expected to be generated in four new towns and other hinterland locations. I hope that the copycats on the other side of the House complete these projects. The solar photovoltaic power plants in Bartica, Lethem, Mahdia and Mabaruma are testimonies of the APNU/AFC Coalition’s commitment towards hinterland development.

The research and consultation done to initiate the hydropower plant at Kato, Kumu, Ituribisi and Mocomoco are testimonies of the APUN/AFC Coalition’s vision for Guyana. The PPP/C, in Opposition, frowned upon these very initiatives but, now in Government, with nothing new in its Budget, as it relates to energy, seeks to deceive the nation and have us believe that these are PPP/C projects.

As the geographical Member of Parliament for Region 2, it would be remiss of me not to highlight the status of the region and the lack of vision put forward by the PPP/C Administration. Before the APNU/AFC came to Government in 2015, Region 2 was in total disarray. What the Coalition met was beyond comprehension. The entire region was traumatised by the daily blackouts, which had crippled

businesses; the manufacturing and agriculture sector and even the health sector, where patients suffered because of numerous postponements of life saving surgeries.

The rice industry, which is the main economic activity in the region, was in a devastating position, with the extremely low price that the farmers got for their paddy. *To add insult to injury*, many rice farmers were made to wait two to three crops before they received that meagre payment. The drainage and irrigation system was in total collapse. The pressure was so astronomical that many farmers abandoned their fields, while others rioted, burned tyres and blocked the main road. The PPP/C, as usual, seemed clueless since it had absolutely no plan to restore the rice industry.

Both the health and education sectors were also in a crippling state. The health sector in the region was constantly rocked by drug shortages where basic over-the-counter medication was a scarcity in the region. This was due to the PPP/C’s incompetence, total mismanagement of the sector and rampant corruption to which it turned a blind eye.

The education sector was no different. The school dropout rate was steeply climbing, especially in the hinterland areas, since the poor could not afford to send their children to school. Many schools were overcrowded and left in a dilapidated state, not very conducive for learning.

Similarly, infrastructure was at its worse. After 23 years in power, the PPP/C had nothing major to show in a region where its support doubled that of the Coalition. It attempted three flagship projects that failed from the inception: the Charity wharf, which floated away into the Pomeroon River; the Supenaam Stelling, which had numerous defects; and the main public road, which funding was secured by the People’s National Congress Government before 1992, but was only completed by the PPP/C, nearly a decade later.

As is the case, once again, the PPP/C neglected communities perceived to be Coalition support bases. Areas such as; the lower Pomeroon, where it refused to clear the main canals, thereby causing immense suffering to the poor farmers; the people of Charity Housing Scheme; Westbury; Danielstown; Henrietta; Bush Lot; Queenstown, which happens to be the first African village bought by slaves; Suddie and Good Hope were all left in the wilderness with no proper roads within those communities. The PPP/C turned its back on Region 2 and so the APNU/AFC Government had a mammoth task to clean up the mess left behind.

The APNU/AFC Coalition, which continues to strive for unity, honoured its commitment to solving these issues and restored prosperity to the region, in every single community, without discrimination. Within the first month of the Coalition in Government, President David Granger delivered on his promise to the people of Pomeroon, providing free transportation *via* the David G boats and later buses...

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

Mr. Holder: ...for other areas along the coast under his Five B’s Initiative. I find it petty and utterly disrespectful for this Administration to remove the ‘David G’ name from the vehicles, but I would say one thing to the Members on the other side of the House, you can remove his name, but you cannot remove his legacy of the Five B’s Initiative.

The progress in education did not stop there. In those five years, four new schools were built across the region. Dozens of schools and dormitories were rehabilitated and extended, fitted with audio and visual equipment, solar power and internet hubs. To solve the many issues in the health sector, the APNU/AFC Government executed a number of successful projects, including; an extension to the drug bond at the Suddie Hospital; construction of the accident and emergency unit at the Charity Hospital, construction of a new theatre at Suddie Hospital - thereby increasing the number of surgeries, construction of a Maternity Waiting Home, providing better services to our pregnant women, and rehabilitation of the Oscar Joseph District Hospital after years of neglect by the PPP/C.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, could someone move for the extension of five minutes, so that the Hon. Member can conclude?

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Holder: Adequate and reliable power was a burning issue and a high priority for the region. As such, the Coalition invested in excess of \$1.8 billion to construct a new power plant that brought much needed relief to the businesses and residence of Region 2.

The rice industry was another major priority. To this end, the Coalition expended hundreds of millions of dollars to construct new sluices, purchase of new pumps and rehabilitate drainage and irrigation systems to reduce flooding

in the region. Hundreds of millions of dollars was spent on farm-to-market roads and to provide assistance to farmers to curb bug infestation and promote higher yields – just to name a few measures taken. It was those crucial investments and our positive policy direction that returned the rice industry in Region 2 to prosperity.

In Region 2, on his campaign platform, the ill-informed Prime Minister told the residences that the PPP/C will return rice production to 600,000 tonnes. I would like to inform that Hon. Member that a record level of rice production was reached as early as 2015, then again in 2019, when we exceeded over one million tonnes of rice. Based on the lack of provision for the rice industry in this Budget, rice production is bound to recede.

Since I became the geographical MP, residents and even supporters of the PPP/C have already been reaching out to me venting their frustration with the many broken promises on full display in the *Budget 2020*.

Our youths need quality jobs, not crumbs. They have quickly noticed that the 50,000 jobs, as promised by the PPP/C, was nothing but a hoax to get votes. I dare any bold Member on the other side of the House to rise and identify any capital expense item in the Budget that will create even 1,000 jobs in the region. There is absolutely none. Instead, what they are doing is using discriminatory methods to put people out of work.

Our poor pensioners are shattered by what was promised and what was actually delivered. There are many disgruntled households that are expecting a decent sum in the school grants, now reduced to a meagre pittance, that only can account for a few weeks’ transportation in many of the hinterland communities.

While the PPP/C provide jobs for its families, friends and cronies, it provides only crumbs for the people of Region 2. Who would have guessed that, with Guyana being an oil-producing nation, during a major pandemic, which has crippled businesses and households, the Government would provide a meagre \$25,000 - an attempt to transform Region 2 into a hamper society? How dare you give us crumbs in flour bags, while your cronies have full shopping baskets?

I close by saying to this nation that this very Budget is not a plan for prosperity, but instead it is the plan to punish ‘we’. Bring back David Granger’s ‘good life’ plan for all Guyanese.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I trust that we are back on audio. Let me thank the Hon. Shurwayne Holder for his maiden presentation in the National Assembly.

A note: we are in a COVID-19 crisis and, as such, as the highest law-making forum of the land – the National Assembly – we ought to set the example. Please, wear your masks.

At this stage, noting that we do have the next speaker, an Hon. Minister and it is his maiden speech also, I would take the suspension at this time and we will return at 12.50 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 11.49 a.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.09 p.m.

Minister within the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Mr. Speaker, Colleagues, Ministers of Government, Hon. Members of this House, I rise to offer my congratulations to you all. I would also like to thank the Hon. Minister, Bishop Juan Edghill, Minister of Public Works, for working with me and the team at the Ministry to gather our presentation. I thank you all for giving me the distinct pleasure and honour of presenting the first PPP/C Government’s *Budget 2020*, since our ascension to office on 2nd August, 2020. I would also like to thank the teams at the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Finance for completing this Budget in record time, in a COVID-19 pandemic.

As I rise to present to the National Assembly our Government’s Budget and vision for infrastructure for the year 2020 and beyond, I would be remiss not to address some of the earlier comments made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, and the Hon. Member, Mr. Holder.

Upon entry into Government, on day one, the Hon. Member and I, Bishop Edghill, did a proper rapid assessment of all the agencies and the Ministry of Public Works to determine what kind of a government we were inheriting. I will so detail the findings and present those to this National Assembly. Before I do so, I would like to first answer the questions and respond to the comments made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, that Guyana is in a good financial state that we found it to be in good financial health, and that this Budget, is a reflection of that. I would say to the Hon. Member and to you, Mr. Speaker, that when we look at the Bank of Guyana (BoG), we found an overdraft of \$83.2 billion in the hole. We did not find it at an overdraft of zero; it was \$83.2 billion in the hole.

In addition, there was another \$77 billion in treasury bills, that they raised money for fiscal purposes to fund, as the young gentleman said, squandermania under the APNU/AFC Government. Now, the PPP/C Government has to find those moneys to bring us back to a position where we are solvent. Right now, at the Bank of Guyana, because of that draw down, it has squeezed the asset base, weakening the backbone of the financial architecture of the country.

I would like to then move on to the issue that they raised about progress, and in the context of answering that, they said that they had progress in five years. I want to respond and let the people who are watching and let the world see, because as I understand this is being livestreamed, whether they consider these items, I am raising before the honourable House to be progress.

The first one: upon resumption of duty on the second day in office, I went to Content, Mahaicony because there were breaches in infrastructure that has long passed the time that the contractor was supposed to fix. The water came in and damaged a whole lot of properties, livestock and the livelihood of the people of Region 5. That contractor continued not to fix it in the timespan which was about three to four months. There were other contractors who finished, but that particular contractor was not able to finish. Mismanagement of that project cost the residents of that region untold amount of damage. We, the Hon. Minister sitting to my left and I, went there and remedied the situation. As of this morning, the other breach, which was a result of the first one, was also fixed. The name of the new contractor is M.B. Construction Services. The name of the contractor that was not doing the work is BK International Inc.

I would also like to talk about the same progress; let us discuss the area of energy. The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL), right now, when we took office, had \$1.9 billion in its bank account. That would have taken it to the end of October, to having zero. The previous Government, when it was in office, lent GPL US\$50 million to buy five generating sets. Each generating set weighs 150 metric tonnes. It is somewhere in Finland. The other part of that contract was for \$994 million for civil works, which will take 10 months long to get done. Right now, as of this morning, there is a 15% completion on that job. That means that the money that was spent there will not be benefiting Guyana or the people of Guyana, until April 2021, thereafter.

The issue with GPL and the blackouts is that the previous Government invested US\$1million only in five years to put

baseload capacity into GPL. This is why you are finding, every day, there are blackouts everywhere. It is because there is zero revolving capacity at GPL. Every time an engine goes down and every time a wire burns there are blackouts. There is zero revolving capacity at GPL. The US\$50 million was added to another \$2.3 million that GPL had to now take from its empty coffers to put it to the project to deal with civil works; further, putting that institution into further financial disadvantage.

Right now, we had put out an expression of interest (EOI), 30 persons plus responded, so we will have to put, immediately, private generation capacity into the grid and that is what we are working on at GPL.

I would not leave GPL as yet. Upon looking at the books of GPL, I found that there is \$13.1 billion that the Government of the past five years owes GPL. It seems that there was a national policy, unwritten somewhere, that you should not pay your light bill. Now, \$13.1 billion represents 4% of this entire *Budget 2020*, which we are looking at; 4% of the Budget is owed by the Government to GPL. So, when we talk about progress, again, looking at GPL, I am not coming off of GPL until I have fully exhausted this matter and the nation knows that over the past three years, GPL has wrapped up \$8.7 billion in losses - \$8.7 billion with a “b” in losses over the past three years. I will leave GPL to rest as I move to the other area.

Let us look at the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). That Authority has a mandate that is very crucial to the aviation sector. That organisation had in its books \$1.17 billion three years ago. The previous Government spent \$800 million in three years. When we got into Office, we found that the management of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority came to the Ministry and said it needed a subvention of \$41 million, just to maintain a four-month reserve to maintain the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Certification. The asset base of that institution, with its cash, has been depleted with record speed; 188% depletion in reserves. I will leave GCCA and move to transport and harbours.

Upon checking transport and harbours, at the end of July 2020, it had \$2.5 million in loss in its books. It did not have money in the bank account; it was zero. Further, when we looked as to why it was zero, we found that transport and harbours had in its books \$945 million in debt. To whom does it owe this money? This money – \$461 million – is owed to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). Those were

moneys that were deducted from the staff and could not have been remitted to the Authority. The second one is \$323 million owed to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). Those were moneys deducted from employees to be remitted on the employees’ behalf to NIS and has not been. It is because the institution just could not afford it. The sum of \$57 million was owed to other small vendors and another \$104 million to some small contractors, and so on. The sum of \$945 million, in the red, was owed to people when we took Office... I want to make sure that is on the record at the National Assembly.

Let us look at the Hinterland Electrification Company Incorporated (HECI). For those who have never heard of this before, let me enlighten you. This company is a holding company for seven other companies which provides electricity to the hinterland regions, including Linden. Linden has 4,597 consumers. To my understanding, this is supposed to be one of the strongest bases for the Opposition. What was found was neglect. Right now, the company in Linden is in the hole of \$726 million. It was underfunded under the APNU/AFC Government.

I continue to say that, only on Friday, I had to make a supplication to Cabinet, Minister Bishop Edghill, the Prime Minister and I – to provide \$89 million to Kwakwani Utilities Inc. (KUI). It has 1,089 consumers for electricity. Kwakwani Utilities Inc. did not have money to pay the workers and to buy fuel to run the generators. There was total neglect for this agency. This particular company provides electricity for, at least, 15% of the Guyanese population, which resides in the hinterland; 15% and it was totally neglected. In totality, with the rest of them, which includes the Lethem Power Company (LPC), Mahdia Power Company (MPC), Port Kaituma Power Company (PKPC), Mabaruma Power and Light (MPL), and Matthew’s Ridge Power and Light (MRPL), the debt that these companies wrapped-up, by providing electricity to our citizens in those areas, went up to \$981 million and that is in the red. We now have to find moneys in this Budget to try and fund it.

There was an issue at Matthew’s Ridge Power and Light that the Hon. Bishop Edghill, immediately, dealt with on day one. We received a call that there were blackouts for about eight weeks. It was because of a 147 kilo-volt-amperes (kVA) generator that was not serviced in time because of a single-path. So, I go back, when we talk about progress under the APNU/AFC, do you categorise that as promised? And my answer is, *hell no*.

1.24 p.m.

I would like to also touch on the matter that the Hon. Mr. Trotman raised about the Budget having nothing new, and about the way things in the country went up under their management. The way things went up is one, but Guyana is lived through the villages. The villages where I come from – the humblest of villages – the country lives through its villages and, at the village level, there is mass job losses. There is depletion of the basic necessities to operate and live. Earlier, somebody spoke about the hospitals; the hospitals do not have drugs. When we checked the records at the Ministry of Health, since late 2017, we are seeing the procurement of drugs. There are no records showing us otherwise.

When one goes to the other villages in the country, the infrastructure is next to nothing. The other day, we had to ‘rush down’ to Diamond where a koker was broken and flooded the entire area. That has never happened before. It broke through because there was no maintenance of a simple koker, and that is something that we see is repeated all over.

I would like to talk about the progress again. Let us look at the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL). On this one, I must apprise the National Assembly that the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited has a \$30 billion bond that was raised for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), one of the areas which the APNU/AFC put 7,000 people out of work – \$30 billion was raised to try and help GuySuCo. As of the month May, only, NICIL was not able to repay the instalment on the loan. It had to take money from the \$30 billion to repay the loan. How can you borrow money for a purpose and then take the same money to repay the loan?

It defies the reason the money was borrowed in the first place. The NICIL has vested also 23 transactions of land in Ogle, Earl’s Court and Le Ressouvenir on the East Coast Demerara; nine have been vested with only two being fully repaid. How can we vest land and transfer ownership, when nobody paid a cent for it? How is that possible in this day and age? Lands were also leased at Peter’s Hall. A total of 181.84 acres of land have been leased to 20 companies. It did not go out to public tender. The rest of the people did not have an opportunity to bid on it; it was secretly done and it was vested to these 20 companies. The worse of it is that the legal documentation was not even prepared by NICIL’s legal team. It was some other legal team attached, purportedly, by NICIL. These are some of the small things that we have seen when we assumed Office.

Let me go back to the issue of the Budget and the size of this Budget at \$329.5 billion. What we have seen over the past five years... and recently, I had to respond to an article by the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan. It stated that the Budget is a private sector Budget and that it does not address people. That speaks, exactly, to the collective misguided philosophical differences between the previous Government and the PPP/C. We believe that the private sector is the engine of growth. The private sector creates jobs for our brothers and sisters throughout the country. You have to make sure that you do not strangle them. That is what happened in the previous Government. It was a strangulation of taxation that caused a lot of them to shut shop and it is reflected in the numbers. I have a lot of papers here. This document is Volume I of *the Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure* that was presented by the Hon. Bishop Edghill, which emanated from the Ministry of Finance.

In 2014, the revenue intake by the PPP/C Administration, in its last year, was only \$135 billion. Look at this, \$226 billion was raked by 2019 year end in taxation. Where did the extra \$91 billion come from? It came from the pockets of the poor Guyanese. The economic philosophy of the previous Government was tantamount to a vampire strategy – sucking the blood out of the people of the country. Every single Guyanese became poorer because \$91 billion was taken from them and brought into the Government’s coffers, all to furnish and help a lifestyle of squandermania.

I want to address some of the issues that were raised by the other two speakers before me and I have to talk about it, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). I went there, again, along with the Hon. Minister Bishop Edghill and I had to read the riot act to a contractor who is over 800 days in liquated damages. Eight hundred days ago this project was supposed to be finished and it is still not finished. We were presented with a report of 914 items that were in defects; 914 items that were not in accordance with the contract. This particular contractor finished MovieTowne and Pegasus Hotel Guyana, but still cannot finish the taxpayers’ airport. The records will prove that the previous Government paid US\$6.7 million to the China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) for delayed works, which was the result of the contractor and not the Government. The then Government paid the people US\$6.7 million for delayed works that the contractor was responsible for. How is that possible that one is being paid for your bad behaviour?

What is worse is that the scope of works, that was originally in the contract, did not resemble anything we saw down there. There was US\$33 million in changes in the scope of works. The scope of works that was changed... I think that the Hon. Member spoke about *lipstick on a pig* – well, *lipstick on a pig* was on the old piece. If you go there now, you will see some *Tarzan*, some wires slinging in the ceiling. That is what you will find there. When you were supposed to get eight bridges, you only have four from a company called Vatable Machinery Company Limited. The Vatable Machinery Co., Ltd. has something called the Allen Bradley system that manages the programmable logic controllers (PLC) systems for these air bridges and they do not work. The Cheddi Jagan International Airport remains a profitable institution, generating its own revenue. For the moneys that were spent to build this airport, a total of \$150 million, we must get the value for it. The Hon. Minister and I read the riot act to that contractor and we expect it to be done according to the revised scope of works by the previous Government.

I would also like to touch on the comment made by the Hon. Member that we in the PPP/C have *square pegs in round holes*. I would like to say to the Hon. Member that, when you were in Government, 67% of your people were pensioners, *come backee* and *bring backee*. I am saying to you that, when you talk about jobs for young people take a look around this table here, at least I am not old.

I want to talk about the education sector - the Hon. Member just said that we do not have a plan for the education sector. How could you, in the previous Government, take away \$10,000 from poor children? How could you have done that, whilst giving away, in the contracts that you signed, billions of dollars to other oil companies? How could you take away from poor children? It is just not morally right.

You spoke about discrimination and about going into the Budget and seeing that the plans in the Budget were only for one set of people. We are a Government that manages for all Guyanese – everyone. I would like to say this to you, I went to Canals No. 1 and No 2. Part of the road at the front was fixed and the piece at the back remained damaged. Do you want to talk about discrimination? That is there for the world to go and see.

The Hon. Member spoke about hamper-country. I remember, with these two feet, walking this country and sharing hampers, but I have never seen none of you from over there sharing any hampers. It is not about hampers; it is about our brothers and sisters who are starving because of the policies

that you put in and people need to eat. That is why the President has put \$25,000 per household; \$4.5 billion for COVID-19 response to each household. [**An Hon. Member:** You have to do better than that.] We will do better than that.

Again, let me come back to the comments made by the Hon. Member who spoke before me. You spoke about jobs and us not providing jobs in the Budget. What is that? You put 30,000 people out of work. You were a Government of unemployment. If you go across the country, 1,972 Community Service Officers (CSO) and 7,000 sugar workers were fired by your Government. What did you do with the mining sector? The mining sector was taxed, everybody packed up their things and left the *backdam*. We are reversing all of those.

Again, the Hon. Member spoke about rice. There is a difference between rice and paddy. Rice is a process and after paddy is processed it becomes rice. If you are promising people \$10,000 per bag for paddy, what will they pay for a gallon of rice at the shop? Think about it. The policy that was put into place for the agriculture sector to tax herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers, is one that is taxing development. The rice sector is a developmental sector and that is why the Irfaan Ali Government is removing all of them.

I would like to talk about some of the good things in our Budget because it seemed that I had to venture off to some of the comments from the other side, that I believe warranted a response. I would like to talk about some of the things that are in the Budget with respect to infrastructure across the country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, that is a three-minute warning for you. You may continue, Sir. That is just a three-minute warning for the first 30 minutes.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: May it please you, Sir. Could I ask, respectfully, for a five-minute extension for the speaker on the floor?

Mr. Speaker: Sorry. I was giving him, the Hon. Member, a three-minute warning to his 30 minutes.

Ms. Manickchand: Sorry about that.

Mr. Indar: I was counting and it is 27 minutes, Mr. Speaker. So, you owe me for that, and I have to be given an extra minute.

Mr. Speaker: You have thirty seconds more.

Mr. Indar: There was a proposal on the table for a bypass road from Ogle to Haags Bosch. That somehow ended up becoming a US\$208 million proposal. Those who were in Government, somehow believed that they wanted it to run to Diamond in the first place.

1.39 p.m.

What was happening was the Government of India only had a line of credit for US\$50 million, so target costing had to be done. I do not know if people have ever heard of it. This is the cost and you model the project to meet the cost.

Day one, President Ali, Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo, Bishop Edghill and I looked at it and modelled it, cost-to-kilometre. When we found the point where we met US\$50 million, it stopped at Haags Bosch. We will be putting four lanes there. We will continue from 7.8 kilometres of road will be going there. The Government of India has accepted the redesign and we will be going forward with this project.

There was another issue about a ferry that goes to Region 1. This ferry is sitting there, the money is there – \$8 million plus \$10 million – which is a loan and a grant. It is to give you a ferry so that the problems of the trips going up from Parika to Region 1 could be alleviated. It took five years to even sit and look at that, to sit with the Government of India to say: “Let us renegotiate. Let us see how we can get this through.” It was never done. In a matter of days, it was done under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government.

The other matter that I would like to raise is the East Coast road which they said they had finished; it is not finished. It is partly finished. There is still money in the account to spend to get the road finished. I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, that the PPP/C Government will finish that road. It seems to me that the previous Government could not finish the road.

The other thing that I would like to speak about is the other major high-end infrastructure that we are going to put in the country. The Demerara Harbour Bridge (DHB) will soon see an expression of interest coming out for a four-lane fixed-span bridge.

We have also started the process of the first leg of the Linden to Mabura road. We have already started renegotiating with the financial institution to get that road finished. Nevertheless, we will get it done. We are a Government that gets things done.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is a good time to seek the extension. This is a good time for one of your Colleagues to seek the extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Indar: Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to the issue of this Budget being a pro-poor designed budget. I would like to put some of the issues that we have raised in this Budget on the table. The first one is the removal of all of the value-added tax (VAT) on equipment for farmers and miners. That, single-handedly, will leave money in the pockets of farmers and miners.

I do not know if some of you have ever been into farming and mining – it is toiling. It is *gong to gong*, as they say in the *backdam*, six in the morning to six in the afternoon. In mining, when you work for a dollar, it is a hard-earned dollar. When you start to tax mining and farming, well you are just being cruel to people. The current Government, the Ali-led Government, has already put in the Estimates that VAT on all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), tractors – you name all farming and mining equipment – will be removed; all gone.

As I said earlier, moving on to some of the other measures, the Ali Government is removing VAT on electricity and water. Electricity is something that embraces the entire population. How can you tax something like that? The child has to turn on the light at nights to study. You are taxing the light that the child is studying under. How can you do that? It is anti-development; it is cruel. You are taxing water. Water is the bringer of life. How can you tax water? Well again, the Irfaan Ali’s Government has removed VAT on water and electricity.

The other area that I would like to talk about is the poultry sector. All of us like to eat chicken. Mr. Speaker, they accused us of having a budget for no poor person. When I am putting the measures before the floor that we put in, they are saying that I am going through all of the sectors. The world is seeing that this Budget is a budget to help people. What is in this Budget, in one year, gives back to the people what you have taken away for five long years. That is what this budget is.

I am going back to the chicken. You all like to eat chicken, you all ate chicken earlier. You all punished the poultry

sector, moved everything from zero-rated to standard rated. Everybody has to pay tax; they have to empty their pockets to pay tax. That entire industry was given a new life by the Irfaan Ali Administration. A new light has been breathed into it.

Some of the other areas from which we have removed taxes, simple items... When one exports his/her goods, everyone who is a businessman or some people who think they are businesspeople, have margins that are only between 10% to 15%. The minute you tamper with that cost-model you end up putting export in Guyana at a disadvantage.

What did the previous Government do? It made everything exempt, so when you exempt the input into the production item, it means that it is a cost to the product. It wipes out the profit of the exporter and makes it into a non-profitable venture. That has now gone. The Irfaan Ali Administration has removed that and has put everything as zero-rated so that you can reclaim your moneys, reduce your cost and operate. We can start up the export industry and make sure that we get foreign income from that. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the reserves at the Bank of Guyana have been depleting because all foreign export earners have been getting a *lash to head*.

The first one was the sugar sector, the second one was the rice sector and the third one was lumber. They started to attack shingles, which brings me to the construction sector. All of the building materials that it put taxes on, Dr. Irfaan Ali has removed them. A poor man can build his home now. You could buy and repair your little kitchen and it would not be taxed.

Before I leave this podium, whenever you go out to eat with your family of four, your wife and your children, you have to pull up another chair because the tax man is sitting there. He is eating just like you. When the bill comes, look at the bottom, there is tax. They taxed everything under the sun. I am saying to you that the Irfaan Ali Administration has seen that. Those are hardship measures and we are removing those things.

Estimates are in the Budget for itemised tax removal for items of production. Items of production tax – there are tax incentives there, so that the private sector can operate and start making wealth again. That is what this country is about – everybody has to make money and we have to facilitate it; Government is the facilitator. Everybody has to make money.

I would like to close by saying that, the Irfaan Ali’s economic philosophy is to drive industry. That is why you will see

infrastructure in housing booming; you will see infrastructure in roads, bridges, and in all of the ports; you will see new hotels going up. That is the infrastructural vision of the Ali Administration and we are here as the executioners to make sure that we get it done. We are a Government that gets it done. That is what we are. We will execute that mandate. The mandate is to build Guyana and build Guyana so that we can admire what we build. Not the brown elephant that you see up the road, not that. That is not something to admire; that is something to cringe at.

Ladies and gentlemen, I rest my case. [*Applause*]

Ms. McDonald: Hon. Speaker and Members of the National Assembly, permit me to extend words of congratulations to the Hon. Speaker on his election to preside over the proceedings of this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, much confidence has been entrusted in you and it is my hope that you would execute your duty with the highest degree of pride and dignity, which, on our side, we feel will foster healthy discussions and development.

Allow me to quote from Mr. Martin Luther King Jr:

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

Again:

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

I, too, am honoured to be here to offer representation to the people of this country and, as a consequence, on this Budget. Please allow me to say to some of my Hon. Colleagues on this side of the House, we are here to conduct serious business and I would urge you and all of us to be accurate in our address to this House and to this nation.

The Hon. Minister reported, in his presentation, about training done by the BIT. May I inform the Hon. Minister that, as close as Region 8, women, men, boys and girls were trained to operate small and large vehicles, machinery, cake decoration and sewing and all the others that you can talk about. When the Coalition Government stood there, we did our homework. So, coming from the training we executed across this country, they were based on where the skill sets were most needed.

The other Hon. Colleague spoke about the Transport & Harbours Department (T&HD), but I wish to say that, in

2015, the T&HD owed \$425 million to various companies. The main reason for T&HD not being profitable was because of the construction of the Berbice River Bridge, which denied the T&HD of being a profitable organisation, in addition to that, there was the extra cost for running the Chinese vessel that was not built correctly.

After careful consideration and perusal of this Budget, one could only conclude that this Budget is deemed to be private sector friendly and not a Budget offering much hope to the working class and the poor people. For us to be effective, it requires a clear philosophical path and, as such, the authors are advised to begin a process of serious rethinking and directing, of which I am prepared to offer these submissions.

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns, to the broader concerns of humanity. The time has come for us to stop calling and just throwing numbers in the air and to address each issue in a cogent and constructive manner. As such, the Budget speaks to the creation of 50,000 new jobs.

1.54 p.m.

It is overly important that when we talk about creating 50,000 new jobs, are we saying to this nation exactly where those jobs are going to be allocated? And, while we are putting those jobs out, at the same time, we are dismissing hundreds and hundreds of persons. May I say to the House that we can only approach or bring reasonable sense to this whole budget planning and all the jobs that we are talking about creating, if only we would put them structurally in place so that citizens can follow and monitor what is happening.

Again, while we are creating 50,000 new jobs and while we, too, embrace offering a solution to one set of workers, the sugar workers, what have we done with the bauxite workers? After 40 days in Office, this sitting Government, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, would have sent home so many persons, not thinking about how they would live tomorrow or how they or their children would get by. Is that the COVID-19 policy? Is that the policy of a caring government?

Oil and Gas, Occupational Safety and Health – as a nation, we are prepared, or we must be prepared for the challenges that will confront us in the oil and gas sector. However, for citizens the world over, statistics would have shown the experiences of exploitation, marginalisation, ethnic conflicts and, most of all, the undermining of our democratic process. We must be prepared to meet these challenges and it is for this reason that this Budget is being debated. I say

considerations must be given for the allocation of funding to address and strengthen the laws in such areas as occupational safety and health, trade union recognition and workers’ education.

As oil and gas continues to be an important part of our development, systems must be put in place. This is so that, every group, region, Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) and every single citizen, regardless of creed, culture or religion, must benefit equally from this process. It is a fact that this does not only apply to employment, but to the contract for the supplying of labour, goods and other services, which must be distributed equally across the ethnic groups in this country. What I am speaking about here is starting a process of an affirmative action, where no racial or ethnic group would be left behind.

This brings me to the point of the continued exploitation of young men and women, primarily in the commercial sectors spanning across this country. It must be noted that the minimum wage has become the maximum wage in the private sector. And, while employees who earn this wage grovel at the feet of their masters’ table, the same employers live luxurious lifestyles and they are buying mansions locally and overseas.

As the Budget consideration is being perused, I call on the Hon. Minister of Labour to put in place the requisite order, to make the \$60,000, agreed upon by the National Tripartite Committee, as the new minimum wage for the private sector employees. You cannot control what happens to you, but you can control your attitude towards what happens to you. In that, you would be mastering change, rather than allowing it to master you.

The labour code commission - the most recent pieces of legislation came out of intense consultations from amongst the social partners. We need to recognise that there are rapid changes which are taking place in our society and, as such, it requires a constant examination of all the existing legislation. It is for this reason that consideration must be given, not only to making resources available for the day-to-day administration of the Ministry of Labour, but for a labour code commission to be established, to work with the prime purpose of addressing the legislation and looking at new legislation. This commission could be drawn from human resources representing Government, employers and workers’ organisations. This is the change that needs to be considered.

Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) and State boards - the RDCs and State boards are asked to carry out many statutory

obligations and to discharge their responsibilities in their respective constituents. In the Coalition Government, when we stood there, not only was it expected that these meetings were required...*[Interruption]*

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I do ask that we reiterate to this House that the Hon. Member is making her maiden speech and, as customary, we allow the Hon. Member to make her presentation without being heckled.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member will continue. You have two minutes remaining before an extension. Hon. Member Ms. McDonald, you still have two minutes remaining from your original time of 15 minutes. Please continue.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The RDCs and State boards are asked to carry out statutory obligations and to discharge their responsibilities to their respective constituents. Not only are they expected to attend meetings but are required to be informed, by way of acquainting themselves with studied positions, which require research, and diligently arriving at positions that will advance the meetings. Ninety per cent of these persons are not executive officers. The time has come for us to be able to address these persons by arriving at a position to advance their meetings. We need to look at a couple of things and I would list them: we need to look at the remuneration of these persons; how they move from place to place; and their schedules.

May I say that, in order for us to be able to effectively function, we must provide the materials that are so necessary to persons who are expected to carry out their functions. These persons must be appropriately quantified and they ought to be remunerated for same. During the life of this Parliament, in this House, I urge that consideration be given for regional councillors and the non- executive directors of State companies and corporations to be considered for incentives and other forms of remuneration in order to carry out their optimum.

De-bunching and Merit Increments - the issue of merit increments has been a bugbear in both the public and the private sectors. For this to be corrected, we, which is the State, here have to start by setting the example. Over the years, the issues of de-bunching have been recognised for teachers and traditional public servants, but the concomitant action has not been taken to correct the situation. As we seek to address the 2020 Budget, which includes its estimate, the Government, Minister of Finance and the National Assembly, must sit and address these matters by appropriating requisite sums to correct the situation. Any failure in taking action on

these issues will, once again, communicate to all workers across this level that their interest is not being seriously addressed.

May I say, in concluding, that the time has come for us to stop the fluff, for us to stop the bluff. We are no longer in elections mode. The time has come for serious business. We must now hold hands, put heads together and lead the way in addressing, not only the concerns, but the problems that confront the working-class people and every citizen in this nation. May I remind us that, in order for our citizens to be able to enjoy the ‘good life’, we must make it our duty to revisit what made us strong, the values, approaches, types of struggles and the continued articulation and publication of our proud history.

As a people, we have a job to do and I would expect that we would do the job that is so allocated to us in a diligent manner. I would ask that consideration be given and provisions be made by the Minister of Labour for all of those workers, including some of my Colleagues here, who were sent home.

In closing, allow me to remind us that we here are one people, one nation, with one destiny and together, the Opposition, the APNU/AFC will rise and will be on the other side of the House.

I, thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Narine: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride and honour that I rise to address, for the first time, this honourable House. I am humbled, as I stand proudly on the shoulders of other trade unionists, whose contributions in this august body brought fundamental and significant improvements to our working people. I believe that tradition is one that ought to be continued and that is my advice to the Hon. Member, my Colleague, sitting on the other side of the House.

My first intervention in this House is, indeed, special as I speak to the national 2020 Budget, which would impact upon the lives of every Guyanese and align our development thrust with the needs of our people. Much was said by the other Hon. Members across the House. One has to be reminded and the teachers must be reminded about this, that, it was under the previous People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government that the Guyana Teachers’ Union (GTU) was able to have agreements after agreements. As compared to the APNU/AFC, when teachers stood up, rightly for their rights, what were they told? Greedy, selfish! What a shame! I just wish to advise the Hon. Member, that, sometimes, we need to

remember our friends and, in so doing, as trade unionists, we ought to respect what is right for our members.

2.09 p.m.

When one talks about a better life under the APNU/AFC Government, it was \$91 billion of additional taxes, which was punishment for the Guyanese people and that is what one has to fairly look at.

We were told that *Budget 2020* is private sector friendly and not for the working people. Well, these are people who are speaking without any vision. I do not think that they would have listened to Minister Bishop Edghill, neither did they read the Budget itself. [**An Hon. Member:** Maybe they do not understand.] Maybe they do not understand. That is right.

Then, we talked about political appointments. What about bauxite workers and so on? It was the APNU/AFC Government that caused 30,000 odd people to lose their jobs in this country. Let them say if this is not true. In the *Mid-Year Report 2017*, the record showed that unemployment in this country was 13%. Thereafter, a number of sugar workers and others – the Barama Company workers, the dealings with the bauxite people – they left. All these jobs. After that, they never published the numbers again. Shame on them. Then, at that time too, the rate of poverty was 30% of the population. Let them tell us now, under their watch, what are those numbers. Let them say it.

One talks about workers’ rights and protecting workers. The GFC, which was once a profitable entity, could not have paid salaries for a few months. A bonus of \$25,000 was awarded in 2018. Our Hon. Minister had to, recently, bail the GDF out to provide that money so that the poor workers could be paid. Then we are talking about the protection of workers and workers’ rights.

The trade union recognition - it is appalling that there is a Trade Union Recognition Board that has not been functioning for many months now. The Hon. Member talks about \$60,000 and calls on the Minister to make an order. The Minister has what is necessary, two things, which the lady minister could not have and which the former Minister maybe did not have, but our Minister of Labour is going to make that order of \$60,000. Where were you since March, 2019, when it was unanimously approved that the minimum wage in this country should be \$60,000? Where were you?

The reestablishment of the Ministry of Labour is a living example of the PPP/C’s commitment to respect the working

people and having placed a ministry to address their problems at work.

We are told again, I want to repeat, that this Budget does not have anything for the ordinary people. It was indeed refreshing to listen to my Colleague, the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, articulating plan after plan, initiative after initiative and programme after programme, all geared at improving the well-being of all Guyanese. Certainly, it was a much welcomed and marked departure from the budgets we have had in the last five years, when Guyanese feared what next would be increased and what else would be taken away from them.

Budget 2020 marks the first step in the journey to reverse the vampire-like policies that plagued our nation over the last five years, when the Coalition speared no one except themselves. Guyanese had to pay all the way *from the cradle to grave*. That was the life the Coalition condemned the Guyanese people to, while their elites, through here, there and everywhere, had benefitted from healthcare in faraway lands. At the same time, many poor Guyanese faced troubled times to put meals on their tables and could not get drugs from the public hospitals and health centres, and many of their gains were sucked away by the Coalition Government.

Budget 2020 is a pro-people progressive budget with significant attention to lifting our working people, putting them to work and making them and their families comfortable, while building a better and stronger Guyana for our children. This is a Budget of hope for all Guyanese, where we will see our nation’s prosperity benefitting all and not a few, as we saw during the Coalition Government. Over 30% of the Budget has been allocated towards the health and education sectors. This is equivalent to more than \$100 billion being spent in probably the two most critical areas of our country. This is a clear signal of the priorities of the vision of a government that cares for its people.

As someone who has been closely associated with the sugar industry for many years and, more so, the struggle of the sugar workers, their families and their communities, the Budget was a breath of fresh air. It is no secret that the Coalition purposefully sought to demolish and destroy the sugar industry to their own nefarious ends. There is no other reasonable explanation for the Coalition’s attitude to the industry and the tens of thousands who depended on its operation. Sugar production last year was the worse in 80 years. During the life of the Coalition, sugar production fell by over 60%. The Coalition Government, prior to its election,

said it had all the answers, but certainly it had the wrong answers.

Before the closure, at the head office, there were 395 persons employed. After the closure, there were 505 persons, despite four estates being closed. They are talking about efficiency and employment of people and so on. It had to be employment purely for their cronies. There were so many other people and production fell.

His Excellency President Mohamed Irfaan Ali pledged his commitment to reopen the closed sugar estates and to once more breathe life into those communities, which the Granger and Nagamootoo Administration turned into ghost towns. *Budget 2020* demonstrates that commitment with the allocation of \$5 billion for the sugar industry. Over 7,000 sugar workers, in the midst of a yuletide Christmas season, were put on the bread line in a most callous, cruel and heartless act, described as the largest retrenchment exercise in post-independent Guyana.

One could never forget the 6th December, 2017, *Stabroek News* newspaper, the front page screaming out, “2,000 workers sent home at Skeldon Sugar Estate”. In that same publication, there was a picture of the former President David Granger petting elephants in Africa. What a shame. That was how the working people were treated in this country. What sort of government was it? What kind of leader puts thousands out of work without any plan to deal with the fallout? Did it not have any compassion for those workers and their families? It was leased concerned about how these Guyanese citizens would eat, send their children to school or pay their bills. If that was not spiteful, then tell me what it was?

That is not all. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, has already put together a team to commence work for the reopening of the Skeldon, Rose Hall and Enmore Estates. In fact, the Hon. Minister, accompanied by the union officials, including yours truly, along with technical personnel, visited the closed estates for meetings with people. The dark clouds and hopelessness which hovered over the sugar industry over the last five years will disappear as the dawn of a new era unfolds under this PPP/C Government. What we saw on the ground was nothing short of criminal. Billions of dollars in equipment was left to rot in the sun and rain by the APNU/AFC when it was in Government.

I am heartened that this PPP/C Government has begun the process to have a capable board of directors with a competent

management team. The industry has several possibilities to success: opportunities for electricity production, refine and package sugar, alcohol – I hope my Comrades over there are listening – bottled molasses, among other things which assures a successfully and viable future. Over the last five years, much was lost and the sustained efforts to restore the industry’s viability was torpedoed by an unsympathetic Administration, that certainly did not understand or possibly did not care about sugar’s importance, not only to its workers and their families, but to our entire nation and economy. Among their sins was five years of no increase in pay to the sugar workers. For five years, notwithstanding, all State employees received increases each year.

In conclusion, I must complement our team of the PPP/C Administration which, undoubtedly, worked tirelessly to bring this Budget in a short period, despite the challenges they confronted. Foremost must have been COVID-19 which, like sugar, was badly bungled by the Coalition, is only now being proactively addressed, with billions being channelled to bring relieve and heighten our response.

I see, too, the Budget making active efforts to address the infrastructure deficit and the paucity in Government services too. These are welcomed developments which will redound to all our people. As I said before, this is a Budget of hope. It brings Christmas in September. *Budget 2020* has something for everyone and is indeed a true plan for prosperity.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I just want to remind the House that we have a number of maiden presentations, and we ought to pay our first presenters in the National Assembly the courtesy of some amount of quiet as they make their first presentations. With this, I call the Hon. Member, Mr. Devin Sears. Hon. Member, you may make your contribution.

2.24 p.m.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make this presentation, be it my main speech, for the 2020 Budget, I rise with humility, firstly, to the Almighty God for His continued grace and mercy towards me. Secondly, I must express heartfelt thanks to the people of Upper Demerara-Upper Berbice and the citizens of Guyana for their vote of confidence in the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change and their consistent prayers and words of encouragement. There are also many people who played a critical role in my life and to

whom I need to say thanks. In the words of recording artist, Koffee, “gratitude is must.”

To you, Mr. Speaker, I extend my gratitude for your continued professionalism and commitment to the administration of your peers in this National Assembly. Similarly, I express thanks to my Colleagues, Members of the winning team, who will be back in Government soon and to the Leader of the Opposition, Lt. Col (Ret’d) Joseph Harmon, for his dedication to service and his commitment to excellence.

I crave the indulgence of this honourable Assembly to also thank my mothers, Joy and Desiree, for their love, guidance and support; my children, Tahelia and Jaheem, who continue to be my motivation and encouragement with every hug and smile; my supporting team, Raphael Trotman, Larry London, Karry Sears and party executives, along with local leaders. Most importantly of all, I want to say thanks to the resilient and powerful people of the constituency I represent, Linden, Region 10. I recommit myself to work for your professional advancement and for the development of all communities. It has not been an easy road but, together with your councillors, we have made great strides. With your participation and your continued support, we will achieve the vision we have set for our homeland, Guyana.

As I address this honourable Assembly, two words come to mind - Guyana first. For emphasis, I repeat, Guyana first. Guyana is unique, culturally, ethnically, religiously and even politically. Spanning over 83,000 square miles, we are temporary inhabitants of the lost city of El Dorado. While here, we must coexist and find strength and unity, while working towards one common prosperity and equality goal. We are Guyanese first. I quote Mahatma Gandhi:

“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not every man’s greed.”

On Wednesday, 9th September, 2020, Member Bishop Edghill presented a budget, which does not represent the will of the people; a budget that lacks merit, vision and progressiveness.

I am forced to reflect on my Colleague Trotman’s opening remarks, which highlighted the striking dissimilarities of a Government that embraces a ‘good life’ for all Guyanese as against a fraudulent Government that snuffs the wealth out of our people’s pockets. The nation’s Budget is supposed to point the way forward and show clear and specific terms or priority programmes to achieve key developmental

milestones. The Members on the other side are lucky to have inherited an economy that is growing and flourishing.

When the APNU/AFC took Office in 2015, we quickly brought back democracy to the people of Guyana by reintroducing local government elections. We have lessened the national debt, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) 2019 economic survey, to 1.7% of the country’s GDP – the lowest in Latin America and Caribbean.

We have introduced telecommunication and internet access throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. We have embraced alternative energy, as outlined by the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) and, further, President Granger’s vision for a decade of development. These are examples of the forward planning that is needed. As a country, we are on the brink of great wealth with the emerging oil and gas industry. The Members on the other side seem near-sighted.

As I considered its implication on the lives on all Guyanese, it became clear that this Budget is incomplete, incoherent and innately not credible. My constituency’s feeling towards this Budget is despondency. Upper Demerara-Upper Berbice’s overall estimated budgetary allocation is \$4.2 billion, but this still leaves much to be desired, since 53% of that allocation goes straight to employment costs. Once again, like pre-2015, it reveals that the bauxite-mining community has been sidelined from real economic development. This Budget does not cater for new investments, new transformational infrastructural work nor job creation.

I met with many healthcare professionals who shared dissatisfaction with the provision of the package that this Government has given them. They still work under substandard conditions. They lack personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators and, for a community of over 50,000, they have only one COVID-19 testing kit. This is unacceptable.

I must highlight to this House that Medical Laboratory Technicians (MLT) in my region are not given risk allowance. I ask this House to ensure that our health workers or frontline workers are well represented in this budgetary provision.

I could proudly boast that, for the first time in history, under the APNU/AFC Government, a Regional Agricultural Unit was introduced. I could continue to boast that we have commenced work from the Millie’s Hideout road to Berbice

River, which will allow farmers to transport their produce to the mainland. I must make recommendation on behalf of my constituency, given the fact that we have heightened farming in the Berbice River, a Tacama savannah road is needed urgently to serve Ebini, Kalkuni and the lower Berbice River.

As I reviewed the budgetary allocation under 2020 programme for Public Works my constituency, it became clearer that this Budget, again, does not have any transformational projects. It seems to me that *Budget 2020* titled, *Our Plan for Prosperity* is an atrocity. Better yet, it is a Lego building-block budget because this Budget builds on the legacy of the building of the APNU/AFC’s vision for a better Guyana. Take, for instance, the Wismar-Mackenzie Bridge and, also, what we spoke about earlier, the Lethem to Linden Highway and the Linden Soesdyke Highway, for all of which we have found funding. I humbly ask that the intellectual authors of this Budget review Region 10’s plan of action for regional development, which focuses on enhanced environmentally sustainable economic and development.

As Guyana develops, history will judge us on how we take care of the elderly and new generations to come. It is disappointing to note that the pensionable increase is a measly and frivolous \$4,500. Might I share with this House that it was the intention of the APNU/AFC Government to increase the pension to half of the minimum wage, which would have taken it to \$35,000. This regressive Budget does not cater enough for youth empowerment and development, very well knowing that over 65% of our population are millennials, who are currently at risk.

According to *Trading Economics*, Guyana’s unemployment rate, as of 2019, was at 11.9%, one of the lowest in history under our Administration. It is my fear that the unemployment rate has risen, given the fact that a lot of our hardworking young people’s contracts have been terminated by this very Administration.

Therefore, I have some questions. One of the questions that all of our young people are asking, like my Colleagues would have shared, is: where are the 50,000 jobs that were promised? I have a specific question to Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton. Those persons who were terminated within the last month or so, some of whom are sitting on my side, are you going to make representation for them when it comes to training and accessing more jobs? We need to rescue our youths.

There is no subvention for my constituency when it comes to sports association, no visible increase in technical education

and no major provision for support in the cultural industry, such as the creative arts industry. To our youths, hold tight, we will be back in Government soon.

The public sector workers want to know, again, where is the 50% salary increase that was promised by this Administration. They want to know why it was not catered for in this year’s Budget.

Regretfully, RUSAL Bauxite Company’s workers’ contracts were terminated and there are talks in the air that they will be resuming soon. What is the Government’s plan to protect the rights of Guyanese who continue to be abused by international investors?

The Government’s budgetary plans, during this COVID-19 pandemic, with regard to education, leaves much to be desired. The idea to use the Guyana Learning Channel Trust, along with radio broadcast when it comes to the curriculum, is lethargic and a frivolous facade to show the Guyanese people that they are doing something. Have you thought about persons in various regions who have not been afforded these amenities? Again, you are building on the legacy of APNU/AFC because every school across this nation has internet access through the former Ministry of Public Telecommunications. It is clear that we continue to widen the gap between the 1% wealthy and those who have none.

Easy access to transportation is important when it comes to my constituency. Given the fact that the oil and gas sector is growing and our economy is growing, we will be trading very soon with Brazil. I believe that an aerodrome is needed in Linden. At this point in time, we have two airstrips. One of the best in this country, which has two miles of asphalt, is in Linden, and another one in Kwakwani, which needs urgent repair. Let me make it pellucid, those airstrips...because we have gotten word that someone is trying to privatise them. I speak on behalf of my constituency, the Linden Airstrip and the Kwakwani Airstrip are not for sale.

Permit me to identify the major impediments of our country’s development primarily those drafted in this weak Budget and identify real solutions to those problems. As we have seen, Guyana is in a time and a place where it has met its lowest in history, when it comes to the healthcare system and where uncertainty is paramount. It is at a time when everyone’s pride and the dignity of our people have eroded. As a lecturer for over 10 years, I have been trained to identify flaws and offer critique so that I get the best out of students. Last week, I observed the Government making lousy excuses, while submitting an inconclusive and incoherent Budget that does

not give a prosperous life for all Guyanese. Government commended itself by saying that it had 21 days, when, in fact, it had since 21st December, 2018 to complete its homework.

The APNU/AFC introduced a Five Bs Initiative, which the other side has inherited, that works. As a former lecturer, I give the Government five Ds, some of which you already know. This reflects *Budget 2020*. It is defective, deceptive, divisive, destructive and deformed.

2.39 *p.m.*

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

Mr. Sears: As I conclude, I say to the Government, go and do your homework.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: We now have the Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, for his maiden presentation.

Mr. Datadin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon. I rise to make my humble contribution to the 2020 Budget debate. Indeed, it is my maiden speech in this House as well.

Firstly, as my Colleagues have done, I wish to offer my warmest congratulations to Minister Bishop Edghill, the staff of the Ministry of Finance, the staff of the Ministry of Public Works and the staff at all the other Ministries who have put together this Budget in record time.

It is important that we understand that this Budget is required because it has been 640 days since this House has considered a budget for this nation. The Hon. Member, who spoke before me, said that we should have done our homework. He said that there is a reduced budgetary expenditure for Region 10. If he would look at the *Estimates of the Public Sector for the year 2020 Volume One*, page 570, for 2018, there is \$3,408,842; for 2019, there is \$3,810,148; and for 2020, there is \$4,181,157.

This Budget is intituled, *Our Plan for Prosperity*. It expressly states that it is, among other things, to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. It is unusual that, 50-odd years in a country like ours, it is so crucial and important that we focus on the rule of law again. The rule of law, as we all know, has been around since the time of Aristotle. That is essentially what guides civilised societies. The legal philosopher, Mr. Dicey, has the modern incarnation of the rule and, that is, the law must apply to everyone, including the lawmakers, the

government, enforcement officials and those who hold public office.

In the last five years, the rule of law has been eroded before our eyes. In the last five months, the five months that followed the 2nd March, 2020, it was practically murdered on television daily. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] Did you not win any? It has been 640 days since the Government fell in a no confidence motion.

The last time this House considered a budget was 14th December, 2018. Indeed, in excess of \$160 billion of this present Budget is to pay all the expenditure that took place from 1st January to 2nd August, without parliamentary oversight and without any oversight whatsoever.

We cannot wait for the period 21st December, 2018 until 18th June, 2019 for a Government and for the leadership of a country to figure out that 33 is the majority of 65. We cannot wait 179 days for leaders to appreciate, understand and apply the most elementary principles of Mathematics. The rule of law was undermined because the Coalition, as the Government of the day, wanted to not respect the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*. The Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) had to tell the Coalition Government that 33 was indeed the majority. It then took another 20 days, from 18th June, 2020 to 8th July, 2020, for the APNU/AFC Coalition to understand that article 177 of the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana* was obvious. Votes had to be counted. There was a rule. Valid votes... I am not sure what else you were thinking of counting, but governments are elected by votes.

Now, the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, has said – if I heard him correctly – that no weapon formed against the APNU/AFC shall prosper. I humbly submit to you that he is wrong. It has been formed already. It is called the Caribbean Court of Justice. That weapon stood for the people of Guyana and against the destruction of the rule of law and it continues to do so.

Governmental abuse: since the no confidence motion, which presented a very clear proposition, the Government of the day fell. The *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana* is clear. Our leaders are expected to read and understand English. They are expected, also, to give effect to the words of the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*, and not to play games and not to hide behind mathematical fallacies. Since the no confidence motion, there have been four cases, principally, that have engaged the court. There was, firstly, Compton Reid against Bharrat Jagdeo; there was

the Ulita Moore case; there was the Eslyn David case; and there was the Misenga Jones case. What was the abuse? All these litigants had lawyers from across the Caribbean who were paid for by the State of Guyana. How could this be? If there is a secret legal fund available to some members of the society and unavailable to the citizens at large, we think that it should be disclosed. I have been in practice for more than 22 years and I have never heard of the Government funding litigation against itself. In fact, one does not need to be a Government to figure out that is ridiculous.

The five months after the 2nd March were characterised by the Coalition doing everything within its power to undermine the rule of law. The attempts to rig the General and Regional Elections 2020 were transparent. They were even childish. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*]. The Hon. Member on the Opposition benches, who is speaking, would know about that. On a daily basis, he would be on the television spinning tales. When it was discovered that those tales were false, he would invent more. He would have a good business writing children’s stories. It is only my humble suggestion.

Seriously, no government should be permitted to undermine the will of the people and to use the courts and the court system as an instrument of oppression to delay and undermine the declaration of an election result. Legions of Members of the Opposition took to the airwaves and social media to create false narratives. That undermines the rule of law. The leaders must never ever do that.

We all know that parliamentary oversight is essential. It is essential and it is a pillar of a democratic society. The Government must account to the people. The taxpayers must have an explanation as to how their moneys are being spent. Guyana has not done that for 640 days. We all knew that the absence of parliamentary oversight was because of the no confidence motion. The remedy for the no confidence motion was an election within three months. We did not have to do that which we did. We did not have to play games. When the Government fell, there should have been an election within three months. The mere presentation of a budget by the Hon. Minister in this House is a monumental step in restoring the rule of law and democratic principles, which have been under threat in this country since December, 2018.

2.54 p.m.

The mere presentation of a budget in this House represents the restoration of parliamentary oversight over Government spending. The mere presentation of a budget in this House represents the restoration of constitutional mandates that all

Government spending must be approved in this House. The mere presentation of a budget in this House represents democratic principles and Guyana must be proud that this is being undertaken. Guyana must be proud that it is being undertaken in the record time with which it is. Mr. Speaker, as you well know, the preparation of a budget would usually exceed 120 days. This has been done in five weeks.

Having regard to the undeniable lack of progress, the undeniable lack of supervision and the undermining of the rule of law, perhaps, the Members on the Opposition side would concede this debate. They had nothing at all. At least we have a budget.

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

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask for five minutes for the Hon. Member to conclude his debate speech.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Datadin: The Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, mentioned, this morning, that Guyana has had recognised and positive growth by reports from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He did not tell you of the debt that has been left behind. It is incorrect to equate what an economic indicator of growth is versus what a government’s financial health is. They are two different things. We are now a petroleum-producing country. There are different considerations. The private sector would be driven because they are interested in recovering that resource.

I just wish to raise, in this House, a few things that took place when they did not have supervision and when the rule of law was undermined. Global Witness, an international organisation, has said that the Coalition entered into arrangements into a contract with ExxonMobil Corporation that will cost the Guyanese taxpayers approximately \$55 billion. The report is available online for anyone who wishes to read it. That is about US\$1.3 billion a year; that is \$15 million for every man, woman and child.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, rushed to execute that contract. We have heard all sorts of things about the why, but there are certain things that we must understand, and we must know what is in that contract and what the nation and this Government have to deal with. There is something in this contract, at clause 32, called the stabilisation clause. It states that if there is any change, if the Government amends laws or there are different taxes, ExxonMobil Corporation is entitled

to a guaranteed return, which means if they are to make less money, the Government has to make up the difference. These are not things that any person who is involved, in the slightest way, in the oil and gas sector would have in a contract any longer. It is no longer used. It is outmoded. [Mr. Ramjattan: Are you a lawyer?] In the same court that you are. That stabilisation clause is what we have to deal with.

We have heard for years about local content policy. Having done a bad deal for the Government, the Coalition did not do the decent thing for five years and have a local content policy that would have helped the citizens. There is still none. One is now being put in place; an advisory board is there. The Budget states, very clearly, at page 59, that we are going to implement it. It will be in accordance with the Santiago principles. It will be so that there would be no non-disclosure of any transaction. There will be involvement from civil society. These are the things that must be done if Guyana and the nation are to benefit.

Finally, I only wish to raise one simple but effective anecdote that has been told to me by my old lecturer. In a petroleum country like Guyana, where we are a blank slate, we have to put legislation, we have to put regulations and all of it in place and we have to build the capacity to negotiate. It is like making bread. If we are to make bread, the ingredients have to be good enough. We need to do that. We need to have the proper equipment for the baking of the bread. We also need the people to monitor the bread so that it does not burn. The most important part of the bread is the people, the flour. But, I dare say, if the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman’s, dear mother, God rest her soul, had sent him for bread like that and he had brought back what he brought back to the Guyanese people, he would have gotten *licks*. We cannot be saddled with things that the Coalition ignored. Maybe they did not know. Maybe they did not care. Maybe they deliberately did it. It was incompetence and we could see, at page 59 of the Budget speech, that we are addressing it - support for creation, building capacity, social and economic infrastructure.

I Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: We now welcome, for her maiden presentation, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as you have so eloquently put it, I am about to embark on my maiden speech to this honourable House. I had my points for speaking well documented and jotted down, but I am afraid that I am suffering from some alarm because I

think I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, admit to the *weaponisation* of the Caribbean Court of Justice. Was that what we heard? As an Attorney- at-Law, that is cause for alarm and I think that is cause for concern to the entire Guyanese public.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank you, and it is with a profound sense of humility that I arise to address this honourable House for the first time. I wish to place on record my appreciation to the APNU/AFC Coalition and our supporters for their confidence in me. I am mindful of the oath I took, standing here some days ago, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the people of Guyana, represent their interests without fear, with true faith and allegiance and without ill will.

Before I come to my thoughts on what has been presented to us as *Budget 2020*, I wish to say that the love of country and service to country are values that were instilled in me as a little girl growing up on the Corentyne Coast and then in Linden. It is this love of country that has seen me, throughout my professional career, in service to the people of Guyana, across various portfolios and across various administrations. This was so up until a few weeks ago, when I was told by the current Administration that my services were no longer required.

At this juncture, I cannot help but note, with amusement, the Hon. Member Mr. Indar referencing the fact that the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority is staffed by *come backees* and returnees. Well, I am neither a *come backee* nor a returnee. I stayed there and worked in service to the people of Guyana. What would be even more amusing, if it were not sad, is that the Hon. Minister has recently appointed a *come backee* as his advisor on aviation. So, we see through those empty platitudes and complaints.

I wish to say that, as a Guyanese – notwithstanding being relieved of my post, I am first a Guyanese – I am fortified in the words of the Scripture. [Mr. Dharamlall: *Inaudible*]. Thank you, Mr. Dharamlall. I am fortified by the words of the *Holy Bible* which states that, “all things work together for good”, and I believe that this has worked for my good, as I am now in a position to be of greater service to the people of Guyana. I wish to say that, unfortunately, the Government of Guyana is poorer for its decision.

As I turn my attention to what has been presented to us as the 2020 Budget, it is not lost on me and I will enjoin us to not lose sight of the fact that this Budget is being presented in a particular context. Two very important contexts: the COVID-

19 pandemic and the ever-deteriorating state of law and order in our country that we have seen over the last 40 days and 40 nights.

I wish to record my alarm and my grave concern at the rapid deterioration of law and order that we have seen, and I am very happy that the speaker that preceded me spoke so empathically on the importance of law and order. We have been plunged, over the last few weeks, into the depths of ethnic strife, reminiscent of our descent into those dark days of the 1960s, which are recorded in the annals of our history. I will say that it is my view, as a Guyanese, that the blame for this current state of affairs must be placed squarely at the feet of those who, in their thirst for political power, unabashedly, fan the flames of racism and intolerance in our country, or those who, in their silence, were complicit.

Over the last 40 days, we have seen the constitutional rights of Guyanese trampled upon. We have seen the orders of our courts violated by those who took an oath to protect and serve. Yet, I am sure it is not lost upon us, when we sit quietly in our homes and in our thoughts, as history has shown us time and time again, the day of reckoning will come.

3.09 p.m.

The day of reckoning always comes. But, again, and at the risk of being accused of exhorting a sermon by my Colleagues on the opposite side of the House, I want to admonish us that, “they that sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind”. The speaker preceding me referenced flour in what can only be seen as a very crass remark, given the fact that my Colleague would have just lost his mother.

“The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour. Were it to yield grain, foreigners would swallow it up.”

[**Mr. Hamilton:** Those are Burnham’s words.] Those are actually the words of the *Holy Bible*, Hon. Mr. Hamilton. And so, it admonishes us that, were it to bear fruit, foreigners would swallow it up.

As I am speaking about foreigners, I want to register my disappointment at the failure of the 2020 Budget to set out a coherent and comprehensive vision for Guyana’s foreign policy. The framing of foreign policy is indispensable for the modern state. This is even more the case for small developing states such as ours. Our foreign policy here in Guyana must perform the delicate balance of balancing the national interest, whilst acknowledging our interdependence in an

ever-contracting global village. National development takes place within the context of foreign policy. In this regard, one would have expected that the current Government would have seized the earliest opportunity to clarify its foreign policy position to the people of Guyana, and clarify it must! If for no other reason, than the fact that we have witnessed, in our very recent past, unprecedented levels of interference by foreign powers in our last General and Regional Elections, the obviously biased and, at times, downright disrespectful utterances have not gone unnoticed by Guyanese. Far more disturbing is the silence of these same foreign powers over the last few tumultuous weeks in our existence. As most right-thinking Guyanese, I am forced to ask and I am forced to wonder whether this is the desired state of affairs for our beloved nation.

It is to be recalled that the David Granger-led Administration, which advanced the matter of the resolution of the Guyana/Venezuela dispute... the furthest it has ever reached on the road to a final settlement at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In this regard, we welcome the commitment to a bipartisan approach to this matter. We are also pleased to see the current Administration express its interest in protecting Guyana’s sovereignty. But, were I a prognosticator, I would venture to say that, given recent developments, this commitment is one that will be severely tested in the coming months. As a citizen of Guyana, the recent foreign policy actions by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic-led Administration is cause – for grave concern. From its departure from the time-honoured international conventions, as evidenced by Guyana’s support of the United States of America’s (USA’s) candidate for the presidency to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to the fear of our citizenry that Guyana is about to be inserted, front and centre, in the USA’s geopolitical engagements, our people deserve answers.

We are expecting the highest-ranking USA official to visit our soil but this visit seems to be shrouded in secrecy. The people of Guyana have no agenda. They have no idea what the agenda for this meeting is. The people of Guyana have no idea as to what this visit will cost taxpayers. It begs the question: why is this visit shrouded in such secrecy? We want to admonish that, as a small developing nation, we have to ensure that we do not become entangled in the geopolitical interventions that can be detrimental to the people of Guyana. The people of Guyana deserve answers. What is it that we agreed to? What is it that was promised? How does any action, on our part, have deleterious consequences on our case currently before the ICJ? We deserve answers.

We fear that we are beginning to witness a departure from the consistency in position taken at United Nations (UN) by the APNU/AFC Government and a return to the very erratic voting patterns that characterised our pre-2015 international engagements. Guyana has gained much by establishing itself as a reliable partner in regional and hemispheric stability. It would be unwise for us to depart from this form of diplomacy. The strengthening of Guyana’s multilateral diplomacy and the improvement of the regional and hemispheric international presence depend not only on sound policy, but also on the calibre of our foreign service personnel. It is our view that the study of our international relations, the understanding of our national interest and the practice of our diplomacy should not be left to chance. Our foreign service personnel are on the forefront of the actualisation of our foreign policy. It was with this in mind that the APNU/AFC Coalition Government reengineered and re-established the Foreign Services Institute, which was, for all intents and purposes, put on hold and allowed to fossilise under the PPP/C Administration. The aim is to ensure that Guyana is equipped with a core of edified and competent diplomats. We are proud of the fact that we have been able to assemble a multi-ethnic cadre of ambassadors, truly reflective of our multi-ethnic makeup.

We remember, with alarm, some years ago, hearing a senior functionary of the PPP/C say, under oath, that there were no Afro-Guyanese qualified to be ambassadors. They were proven wrong, and so all of Guyana waits, with bated breath, to see what our ambassadorial appointments will look like. The tenure of the APNU/AFC Government was characterised by a steady...

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

Mr. Jones: I do ask for five minutes for the Hon. Member to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Walton-Desir: As I was saying, our approach to foreign policy has been steady and studied. For the record, I wish to record – time is now against me, so I cannot be exhaustive – some of the accomplishments as it relates to foreign relations. It was the APNU/AFC Government that identified Guyana’s Chairmanship of the Group of 77 (G-77) and China as a strategic priority, which has resulted in Guyana’s ascension to the Chairmanship of the G-77 in January of this year. It was the APNU/AFC-led Administration that established, as a discreet unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the

Bilateral Affairs Department and which has, over the last few years, concluded a number of bilateral agreements, including the establishment of diplomatic missions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Republic of Ghana. Cognisant of our ever-increasing prominence on the international stage and being committed to the promotion of international law and order, the APNU/AFC, over the course of its five years in Office had ratified or acceded to over 25 multilateral treaties in the important areas of environmental justice, the protection of children, the protection of the marine environment and international shipping.

As I am on the topic of marine environment and international shipping, I must say that, given the anticipated growth in maritime traffic as a result of increased offshore activity, we would have hoped to see, in this Budget, some emphasis being placed on strategic planning within the maritime sector. We wish to strongly recommend that maritime spatial planning be given urgent priority in the immediate, term, as there is need for a cross-cutting policy tool, which will enable a strategic and integrated approach to the management of our maritime space. We wish to strongly urge the commissioning of a national maritime and port sector master plan. Such a plan will serve to strengthen the internal competitiveness of the maritime and port sectors. I hope that the Hon. Bishop Edghill is taking notes.

Under the APNU/AFC Coalition Government, the aviation sector soared to new heights. Guyana, as a State Party to the Chicago Convention, has achieved record compliance with the requirement of the Convention on International Civil Aviation. Guyana’s level of effective implementation in 2015 stood at a mere 44%. Today, we are at 74.4%, far above the global average of 60%. I would venture to say that this should address the Hon. Member, the Minister within the Ministry of Public Works, as it relates to expenditure. Such a level of effective implementation could never be achieved unless one hired competent personnel and spent money on improving the aviation and air services infrastructure in Guyana. This accomplishment has earned Guyana the International Civil Aviation Organisation Council President’s Certificate for being one of the 10 most progressive states in aviation. If there ever were a sector that is right for a bipartisan approach, it is the civil aviation sector. I know that no person here who, when he gets on a plane, save he is of nefarious intent, is not interested in arriving safely to his destination. We therefore need, at all times, the best people for the job.

In closing, I want to note another stellar achievement: the commissioning of the National Civil Aviation Master Plan

that has provided Guyana with a 20-year strategic plan for the seamless development of the civil aviation sector.

Finally, in closing, I wish to say that, as a new entrant into the field of politics, I chose to mount the platform of the APNU/AFC Coalition because I believed, then, that it represented Guyana’s most positive steps towards an inclusionary democracy. I am now sure that I made the right choice; I am very sure that I made the right choice.

3.24 p.m.

I will say that the time for pettiness and the time for the winner-takes-all paradigm, that has come to characterise our politics, is over. The time for race-based politics in Guyana is over. The people of Guyana deserve better. I wish to say that Isaiah Henry deserved better. I wish to say that Joel Henry deserved better and, certainly, Mr. Haresh Singh deserved better. So, today, I add my voice to the clarion call for justice for our sons. May their senseless deaths ever serve as a memorial to our failure, one that reminds us every day and one which demands of us that we forge a better Guyana. We can and we must.

I thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Just a notice to the Committee of Selection, at the suspension, we will be meeting in the Dome to carry on the meeting of the Committee of Selection to deal with some urgent business.

Mr. Charlie: I bring greetings to this honourable House from the people of Region 9, Upper Takatu-Upper Essequibo. From my Macushi brothers and sisters, *meyarimang*. From my Wapishana brothers and sisters, *kaimen* and from my Wai-wai brothers and sisters, *kadowahay*.

I have listened attentively to the contributions to this Budget debate and I have noted some remarks made by the Members of the Opposition. The Members of the Opposition in this Parliament tend to forget where they were and where they have failed. Thus, they forget that this Government, when in Opposition, reminded them that they were failing the Guyanese people. They were standing on sinking sand and, thus, they are now occupying the benches of the Opposition because they have tremendously failed the Guyanese people.

The Hon. Mr. Raphael Trotman alluded to the Budget earlier this morning that it is not cohesive. I ask the Hon. Member to read this Budget...

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order. My Colleagues in the Opposition are conducting themselves in a manner that undermines the identity of the Indigenous peoples of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for the record, you should state the Point of Order or which section of the Standing Order that is being violated. I do not consider that a Point of Order.

Mr. Charlie: That is the attitude of those agents over there: disrespect to the Amerindians. For five years, the Amerindians were disrespected and later on in my presentation I will tell you how we were disrespected. I now get back to the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman. I urge the Hon. Member to read and understand this Budget presentation and he will see that this Budget is cohesive.

The Hon. Member, who is the representative from Region 2, alluded to the Kumu Hydropower Project. The Hon. Member needs to go to Region 9 and see if that hydropower project is in operation. I stand here to set the record straight and to say that no such project was implemented under the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. The people of Region 9 were promised an aerodrome at the Lethem airstrip. I ask the Hon. Members over there, where is the project?

It is misleading when Members of the Opposition try to paint a picture that everything was bright and beautiful in the Amerindian communities under their tenure when, at the level of the village, it was a different reality. An Hon. Member alluded to the court. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic will only go to the court when its citizens’ rights are threatened. We will not waste our time and go to the court to prove 32 is more than 33. We will not do that. We stand resolute with the people of Guyana and we are in Government to protect their rights.

I, like my Hon. Colleagues on this side of the House, who spoke before me, rise to make my contributions to this Budget debate. Firstly, I want to extend my congratulations to the Hon. Minister, Bishop Juan Edghill, for presenting this Budget, which is inclusive and equitable. Appreciation is also in order for the staff of the Ministry of Finance who have worked to make this Budget ready in a relatively short timeframe.

Before I touch on the impact of *Budget 2020* on hinterland communities, please allow me to digress a little. A national newspaper, dated 1st October, 2019, which was then working as one of the propaganda arms of the Coalition regime, was spreading wrong information under the caption:

“Nappi residents overjoyed about first-time water access in homes”

Under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration, before the questionable Coalition won at the polls in 2015, the water sector had experienced unprecedented progress and development, as focus had been placed on ensuring that residents across the region, including Nappi Village in Region 9, have access to safe drinking water. Residents across the region had access to potable water in their homes as a consequence of the PPP/C’s Government investments in strategies and methodologies, including but not limited to, solar water systems, drilled wells, trestles and gravity feed systems.

The PPP/C Government, during its tenure, had evidently transformed the Amerindian communities. It is an incontrovertible fact that Amerindian development became a prioritised reality under the PPP/C Administration, through specially designed hinterland programmes. Again, the PPP/C Government will continue on its progressive and development route.

Budget 2020 caters for numerous socio-economic initiatives towards the implementation in all hinterland communities, with the intention and aim of bringing hinterland development in conjunction with coastal development, without sacrificing traditional morals and customs. Thus, ushering in qualitative changes for the well-being of all Amerindians across this country.

Primarily, the ultimate goal of these development projects in *Budget 2020* will make the hinterland communities self-sufficient and, once again, with self-administration under the village council facilitated under the umbrella of the first ever Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, which was brought into being under the Jagan-led Government of 5th October, 1992... We shall not forget that it was the then President Cheddi Jagan who designated September as Amerindian Heritage Month and honoured the first Guyanese Amerindian Member of Parliament, Stephen Campbell, by naming 10th September Amerindian Heritage Day.

I now turn my attention to the presidential grant. *Budget 2020* caters for the necessary funds for the presidential grant which will significantly impact Amerindian communities. The presidential grant will allow many Amerindian villages to implement empowerment and development projects.

Land titling and demarcation: the implementation of the US\$10.7 million, which the Coalition Government had

inherited in 2015 for the land titling project, should have provided absolute grants and certificates of title to Amerindian communities. This programme, in 2013, had targeted Amerindian villages and the process should have been completed by the end of 2016, but it came to an abrupt halt under the Coalition Administration. The PPP/C Government, under the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, under the competent Minister, the Hon. Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, will fix it and deliver the needs of Guyana’s first peoples.

3.39 *p.m.*

Tertiary education and further afield: spread across the hinterland regions are approximately 250 schools and all will benefit, inclusive of Annai Secondary School, Aishalton Secondary School, Sand Creek Secondary School, all in Region 9; St. Ignatius Secondary School, Paramakatoi Primary School and Kato Primary School, in Region 8; and not forgetting Waramadong Secondary School, in Region 7.

Through the intervention of *Budget 2020*, secondary and primary education will be easily accessible, as it caters for hinterland students from all remote areas as well. This will be made possible....

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes without an extension.

Mr. Charlie: Social assistance: *Budget 2020* caters for the National School Uniform Programme and it will aid thousands of Amerindian students. The programme will positively impact students’ school attendance and performance. Each student in the hinterland schools will, once again, benefit from the PPP/C Government ‘Because We Care’ initiative as a further incentive to ensure Guyana’s children attend school.

Hinterland scholarships: *Budget 2020* caters for the Hinterland Scholarship Programme and it will provide academic facilitation for the furtherance of studies, both at the secondary and tertiary levels, for all hinterland students.

Transportation boost: Amerindian communities will, once again, benefit from the PPP/C Government from transportation assistance in the form of tractors, all-terrain vehicles, boats and engines and pickups to aid in community projects. Students will benefit to go to school and also for emergencies, among others.

Road infrastructure: in order to create greater linkages between Amerindian communities and improved access to

goods and services, *Budget 2020* caters for sums to construct new roads and maintenance of existing ones, which the Coalition Government neglected for five years.

Health services: *Budget 2020* will ensure Amerindians receive much needed healthcare. This sector was neglected under the Coalition Government, however, the residents of the hinterland can rest assured that health services is one of PPP/C’s priority.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Could someone move an extension for the Hon. Member to conclude.

Ms. Manickchand: I am asking kindly for five minutes in order for the Hon. Member to conclude his speech.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Charlie: I can go on and on to mention the numerous achievements, progress and development initiatives that will take place across the hinterland regions under the PPP/C Administration. Prior to elections in 2020, it was evident that the Coalition Government, using State funds, was traversing across the hinterland, distributing handouts and trying to bribe residents using State resources in its bid for the Amerindians and hinterland residents to give it another chance at the just concluded elections.

Fooled us once, shame on the Coalition party. Fool us twice, shame on us. Despite their best efforts, they could not fool Guyana’s first people a second time. We collectively voted for peace, progress and prosperity. The PPP/C, under the wise and caring leadership of our President, Dr. Irfaan Ali, our Vice-President Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo and our Prime Minister Brigadier (Ret’d) Mark Phillips...

Guyana’s history is replete with stories of People’s National Congress led electoral violence. We have seen five months of political unrest in our country and this was caused by the Coalition parties. Amerindians will never forget that the Coalition Government established a commission of inquiry to investigate their lands, concretising its narratives of Amerindians not being the first people to Guyana in an attempt to usurp Amerindian people’s land. Also, labelling Amerindians as greedy and that we should not benefit from the oil and gas sector, for which the Coalition Government, over there in the Opposition now, never apologised to the Amerindian nation.

It is a fact that we, Guyana’s first people, laud the *Budget 2020* theme: *Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law,*

Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation; and Enhancing Welfare, which speaks volume of a competent and caring Government. People, from all walks of life, can now breathe a sigh of relief, since this budget addresses a plan for inexorable climb to the attainment of prosperity for all who strive to achieve.

Budget 2020 will strengthen the Guyanese peoples’ social compact and fulfil the promises of equal opportunities for all to prosper. *Budget 2020* will transform our country’s economy, particularly, in the Amerindian and hinterland communities, since the PPP/C Government, through this Budget, will strengthen our social demographics by ensuring all benefit from the fruits accrued through the prudent and caring leadership of the progressive and astute administration construct.

No one can say that this Budget is not a people’s budget and my presentation, this afternoon, proves to all that this Budget is inclusive. This Budget is equitable. It is a people’s budget. In this Budget no one is left behind. Everyone has a bite of the pie in the 2020 Budget; even you over there and your supporters over there will benefit from the 2020 Budget and so, speak to the budget as benefitting everyone in Guyana.

Inclusive and equitable is what the PPP/C Government is all about. It is what we believe in, regardless of one’s political affiliation, regardless of race, religion or gender. This is what the PPP/C is about, and I ask the Hon. Members, over there, to come and join us as we move our country forward as one people, one nation, with one destiny.

I ask the Opposition Members to support this Budget. You have a constituency, let them benefit. Do not deny them because the 2020 Budget is a budget for everyone and is a plan for prosperity.

With this, I ask that the Budget be supported and that we move the development process from here. Our people need us, our country needs us; you have wounded our country. It is time to rebuild what you have broken.

As I take my leave, I ask that the passage of this Budget be endorsed by everyone.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. We have the Hon. Mr. Vincent Henry to take the floor next. I want to allow Mr. Henry to continue past 4.00 p.m. so that he can conclude. So, let us allow Mr. Henry to conclude his maiden presentation in the National Assembly beyond the time for the suspension.

Mr. Henry: On behalf of the Guyana Action Party (GAP), a member of the APNU/AFC Coalition, and the people of the hinterland, I do express sincerest condolences to the families of the boys who were brutally murdered on the West Coast of Berbice and demand that justice be served.

One favourite slogan that all Guyanese heard recently was *forward ever, backward never*. Having examined the budget presented by the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill, I have come to the conclusion that this Budget before us can only be called a backward Budget, especially, as it relates to the Indigenous people’s affairs.

We are currently celebrating a virtual Indigenous people’s heritage month of activities. It is, however, noted that the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs seems to have run out of ideas, or is now under some sort of iron curtain where ideas are not encouraged to float. The programme hosted by this Ministry is lacklustre and devoid of innovation. This year’s heritage activities could have included virtual storytelling, poetry writing and reading, solo singing competition, among many others. We could have also used this opportunity to give recognition and substantial awards to outstanding Indigenous persons in various sectors of life, such as the foremost balata figurine maker in Guyana and the world, Mr. George Tancredo; the father of community-based tourism in the world, Mr. Sydney Allicock; our cultural icon, Mrs. Dorothy Ferrier; former Member of Parliament, Hon. Phillip Duncan; and many others.

In this instance, we have to ask the current Minister of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs to become inclusive. Do not lock the door on other Guyanese who have a contribution to give for the development of this country and the Indigenous peoples. There is nothing to be gained by keeping others away because you perceive them to be Opposition people. Take a leaf from Minister Allicock and let us work towards a celebratory, but meaningful heritage month of activities for the rest of the month and future years to come.

3.54 p.m.

Our history dictates that we remember the Hon. Stephen Campbell, our first Indigenous person who became a Parliamentarian in Guyana on 10th September, 1957. This honourable gentleman is remembered for his struggles to ensure that the Indigenous peoples of Guyana gained land tenure *via* land titles and demarcations. It is unfortunate that he died before he could have seen a major milestone of his work being achieved, when, at Independence in 1966, Guyana and Great Britain agreed that we would be granted

what he fought for. On behalf of the Indigenous peoples, the first peoples of Guyana, I call on the relevant authorities, including the Government of this country, to begin and carry the process to facilitate the granting of the 10th September as a national holiday. Is no one clapping? Are we not supporting the Indigenous peoples? What about the Opposition? Shame on you. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I should not go so far.

We have seen the renaming of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs to the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. One wonders if this was done because of sheer ignorance. I say this because if one should examine the word Amerindian or the name Amerindian, it clearly shows that it was made up of two parts, ‘Amer’ plus ‘Indian’. The first part, ‘Amer’, has its genesis from an Italian explorer by the name of Amerigo Vespucci who, between 1497 to 1505, made trips to what is now known as North America. From his name Amerigo, the continents are known as North and South America.

However, this explorer, Amerigo Vespucci, was known to have pillaged Indigenous settlements and killed the people using his superior weapons. He was said to have captured over 200 Indigenous peoples and forcibly took them to Spain as slaves. After him, many more invaders came and tens of millions of our ancestors were decimated by massacres or by diseases brought by the invaders. All of these atrocities are associated with ‘Amer’, part of the word Amerindian.

The other part of the word, ‘Indian’, came about because of mistaken identity. Christopher Columbus, in 1492, arrived in the Bahamas and thought he had reached the East Indies while travelling across the ocean, so he mistakenly called our ancestors whom he found there, ‘Indians’. For the Ministry that represents the Indigenous peoples of Guyana to be named the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, it would not only insult our intelligence but it is also says that it does not matter that our ancestors were decimated like unwanted animals and it does not matter that a mistaken identity was pushed down our throats. Even more so, it would not matter if these atrocities were to be repeated on us today and to our future generations. What a shame to go back into that part of our history and call us by that name.

This Budget sees the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs making a decision to rehire the 2,000 Community Support Officers who were supposedly fired. In the first place, the CSOs were never fired by the APNU/AFC Government. When Minister Allicock took Office in 2015, his team found a cheque that was cancelled by the PPP/C Government. This cheque was to pay the CSOs for the month of April, 2015

prior to the elections. It was the PPP/C who cancelled the cheque; it was the PPP/C who fired the 2,000 CSOs. Shame on you. Yet, you can go on television and keep repeating that fallacy. I do not want to say ‘lie’. You repeat it like the German psychologist or whatever you call him, to say a lie, over and over to make it sound and become true. You fired the CSOs.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, ‘lie’ is a word that we do not use in the National Assembly.

Mr. Henry: Pardon me?

Mr. Speaker: “Lie’ is a word we do not use in the National Assembly.

Mr. Henry: I will humbly retract.

Mr. Speaker: Please continue.

Mr. Henry: Minister Allicock and his team then had to lobby and find funds to pay the CSOs their last payment. After an assessment, the APNU/AFC Government launched the Hinterland Youth Entrepreneurial Programme (HEYS), thereby the youths of the hinterland communities continued to get the \$30,000 per month. It was not stopped. However, the APNU/AFC’s HEYS programme have positive, sustainable benefits for both the youths who were trained and Indigenous communities at large.

The PPP/C’s CSO programme was very limited in scope. It gave each youth on the programme a sum of \$30,000 per month. The youths on that CSO programme had no supervision; there was no monitoring and no evaluation. There was no training in any way. Every now and then some of the CSOs, all decked in red t-shirts, were taken somewhere to picket against the then APNU/AFC Opposition. Imagine, they went to picket the Opposition.

To date, approximately 4,000 Indigenous youths were trained under the APNU/AFC’s HEYS programme. In this programme, our youths not only received the \$30,000 per month, but received training in entrepreneurship, mastering English, tourism, agriculture, leadership, public speaking and many more skills. There are some who are quick to parrot anything that the PPP/C Government says. I have read that one Indigenous leader, who says he is the Opposition but really he is a full-out PPP/C strong man, parroting that the HEYS programme was a failure. Allow me to give a few examples of what our youths have done and are still doing because of the HEYS programme. There are many successful projects owned by young men and their wives who were

trained under the HEYS programme. For example, in Parikwarunawa Village these include several swine farms, corn and peas farms, thriving groceries and the selling of petrol, *et cetera*.

As you travel across the Rupununi, you hear about and see many success stories. Allow me to hail the Two Brothers’ Technology Centre in Ruperti. I hope you are listening, hearing how people have been bad-talking the Indigenous youths of Guyana, making us look as if we cannot do better. I am a youth also. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] I am a big youth. With the kind of training that over 4,000 youths received from the HEYS programme, I am sure that our hinterland people stand a better chance of doing well for themselves, wherever they go or in whatever they choose to do. To change the name of the programme, which had so many positives, to one that was not satisfactory, is to go many steps backwards.

I noticed that a number of solar systems will be procured and distributed in the hinterland. This is good, but it would be a waste to purchase and distribute systems that are inferior and have low outputs. The moneys would be better spent in buying and distributing high-quality systems that can provide more than two lights, that would allow our children to read and study in the evenings, and allow us, the bigger, older folks, to make handicrafts before going to sleep. The balance of these systems could then be purchased in the 2021 budget.

Further, I ask that the support for the Hinterland Green Enterprise Centre and the Bina Hill Institute Youth Learning Centre be kept on the front burner. These are transformational projects that have served and will continue to serve the youths of Region 9 and Guyana as a whole.

I wish to put on record that the APNU/AFC Government did magical developments in the hinterland within its five years in Government. That made me wonder who wrote the Hon. Member of Parliament’s speech for my region. My Hon. Members of Parliament, water systems were established in locations that did not have, and a basic right was fulfilled.

This APNU/AFC Government began and dug deep-water wells. Indeed, the whole of South Rupununi, and almost everywhere in the Rupununi, deep-water wells were dug. In Nappi, which was mentioned, it is indeed true, because I went there and a pensioner told me, personally, that he had to fetch water up the hill all his life. He was happy that APNU/AFC Government gave them water at their homes.

The building of houses for persons in need was continued. Radio stations were established, wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) systems were installed and functioning in most villages, transformational roads and concrete bridges were built at Manari, Lethem, South Rupununi and other hinterland towns. Lethem has a high-quality road in the centre. In the past, we used to get ‘biscuit’ roads that broke in six months and the red mud was what we had to live with all the years. The APNU/AFC gave us long-lasting roads in Lethem. Not only that, the Manari bridge is a concrete bridge – one of the first in the region. We have set the example for good development and we ask that this Government continue; learn from us and continue. The Hunt Oil road and the road from Lethem to Georgetown are still standing after the last rainy season. Now, it is a driver’s paradise. Normally, it was always down.

Region 9 recorded the highest pass rate at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) during the APNU/AFC five years of Government. One child gained about 22 or 23 passes with high grades.

Even COVID-19 was afraid to run wild during the APNU/AFC time. Now it is running wild.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, now is a good time for someone to seek an extension for you.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Henry: In closing, when you add up the number of land titles granted since Independence to our Indigenous peoples, you will see that, combined, the governments, under the Presidencies of Mr. Burnham, Mr. Hoyte and Mr. Granger, granted more titles than what the PPP/C did in all their years in government. Roughly, 18.8% of Guyana’s land mass was granted to the Indigenous peoples. Out of that, 14.4% was granted under those Presidencies and just approximately 3% was granted under the PPP/C.

Time does not permit me to elaborate, but one thing that all the hinterland people know is that the APNU/AFC Government has done more positive developments in its five years in Government than what the PPP/C did in its 23 years. I will repeat that because my people know it is true.

In closing, I just want to say that a \$10,000 cash grant was granted to our people for a period of 23 years. That works out to \$500 or less per year.

Indeed, the health of our region is very important and, therefore, we ask that the regional hospital in Lethem be upgraded to become a one-stop regional hospital. Today, it is very improved, but it is time to go forward to become a one-stop hospital.

I thank you for listening, and may God bless the whole Assembly. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Now is a good time to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 4.09 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.16 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: I will try to ensure, henceforth, to give each person speaking a two-minute warning towards the end of his/her original time. Thank you very much.

Hon. Minister, Mr. Kwame McCoy.

Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister [Mr. McCoy]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Please permit me to publicly extend my congratulations to you, on your elevation to the noble Chair as Speaker of the National Assembly. I have every confidence in you that you will meet and exceed the high expectations of this illustrious House of representatives.

Mr. Speaker, I rise on my maiden presentation to this House, and I am here to represent and to give support to the national *Budget 2020*, presented one week ago by the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill. It is a Budget which we, the Government, were able to put together in a short and a record time of 21 days.

I wish to say that I take this opportunity to acknowledge, as well, my distinguished Colleagues on the other side of the House and my Colleagues in the Government, and to say that I look forward to us working together in the best interest of Guyana and its people. I want to say that, in working together, we must recognise that the people out there are expecting the best of us in every possible way that we may represent them and will represent them.

I want to start my presentation this afternoon by recognising, first and foremost, that we have a sacred responsibility first of all in our presentations to reflect the best in terms of accuracy and to present the right context in those presentations.

Throughout this debate, from the commencement this morning, I heard speakers from the other side criticise the Budget. Nothing could be said to be constructive; all seemed

to be just a mere putting together of words. If there were any charges or a charge for the misuse or misrepresentation of words, they would all be in jail.

When we talk about accuracy, accuracy must be what it means. It must be that we understand, first of all, what we would like to present and whether what we present is rooted in facts or fiction. Therefore, you have a choice of either going along the right path or going down the road of being very fictitious in the presentations to mislead or misguide, as we have seen.

I will start with one of my Hon. Colleagues on the other side, who spoke just before the break, Hon. Mr. Vincent Henry. For the first time in Guyana since 2015, we have heard that the CSOs, who were fired by the APNU/AFC Government, were instead fired by the PPP/C Government. That is so appalling that one could imagine how much it took from the Hon. Member to actually tell a story of that sort and to actually believe that we could sit here – or anyone on the outside listening – and would actually believe what was said by Mr. Henry.

I then heard another Member giving a comment about the Caribbean Court of Justice, trying to pick up from what the Hon. Mr. Sanjeev Datadin had said. Just remember that the courts will always be our weapon against those who try to keep us out from democratic principles, norms and what has been the convention in this country; those who try to hijack our democracy; and those who try to deprive the people of this country their will to elect a government. The CCJ and every layer in our judicial system ought to be the weapon against such actions.

What did we inherit coming into Government just about a month ago? [**Mr. Mahipaul:** A good system.] We inherited a good system of mismanagement all across this country, in every sector. In every Ministry, there was total mismanagement. So yes, Hon. Member, that will be good by the measurement of your own standard – the level of mismanagement that pervaded our country under the APNU/AFC Government.

There is dilapidated infrastructure all across this country. We have seen dilapidated infrastructure and broken systems right across Guyana. Every single Ministers can point to where we have seen a total breakdown in systems and infrastructure right across this country.

There is corruption – massive corruption – yes, well known to APNU/AFC. Regarding the level of nepotism and cronyism,

when you go to the ministries and across this country, it is everybody and their mother, father, cousin and sister in the public service, hired by the APNU/AFC Government. That is the nepotism that we talk about.

When one looks across this country, one understands why the APNU/AFC was so afraid to leave Government from 2nd March. It is because we would have been breaking up their family ring and they did not want us to break up the family ring.

The misuse of funds – I am no economist or financial expert, but my Colleagues here have already given you examples of that and will continue, during this debate, to demonstrate how much our funds have been misused. Not only were the funds misused for the simple sake of it but, also, there was a total refusal to follow the laws of this country in terms of how money should be spent. The tendering process was ignored and there were all sorts of behaviour, not in keeping with what is expected based on our financial laws.

There was double-dipping employment – one person employed at two, three, and four places. They hold on to their jobs as if they have a God-given right to be employed in two and three places across the Government and the public service. This is what is horrible about the APNU/AFC practice and their pervasive lawlessness.

Complete disrespect for the Constitution. My Friend, my Hon. Colleague, Mr. Datadin, could not have put it better, in describing what happened over the last few months in this country and, in fact, from the no confidence motion of the 21st December, 2018.

If you look at all that was said here and what we have known, we have had a country in which the APNU/AFC Government has been the most indecent in the history of Guyana. We have never had a government that has ever been so bad for the people of this country. Bad to the extent that it was just a few in the Coalition Government that enjoyed the cream and enjoyed themselves. In fact, they had no business about the ordinary man; absolutely none about the ordinary man. It was Mr. Joe Plumber and others who wanted to cream the sweet. [**An Hon Member: Inaudible**] Well, you said it. We have to know that here.

Thank God that the people of this country were not cowered by the actions of the APNU/AFC. From the inception of the court actions about whether 33 versus 34 is higher or greater or lower, to whether people from overseas flew in on election day and voted or not, or whether there was an impersonation

of a dead man voting, the people of this country stood up against all of those manufactured claims about electoral fraud. Today, we are here, thank God, under a People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government that will take this country to the level it ought to be.

Now, many people can talk, and they speak, but whether what they talk or speak about is genuine or not, is always the question. I want to assure you that, on this side, you have true patriots, true nationalists, true persons interested in the development of this country and we will work hard every single day to demonstrate that and to make sure that our country is that great place we all dream about.

5.31 p.m.

We inherited all of the mess. What can we do? We have a choice; we can leave the mess or we can go along a pathway to development, clean it up and bring the solutions to the problems which exist and have multiplied under the APNU/AFC Government. The nature of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic is about fixing things and making things happen – making things happen for the ordinary man and for every segment of our society and – making things happen in a way that our citizens will all be included and all feel part of a Guyana that we all dream about and want for ourselves.

Last night I was speaking to two persons, one from Antigua & Barbuda and one from St. Lucia, and already, from afar, they could feel the wave of positive development taking place in Guyana. Could one imagine in this short time, albeit for four months, that an emergency budget was put together that will allow our country to change its course? It will go along the lane of making sure that our people develop and that we give a chance to the development, we believe, of people who are going through all of this suffering and punishment, not only because of COVID-19 but because of the APNU/AFC which brought it on the backs of the people in this country.

With respect to the distribution of hampers and relief packages to our citizens in Guyana, I heard Members on the other side frowning on the fact that people are getting hampers and a \$25,000 cash grant. One may wonder, where do these people live? I mean, those who are criticising this. Where do they live? To note, just a few short months ago, they did absolutely nothing for the people of this country. It was all about your many Colleagues trying with a hustle to make sure that when they came, they will have enough money in their pockets with the Tiwaris, Harrys and whomever they are. They did nothing, but yet they criticised

an effort which was commended by hundreds of people across this country. As we took the cameras around and spoke to people, we received the phone calls and the messages that are totally appreciative of the effort. This is just the beginning. As my Colleague is reminding me, it is not the oil money as yet. So, look forward to greater things to come, and one would understand what it means to be able to work in the interest of the people of the country.

They said that the Budget is pro-private sector, private sector friendly. Yes. The Budget is private sector friendly and pensioner friendly. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] She is commending it. As Mr. Brian, a man from Melanie Damishana commended the Budget, it is friendly to him. [**Mr. Holder:** Is that Julius?] So did Julius as well; it is friendly to Julius. Ms. Sutton, she commends the measures; the Budget is friendly to her. Then Mr. Mangal commends the efforts of the Budget; it is friendly to him as well. Then, we have a Registered Nurse who said the Budget is friendly to her; she finds favour with the Budget measures. Ms. Wong finds favour with the Budget measures. Mr. Richard finds favour with the Budget measures. None of them are from the private sector. Do you see any private sector person here? I am happy that you are concurring. I could go on and on if it were not for time. I could show you hundreds of persons who are in favour of the Budget measures.

I want the Opposition to understand that, if indeed as they claim, they have an interest in developing the people in this country, in contributing to their growth and development as a whole, and they want to work with the Government, then they have to be able to match their words with their actions. They have to stop misusing words and allowing themselves to be misguided. They have to stop it, because it is not the way a country is developed nor a way to take your people out of poverty. They have to say that the measures are as good as they are; that is what they have to say. They must go and take the \$25,000 and the hamper, and we will work with them to bring better benefits. That is what they have to do if they are totally serious about making a contribution to this country. It is time that we stop all of this talking for the sake of it, while we do nothing that is demonstrative of a serious effort to make our people better. It is not a *lampy and pampy* circus, for God’s sake. We must not get into that kind of parliament.

I want to say that the area I have responsibility for is media, the State media, the Guyana National Broadcasting Authority (GNBA) and the public information sector (PIS). We inherited a smelly public information sector. But, I would like to thank the people of this country for the faith they

demonstrated in us, so that we could change it from what it was and we could make it something that is truly for the people of this country. When this sector was inherited, we found a number of problems. When we examined what was taking place, there was a situation where there was total demoralisation; the moral within these agencies was at its absolute lowest. One could check that the equipment in these places were virtually non-existent. When one checked what was going on, it was all about filling up the places with a whole lot of people and paying salaries, but no interest in their actual welfare and the work that must be done. The tri-caster was not even working, and the news could have collapsed at any time. There is one issue that I would have loved to mention here but for security reasons I would not mention it. There was the total breakdown of systems and the absence of the right tools and equipment to be able to carry out the functions and the work. I would like to suspect that there was a massive raid at the National Communications Network (NCN) and other places, but it would only take some time before the Government finds out. I, personally, remember having worked in this area for a while and the timeless efforts in making sure that we equipped the place and that we provided the right type of tools. It is probably a magical movement, Mr. Henry, that could cause the kind of situation that exists today to be facing us at NCN and all of the other places. We have, nevertheless, a job to do. I would say that, despite what we found and as discouraging as it might have been from the time of assessing the situation at these places, we have to make things much better.

The Guyanese people have spoken with their votes. They have given us the mandate to lead and to govern, in the majority. It is our task and my task to keep the people of this country informed and engaged with initiatives and actions of the policies of the Administration of His Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali, who stands in stark contrast to his predecessor, as our youthful visionary and energetic President. I would like to hear you laugh again. Compare that with what we had just a few months ago.

The department of the State media like the Department of Public Information and others... The Hon. Member who spoke today stated – and, of course, it seems to me that they all allowed themselves to be misguided, for whatever reason – that the DPI had refused to carry the broadcast of the Opposition. When I checked DPI, in the first place, was not carrying any broadcast of the Opposition or the Government on livestream. The DPI cameras are here supporting Parliament with its livestream broadcast. One must know that, these things, would not go unchecked; one must know

that in this day and age when one could have information so swiftly, easily and quickly, it is not the days of telegram. Why would the Opposition eve attempt to do this? It is only for the purpose of being totally mischievous. I would ask that, in the future, we make sure that our comments and such claims are rooted in facts. I hope we would be able to achieve that in this House.

The DPI is expected to keep abreast with evolving technologies, in an effort to deliver timely information to Guyanese, both here and in the diaspora. The NCN will be retooled and we have to invest in training and in the welfare of the staff because, as I have said, we took over a place where the people there are totally demoralised. There were no kind of guidance, vision and leadership were provided to these young talented staff. Nevertheless, they were made to wend their way through the entity and to feel their way out on a daily basis. I want to say that now we will have better management of these places, management that could help to steer them in the right direction that could deliver on the mandate of making sure that the public information sector, especially the Government’s public information sector, because it is run by the State, would be one that would be admired and would be a leading example across the Caribbean.

5.46 p.m.

We have to make sure that we achieve this. We will be undertaking the functions that I have been asked to do. We will make sure that we have a very busy schedule in the Office of the Prime Minister. We will be engaging the citizenry of this country to understand the impact of our policies, what are their needs and how do we, as a whole, get feedback from members of the public. We will be supporting all outreaches. We will be working on training and development among the State media, the public information sector, community engagement, as I said before, and working towards developing an information technology (IT) platform for Government communication. This is very important. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *Inaudible*] I know, Hon. Member, the word ‘training’ to you is an offence. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Yes. It is.] Yes. We would pay a lot of attention to training. One cannot talk about developing human resources without training and preparing them for the new world. There are new techniques being used in IT, social media and every area of the sector every day. One has to understand constant upgrading of people by giving them training, Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson.

Media development and broadcast modernisation are areas that we would focus on and we will make sure that people benefit in such a way that they will be able to contribute significantly to our national development. That is what we are all about and why we are here. We are here to seriously develop this country and to be able to make a difference that you could not have made in the lives of every single Guyanese and not for one village and not for the other. When you look at the measures in the Budget, \$25,000 will be going to the home of every single Guyanese, including your home. **[Mr. Holder:** Your home too.] I already have a signed form that I will not be collecting any \$25,000. You could follow the standard, if you wish. We will put the \$15,000 school grant and the ‘Because We Care’ cash grant for every schoolchild in the public school system. Whose children are those? It is not the PPP/C’s children versus the APNU/AFC’s children. It is the children of Guyana.

When we took VAT from electricity and water, it is not measures given to people in Crabwood Creek and not the people of Linden; it is not given to the people in Alexander Village and not the people of West Ruimveldt; it goes to every single Guyanese and that is how we govern. We govern in a way that is, first of all, transparent and accountable. I know many of you will cringe on that side because you do not like to hear those words.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, to conclude, you will need someone to give you an extension. Before I take the motion for the extension for the Hon. Minister, please, I am urging Members that the Hon. Minister is making his maiden speech. Time-honoured convention in honourable assemblies is that we allow persons who are making their maiden speech to be uninterrupted, but I am hearing quite a bit of heckling coming from the Assembly. Please, we would want to continue to honour the time-honoured convention tradition, because we have so many other Hon. Members who would be delivering their maiden speeches in the Assembly over the next four days.

Could someone move the extension for the Hon. Minister?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, can I move and ask that the Hon. Member be given another five minutes to conclude his presentation?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. McCoy: We have a job to do and we will be doing our job. We will ask all Hon. Members on that side of the House to, also, do their job and not to just do a job that does not

coincide with the desires of the people of this country. That is, to ensure that they benefit from development and that they enjoy the best their country has to offer in terms of the resources and the equal distribution among the many desires of our Guyanese brothers and sisters. I ask that you do not be the type of Opposition... which might be a very hard thing but I still feel I should ask you and try to seek that from you. Be an Opposition that will be helpful and that will not find itself burdened with negativity. Be an Opposition that would not be spewing negatives or go into the streets to create mischief, such as what we saw on the West Coast of Berbice. Be an Opposition that you will say to the people of this country that we are working in their interest and, not just say it, but, by your very actions, demonstrate it on a daily basis.

We have, in this country, a far way to go. Do you know what gives me and many other Guyanese the confidence? It is the journey we have to travel and find sweetness along the way, that there is a Government called the People Progressive Party/Civic Government, which will work hard, every single day, to ensure that the people of this country benefit. Members could decide to reject all that I am saying, but the facts are with us historically only as recent as 2015.

Whenever the People’s Progressive Party/Civic is in Government, the people of this country do well. They do well not because, necessarily, they are some favoured bunch of people. They do well because the programmes and policies we provide and implement are designed to make people do well. While there will be challenges and problems along the way one could bet his/her last dollar that we will always be there with the people in the good times and the bad times because that is who we are. We will be in touch with the people and we will make sure that we engage them every step of the way, not in the kind of attitude we saw just recently before the new Government. This is where people were mistreated terribly. They could not get an ear from those on the other side, the Ministers and so forth. They would know of the stories of changing the numbers when they reach into Government and so forth. It was just horrible.

We need to recognise that this Budget was put together in the shortest possible time and it caters for every Guyanese. There are measures to assist those who are affected with the situation of the COVID-19, our farmers, the vulnerable, the elderly, our children, our brothers and sisters from the hinterland, teachers, nurses and everyone.

This afternoon, once again, I commend *Budget 2020* to the National Assembly and to say that one could look forward to

great things in the remaining of this year and as we move forward into 2021.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister McCoy. We will now have for her maiden presentation the Hon. Member, Ms. Maureen Philadelphia. Please, let us give her the respect for her maiden speech. Hon. Member, please proceed.

Ms. Philadelphia: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here as a proud daughter of Region 4, specifically, the East Coast of Demerara. I want to say thank you to those persons who have allowed me the opportunity to represent their cause in this noble House.

This beautiful country of ours has been blessed with much resources of which petroleum has been added to the list. We are now an oil producing nation and the ‘good life’ has beckoned. Even as we speak of the economic prospects of Guyana, of which it is estimated that the Stabroek block will produce more than five billion barrels of oil, the management of this sector is of great importance in ensuring the prospects thereof benefit ‘all’ of Guyana, irrespective of region, religion, economic class or standard. While the oil and gas sector will bring significant financial resources and enormous transformational opportunities, we need to ensure that, in every aspect and every sector, we capitalise on these opportunities, even as there are increased employment and job opportunities in this new sector. We must remain cognisant of all the other sectors that need our attention.

It is with great enthusiasm that I remind this noble House that 20th December, 2019 was declared National Petroleum Day in Guyana. This day ushered in a dawn of a new era. His Excellency, Brigadier (Ret’d) David Arthur Granger, former President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, in his address to the nation on 20th December, 2019, stated: “...no one should be left behind... in a petroleum state’. I mean ‘no one.’

6.01 p.m.

The final draft of the local content policy, done by Dr. Michael Warner, highlights that there will be focus on education and training. One of the goals of this policy is to promote education, inclusion and advancement of Guyanese with the expertise and experience required to participate in the petroleum industry.

This policy provides for programmes of training for Guyanese to participate in the petroleum sector, progress into higher skilled positions and the skill set, competencies and related certifications that training participants will gain. This local content policy speaks to there being support for education and vocational training institutions, including providing support to the curricula courses and certifications. I recognise under the iii. petroleum 4.130 (vi) of the *Budget 2020* speaks to the training of thousands of Guyanese at every level to create national core of managers. Such a statement arouses my interest and stirs my curiosity. How could we get managers without thinking of the foundation? Oil and gas is new to Guyanese and the Guyanese nation and it is incumbent upon us as leaders to think about the legacy we are going to leave behind for our future generation.

Education and training in a petroleum state should not only focus on the tertiary and the vocational training levels but, also, students at the secondary schools should be provided with an opportunity to be educated on the new resource. It is my view that a curriculum package focusing on oil and gas should be developed for the secondary level. This will help our students to develop an appreciation and an understanding of the fundamentals of this sector and all that it could offer. This will no doubt aid as a springboard for them when leaving school and thinking of a career path and, of course, a path for higher learning. Having this base knowledge, will no doubt, encourage more Guyanese in seeking employment in the oil and gas industry.

Engineers, Scientists and Doctors were not born overnight. It takes years of training to acquire those skills. If the nation is to acquire those skills, then it must be done overtime and we must start early on. We must start at the secondary level of education.

Our young people should also be provided with training opportunities outside of Guyana with institutions such as the University of Aberdeen and Delft University of Technology, just to name a few, that have good track records in training for oil and gas.

In 2020, the visiting President of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, Professor Sarim Al-Zubaidy, spoke at the University of Guyana’s 5th Conversation on Law and Society. He stated that:

“...investing oil revenues into education will help fuel further economic growth.”

Professor Al-Zubaidy told the audience that education fuels economic growth. He noted that we need to:

“...build the local capacity and capability and ensure that you introduce your local structures into the final process so that you achieve the successes of the successful countries. We need to continue building our human resources to participate in this growth.”

The development in education will, in turn, bring about long-term sustenance to Guyana as highlighted in Guyana’s Decade of Development 2020 - 2029. There should be an emergence of an education nation characterised by every child being in school; every child graduating from secondary school, and the community having a more highly educated workforce.

I would have looked at what was said before and recognised that this document that was produced before this honourable House did not cater adequately for what was said before. Our goal should be to develop our human resources and to manage the resources of this country. We must, also, follow guidance from oil-rich countries so as to avoid their mistakes. It is my fervent belief that, if we capitalise on these skill sets available to us, this will be achieved in the shortest possible time.

As noted by the Director of Energy, Dr. Mark Bynoe, over 1,000 Guyanese are employed in the oil and gas sector with increased educational opportunities. This number will increase greatly. It is, therefore, imperative that the revenue derived from this sector be maximised and used to transform Guyana’s economy into one which is internationally diversified. We need to take full advantage of the contribution to the oil sector, to ensure our future generations are prepared to function in a petroleum state. We need to invest in our future, for such a transformative industry, it is essential to have the human capacity that could handle the transformation that the oil and gas discoveries will bring. We must ensure that a greater portion of Guyanese are contributing to the local content policy which remains a commitment for all of us.

This Budget speaks to the training of thousands of Guyanese at every level to create national core of managers. I must, also, note that such a blanket statement is not enough. Further, information and classification are needed and must be provided to this noble House. Could the Hon. Member, Minister of Natural Resources, provide to this noble House how much money was allocated for education and training under this sector? Could this House also be informed how

many persons are catered for, what are the specific areas of education and training and the duration of such?

As a budding oil-producing nation, we need to be visionaries and think broadly about how we are going to provide education and training to satisfy the growing demand in this sector. As a nation, we should always focus on establishing high educational standards and building its skills base, lest it be found wanting. Guyana is now producing oil and we have the potential to offer a great deal of wealth to our beloved people, if managed appropriately.

Looking at what was presented to this noble House on Wednesday, 9th September, 2020, it could be deduced that same lacks capacity to capitalise on the competencies laid before Guyana as a budding oil-producing nation.

I wish to provide a few highlights. Being a geographical representative of East Coast, Region 4. I wish to share a few. Infrastructure has been a crisis under the PPP/C Government for 23 years. It must be noted that, over the past five years, there could no longer be any ranting of green or red villages and communities. I trust that the other side could emulate what was created under the APNU/AFC-led Government. Most of the farmers had to abandon their lands and find alternative means of livelihood. This was so because the roadways and the waterways were abandoned, making it difficult for them to access their farmland. I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that, over the past five years, things have changed in this area. We have had several Rural Agriculture Infrastructure Development (RAID) fairs of which Region 4 produced one. I must also inform this noble House that the RAID project at Buxton is producing bountifully and, of course, persons in Victoria, Golden Grove, Nabaclis and other areas have gone back to their farms. I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, that National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) has commissioned a pump at La Bonne Intention (LBI). There is another pump to be commissioned at Belfield and one at Hope, which you will have the honour of commissioning. Of course, it is with the compliments of the APNU/AFC-led Government. The road on the East Coast Highway could have been classified as a sandy beach. Today, we could drive and be proud of what was prepared for us by the APNU/AFC-led Government. As a matter of fact, what took me 45 minutes from where I live to Georgetown, is now 20 to 30 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, since we are on the subject of time, could someone move that you get an extension to conclude?

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Philadelphia: In the Budget, we speak of employment. What I have recognised is that we have built two nursery schools in Region 4, over the past five years and, very soon, we will commission a secondary school at Good Hope. What the Budget did not seek to tell us is that it is the compliments of the APNU/AFC. What the Budget needs to tell us is how we are going to people that institution and what system is in place to ensure that salaries are catered for, bearing in mind that this Budget is not a people’s budget, but it is a budget for the private sector?

Thank you. [Applause]

6.16 p.m.

Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]: Mr. Speaker, first of all, please accept my congratulations on the ascension to the Chair of the Speaker. I wish you well.

I am honoured to have the opportunity to represent the Government and the people of Guyana in this Twelfth Parliament of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. It is equally an honour to join my Colleagues in support of *Budget 2020*, the first of the newly-elected People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government.

I need, this evening, to respond to an Hon. Member, who hails from Essequibo, to tell him that you can go to President’s College (PC) and the University of Guyana (UG) and the institutions will not teach you the whole scenario behind the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Let me tell you, the Guyanese people would not have spent a cent in the development of Amaila Falls project and it would have given us, today, 165 megawatts of power. It would have also given us reduced electricity cost. I must also teach you that the APNU/AFC did not do any major development work in this country. We left those moneys for the roads on the West Coast, East Coast, Sheriff Street and Mandela Avenue. Do you know what happened? Squandermania took place.

As I was going through the Estimates of the Public Sector last night, I think I saw a page for which shackles and handcuffs are going to be bought. Every project that was done under the APNU/AFC will be investigated. Those investigations have started. Have no fear, Hon. Members, have no fear. Do you know that from 2015 to 2nd August, 2020, clouds of

corruption and mismanagement were hanging over Guyana? That is the reason all of you are sitting there in the Opposition seats. You will be there for a very long time.

This Budget, being presented after a protracted delay, a fallout from the 2020 General and Regional Elections, is presented at a time when our economy is under tremendous shock and tremendous stress. This must be addressed, fervently, to bring relief to all of our people. *Budget 2020* aims to begin that process of liberalisation, as it contains plans and projects which cater for everyone, for every Guyanese, the ordinary man, the farmer, the law enforcement officer, the public servant and, most importantly, the medical professionals, who are working on our frontlines.

These commitments were made with a clear understanding of the role the sector will play in the People’s Progressive Party/Civic development programme and with an understanding of the constraints of the sector. Therefore, the Party and now Government was clear about what material and technical support the sector needed to be effective in fulfilling its role. *Budget 2020* has made provision for a total of \$53.25 billion to the local government sector. This is indicative of the Government’s commitment.

Institutional strengthening of human resources and capacity building are important pillars of organisational effectiveness. An initial training needs assessment (TNA) has identified this area for attention. In the initial phase, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will be strengthened to support the robust capacity-building programmes, to ensure the availability of the required skills, both in technical and managerial capacities. To deliver the work programmes, staff will be adequately equipped to monitor the programmes’ implementation, to ensure the programmes’ objectives and the hallmark of good governance.

The amount of \$28 million was allocated to policy development and administration. A commensurate amount will be directed to the capacity-building initiatives within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The state of the physical infrastructure in the municipality of Georgetown and the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC) have much to be desired. Crumbling infrastructures affect municipal and local government services delivery. Over the last five years, no maintenance works were implemented by the APNU/AFC regime. They are now sitting on the Opposition’s side. That is where they belong.

Whilst in the last People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional

Development implemented the following programmes which were aimed at job creation, poverty reduction and economic development. The sum of US\$25 million was spent for urban development programmes, US\$15 million was spent for community services enhancement projects and \$25 million was spent for community roads improvement projects. Despite the maintenance of business plans, which were developed to ensure maintenance, sustenance and expansion of the investments made, the municipal and local government infrastructure were allowed to decay.

Provision is made for infrastructural development, such as the expansion to community markets, community centres and sanitary landfill sites, to practise proper solid waste management. Some public goods have been earmarked for upgrading by the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, which will ensure the effective and efficient local government and municipal services delivery to our citizens.

The manifesto of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic embodies the development of local economies, with the main aim to provide transparency and accountability for local residents in planning, implementation and monitoring for compliance and evaluation. As the Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, I will ensure that the municipalities and the Local Democratic Organs (LDOs) are equipped to ensure that they deliver on their mandates to benefit their constituencies.

Public participation and engagement with local government officials and residents will be high on my Government’s agenda. This will forge a close working relationship among all local government stakeholders to allow for a consensus in the decision-making process. It was envisaged that the implementation of *Budget 2020* will set a foundation for renewed hope and confidence for all of our people, to promote investments, job opportunities, village economies and enhanced community involvement as part of our support initiatives. The markets at East Ruimveldt and Albouystown are in their third and second phases of rehabilitation, respectively, and will be completed in a short space of time.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government will continue to dedicate financial and technical support to those investment projects and to provide adequate service to the local population. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will actively pursue collaboration with all stakeholders to facilitate support and enhance municipal and local governance, management administration

and development. This is to ensure the participation in the development implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the local sector policies.

The APNU/AFC regime mismanaged this economy for five years by hiring many party activists in key positions. This practice was encouraged by the Ministry of Finance, which approved huge sums in salaries and stipends, which allowed them to use State funds and assets to do continuous political work, *nevermind* they lost. *Budget 2019* was passed in 2018 and, despite the passage of the no confidence motion, the Ministry of Finance, subsequently, reallocated large portions of budgetary funds to aid political campaign promises. This resulted in many viable projects being discarded. A sum of \$348,400,000 was awarded for projects in 2019 that never materialised.

Listed are some of the projects, their values and reasons the projects were never materialised. A sum of \$150 million was budgeted in, 2019, for property inventory and valuation across all Local Democratic Organs. This never materialised. The sum of \$58 million was budgeted, in 2019, for a construction of a town hall and office spaces for the municipality of Mahdia.

6.31 p.m.

Listen to this, Hon. Members. This project was cancelled because of an issue with ownership of the plot of land that was identified for the building. They had an issue with the ownership of the land, but imagine the APNU/AFC went through with this project, identified a piece of land and, then, at the end of the feud, it was not there.

Thirty-three million dollars was redirected to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure for road projects in Mahdia. No one knows if these roads were ever completed. The remaining sum was for the construction of the Aranaputa Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) building in Region 9 and the Profit/Rising Sun NDC building; work for both buildings never started.

A sum of \$40 million was budgeted, in 2019, for Plan of Action for Regional Development (PARD) for Regions 1 and 6. This project was abandoned and the money was utilised for community grounds.

The sum of \$65 million was budgeted under the Georgetown enhancement programme for the construction of an administrative building, phase one, of the Georgetown municipality. The Georgetown Mayor and City Council

(M&CC) – usual story – procrastinated on the project at every stage. Eleven million dollars was redirected to purchase a vehicle for the Mayor after he had an accident and his vehicle was written-off.

The sum of \$4 million was budgeted for the rehabilitation of the Friendship Community Centre Ground, Pomeroon-Supenaam. This project was tendered in 2019, but never got started; no reason was given. The sum of \$4.3 million was budgeted for the rehabilitation of the Glasgow Playground, Pomeroon-Supenaam. This project was tendered in 2019, but never got started.

The solid waste situation in our country is plagued with an accumulation of socio-cultural behaviour patterns and management issues. Over the next five years, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will implement several initiatives to curtail the scores of the issues related to solid waste management legislation. The Ministry will update the inventory of solid waste disposal sites in each of the 10 regions to determine, based on appropriate siting criteria, the open disposal sites, which are to be closed, and those to be upgraded to controlled landfills.

Of this *Budget 2020* total of \$329.5 billion, almost 16%, \$51.7 billion, has been dedicated to the health sector; almost 16%, \$52 billion, has been allocated to education; while, for the productive sectors, \$18.4 billion or close to 6% has been allocated for agriculture and the reopening of Enmore, Rose Hall and Skeldon sugar factories. Let me repeat, \$18.4 billion or close to 6% is for agriculture and the reopening of Enmore, Rose Hall and Skeldon Sugar Estates. Those people that you fired by closing those estates...

In closing, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government has a strong programme of decentralisation and accountability by engaging the local citizens, our strategic partners and stakeholders involved in a decision-making process. This will widen the scope to facilitate a wider involvement and commitment to decisions which affect their communities. We will continue to support the consultative approach to local governance and to facilitate the maximum utilisation of public resources. Amongst measures to be pursued are: substantially increased fiscal transfers to the municipalities and the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, strengthen local government bodies to manage resources, to take on enhanced maintenance responsibilities, to support infrastructural development and strengthening Local Government Organs in budget planning and preparation

through a consultative process to facilitate financial management and accountability.

In keeping with the People’s Progressive Party/Civic manifesto promises, my Government and the Ministry’s first-year implementation of project deliverables, will place emphasis on improving the lives of all Guyanese and putting money in the people’s pockets. Just to mention a few, and I hope that it can resonate in the ears of you Hon. Members on the Opposition side, \$25,000 cash grant would be given to households as COVID-19 relief.

When the Hon. Member, Mr. Kwame McCoy, was speaking about COVID-19, a Member on the Opposition mentioned that \$25,000 is ‘crumbs’. Well, I can imagine that coming from you. The swamp was drained. The removal of VAT on electricity and water, increase in pension for elderly, and grants for school children, including increase in school allowance... [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** When?] Do you wear school uniform? They only have ladies school uniforms. The removal of VAT on hinterland travel; two weeks’ tax-free bonus for the Joint Services; \$150 million to support frontline workers, as part of the special COVID-19 relief...It seems as if the word ‘shame’ has disappeared.

Considering the devastation meted out to the private sector by the last APNU/AFC regime, as part of this emergency Budget, several measures have been put forward to get businesses back on their feet again. These include corporate income tax exemptions to support private education and healthcare; increase in eligible loans for mortgage interest relief; removal of VAT on building and construction materials, machinery and equipment in mining, forestry, agriculture, manufacturing, fertilisers, agrochemicals, pesticides and other key inputs in the poultry industry; tax concessions and special incentives in agriculture, tourism and manufacturing; those include investments in agro-processing facilities, cold storage, packaging along with special incentives, including land for the planting of corn and soya beans; incentives for the establishment of industrial parks in the hinterland and coastal regions; and special COVID-19 relief. Notwithstanding the destruction of the economy by the APNU/AFC and the rise in poverty and hopelessness, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, in its first budget, a mere week after taking Office, has provided a streak of measures targeting all Guyanese, from the coast to the hinterland, schoolchildren to the elderly and public servants and the private sector.

As Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, I stand here, today, before this honourable House, to say that we, on this side of the House, will work tirelessly to ensure that these measures are implemented and to deliver benefits to all Guyanese. We remain committed to our manifesto; we remain committed to our people; we intend to deliver on all the promises. This 2020 Budget is the start of that effort.

Let me commend the Minister of Finance for rolling out a people-friendly budget that will be welcomed by all Guyanese. It is my wish that all Members of this honourable House show their support for the passage of this 2020 Budget.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 15th September, 2020.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m., on Tuesday, 15th September, 2020.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: This Assembly stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. Tuesday, 15th September, 2020.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.43 p.m.