



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

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2022) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN

40TH Sitting

Thursday, 3RD February, 2022

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.34 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent – on leave]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (17)

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

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

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

+ 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.

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

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

Junior Ministers (4)

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

Other Members (14)

Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,

Lot 71 BB Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

Mr. Alistair S. Charlie, M.P.,

(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),

148 Lethem,

Central Rupununi,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,

Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),

Lot 4 Public Road,

No. 66 Village,

Corentyne,

Berbice.

Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,

Lot 60 Section 'K',

John Street,

Campbellville,

Georgetown.

Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,

Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,

Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,

Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,

Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,

Lot 340 East Street,

South Cummingsburg,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,

55 AA Victoria Avenue,

Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,

(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),

Lot 16-30 New Street,

New Amsterdam.

c/o Freedom House,

Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

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

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

[Absent – on leave]

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

[Absent – on leave]

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

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

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

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Joseph F. Harmon, M.S.M., M.P.,
Lot 99 Mazaruni Street,
Guyhoc Park,
Georgetown.

[Absent]

Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,
Lot 10 Delph Street,
Campbelville,
Georgetown.

Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,
Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,
South Ruimveldt,
Georgetown.

Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P.,
Lot 3202 Pricese 3,
Providence,
East Bank Demerara.

[Absent]

Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P.,
Lot 933 Block 1,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
Dr. Nicolette O. Henry, M.P.,
Lot 2227 Ozama Street, North Ruimveldt,
Georgetown.
Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P.,
Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme,
East Coast Demerara.
Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.,
Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue,
South Ruimveldt Park,
Georgetown.
Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,
Lot 48 Atlantic Ville,
Georgetown.
Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P.,
Opposition Chief Whip,
Lot 609 Conciliation Street,
Tucville,
Georgetown.
Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,
Lot 842 Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,
Lot 151 Durbana Square,
Lamaha Gardens,
Georgetown.
Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P.,
Lot 202 N, Fourth Street,
Alexander Village,
Georgetown.
Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.
Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.,
Lot 18 Public Road,
Johanna Cecilia,
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).
Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.,
Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field,
East Bank Demerara.

[Absent]

[Virtual Participation]

Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,
Lot 1110 Plot 'B',
Herstelling,
East Bank Demerara.

Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,
Lot 590 Good Hope,
East Coast Demerara.

Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
Lot 1282 Block EE,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.,
(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
Shulidnab Village,
South Central,
Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)

Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini),
Mabaruma Compound.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Virtual Participation]

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

Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)
Church Street Mahdia.

Lot 4 Public Road,
Stewartville,
West Coast Demerara.

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

Wismar, Linden.

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

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

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

Officers (2)

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

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

Hansard Division Officers (19)

Ms. Allison Connelly,
Chief Editor
Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor
Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor
Ms. Latoiah Joseph,
Senior Editor
Ms. Carol Bess,
Editor
Ms. Shevona Telford,
Editor (a.g.)
Ms. Tesia Ellis,
Editor (a.g.)
Ms. Indranie Persaud,
Reporter
Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter
Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter
Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Reporter
Ms. Bianca Cummings,
Reporter
Mr. Rohan Ramjas,
Reporter
Ms. Nadeila Allen,
Reporter (a.g.)
Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter (a.g.)
Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

40 TH Sitting	Thursday, 3 RD February, 2022
--------------------------	--

Announcements by the Speaker	5541
Public Business – Government Business	5542-5654
Estimates of Expenditure 2022 - Budget Speech	5543-5656
Adjournment -	5657-5658

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Condolences to the Family of Ms. Shereeda Persaud

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, yesterday, there was a very horrific accident at Mahaica. On your behalf and on my behalf, I extend our condolences to those who have lost their lives and our concern for those who were injured. I raise this because Ms. Shereeda Persaud, who lost her life in that accident, was the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs at the 2021 Youth Parliament. We extend our condolences to her family, also. Ironically, her motion was on road usage.

Birthday Greetings to the Former Clerk of the National Assembly

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, today, on a more pleasant note, I know I have your support in extending birthday salutations to our former Clerk of the National Assembly, Mr. Frank Narine, who, today, is 90 years of age. Happy birthday, Mr. Frank Narine.

Meeting of the Committee of Supply

Mr. Speaker: A reminder to the Committee of Supply: We have the consideration of the time for the allocation or consideration of the estimates at the first suspension.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

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

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly and that, when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly, an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2022 have been prepared and

laid before the Assembly on January 26, 2022, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021 provides that the amount that the Minister with Responsibility for Finance shall request the National Assembly to approve, and the amount that the National Assembly shall approve, as the withdrawal from the Fund for the next ensuing fiscal year shall be included in the annual budget proposal and shall not exceed, for that year, the ceiling calculated in accordance with the said Act:

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2022, of a total sum of five hundred and one billion, six hundred and seventy-eight million, two hundred and ninety-eight thousand dollars (\$501,678,298,000) excluding fifty one billion, two hundred and fifty-five million, and four hundred and twenty thousand dollars (\$51,255,420,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

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

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now resume the budget debate for 2022. Our first speaker today is the dashing Mr. Duncan, the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan.

Mr. Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Colleagues all. Thank you for a very elegant introduction, Mr. Speaker. I had meant to refer to William Shakespeare a little later in my presentation, but as the Speaker offered such generous words...I think that I must be very careful when quoting William Shakespeare in the National Assembly. I think a passage from one of those literary texts states:

“...These couchings and these lowly courtesies

Might fire the blood of ordinary men

...Be not fond...

“...that Caesar bears such rebel blood...”

Mr. Speaker, I am appreciative of the opportunity to add my voice to this great debate. I wish to recognise the sterling contributions of the Members of the Parliamentary Opposition, the depth and breadth, and the sheer substance

they each added to their presentation. We are the better for it. I wish to recognise, as well, the efforts of our Colleagues on the other side of the House in their contributions to what the Hon. Member, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, was courageous enough to call a national budget. I look across this arena of the National Assembly, at the 33 Members of Parliament (MPs) on the Government side, and I feel, I confess, a little bit underwhelmed. It is only symptomatic of getting accustomed to looking out into the void and having thousands of persons looking back at me. Yet, all our Colleagues on the other side of this House are honourable men. Knowing the Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson's, love of William Shakespeare, again, I must choose my allusion to William Shakespeare's 'honourable man' with care. Reading this Budget and reading the consternation of the public in reaction to it, one knows all too well, feeling the pain of the small man, that:

“...When sorrows come, they come not single spies
but in battalions...”

Mr. Speaker, allow me to extend a metaphor. There is a passage in William Shakespeare's great literary text, *Julius Caesar*, that reminds me of this great scene before us. For there he was, noble Mark Anthony, given leave by Brutus to eulogise the murdered Caesar. I rehearse Anthony's words:

“Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?

When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;

And Brutus is an honourable man.

You all did see that on the Lupercal

I thrice presented him a kingly crown,

Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;

And, sure, he is an honourable man.

I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,

But here I am to speak what I do know.

You all did love him once, not without cause:

What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?

O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,

And men have lost their reason...”

When one reads *Budget 2022*:

“...O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,

And men have lost their reason...”

I came to the National Assembly to speak what I know. Bishop Juan Edghill is an honourable man and an Hon. Member who will, no doubt, regale us with thunderous sermonising that this is the biggest budget ever, and the biggest for his sector pinned at \$76.7 billion for roads and bridges. Based on the track record of the two previous budgets and the dreams deferred, there is little hope this will be done. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) has demonstrated their skillset in solving the problems that persist and prevail in this society. A pothole on the Ruimveldt Public Road demonstrates the PPP/C’s problem-solving abilities. The PPP/C encountered this pothole on the Ruimveldt Public Road, and instead of fixing the problem with last year’s biggest budget ever and the year before that’s biggest budget ever, they drew a line around it, ensuring that others would follow and not go into the pothole. In typical PPP/C fashion, when the obvious was pointed out, the Hon. Member, Minister Sonia Parag was perhaps called in and attempted to photoshop out the white line drawn around the problem. Only when enough public pressure was brought to bear on the issue did the PPP/C choose to do the right thing and attempt to fix the problem. In my best crab man voice, *pressha buss pipe*.

Hence, the PPP/C’s three stage solution of problem solving is, you draw a line around the problem, you photoshop the problem, and you fix the problem only when public pressure is applied. Yet, these are all honourable men. *Budget 2022*, the biggest budget ever, is the PPP/C at stage one. *Budget 2022* tries to draw a line around the problems that beset us as a country. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, is perhaps the only person I know on the other side of the House, who has not rehearsed this refrain, ‘the biggest budget ever’, with regularity. We are certain that in his accounting of things, he has argued that size, like height, does not matter. I could hear the Hon. Minister, Ms. Oneidge Walrond, hurrying to chime in, ‘yes, yes, Comrade Ashni, a *lil* Dutch axe can

sabotage a whole Ministry’. But our Colleagues are all honourable men.

The 2020 Budget was the biggest ever and carried the theme, *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment, Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law, Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation, and Enhancing Welfare*. In 2021, the Budget theme was: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. By the time we got to 2022: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. By 2022, the ‘Economic Growth’ of the 2020 theme and the ‘Economic Dynamism’ of the 2021 theme were all abandoned. Perhaps, if I had to project a non-oil growth of 6.1% and only achieved 4.6%, after throwing two of the biggest budgets ever at that problem, I might have abandoned economic growth and economic dynamism as well. William Shakespeare reminds us:

“...Ambition should be made of sterner stuff...”

We cannot just abandon our budget’s aim like that, and the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance is an honourable man.

10.49 a.m.

In 2020, the lofty aim was protecting our people in a COVID-19 environment, but we guess that, after 45,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19; the current COVID-19 surge; and the more than 11,000 deaths, you would ease a little bit on protecting people from COVID-19 environment. That was abandoned as well as we get to 2022 in this Budget. How could we miss in that 2022 Budget theme... creating jobs when, according to the Guyana Bureau of Statistics:

“The youth unemployment rate for the third quarter of 2021 was recorded at 31.9 percent...”

We understand why the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, would, at this point, just be drinking water and minding his own business. *Stabroek News* Editorial on 4th December, 2021, perhaps, captures the pervading situation in its header for both *Budget 2020* and *Budget 2021*:

“Failure to launch”

This brings us frontally to 2022 and the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) supposed new direction for the

economy: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. ‘Steadfast Against All Challenges’ could easily be the mantra of the masterminds behind the three freight containers of arms and ammunition which were Guyana bound and intercepted in Senegal. We are steadfast against those challenges of being intercepted. We can see them saying to that other ship spotted in the South China Sea, flying the Guyanese flag, and illegally dealing in crude oil with Iran, that we are steadfast against all challenges. The Private Sector Commission (PSC) had a so-called election observer, deep in its rank, who the American authorities were observing and later apprehended. He, too, was steadfast against all challenges. Mr. Rahm Emmanuel, the former Mayor of Chicago, Chief of Staff of the Obama Administration, said that:

“You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.”

When one looks at the COVID-19 governance of the PPP/C, it is a crisis that went to waste. Some of the things we could have been thinking about, instead of logging around suitcases of money to village after village, is going against paperless cash, and distributing bank cards so that people could go to a bank automated teller machine (ATM), put in a card and, perhaps, receive the moneys being transferred to them in this COVID-19 cash grant. Perhaps, that would not lend to the kind of corruption that goes along with this kind of COVID-19 cash grant which is infamous. This crisis that COVID-19 has offered us could have had us planning to go to higher ground, sitting down with national city planners and planning for this nation. These are the experts of climate change, and we know what climate change is doing to higher sea levels. We could have been sitting and collectively, in this period, thinking about going to higher ground. With the whole idea of cash grants in the 2022 Budget, one would have thought that, if the caring Government that the PPP/C is would have really and truly relegated us to the Opposition seat, then they would have been giving moneys, through cash grants, to the people, through this 2022 Budget, again, in a very systematic way, but that has not been had. The people of Guyana should understand that we are coming back.

Instead, what is the picture before us with the biggest budget ever? A little boy walking from Great Diamond to Diamond looking for food, how does this biggest budget ever affect his life? He is six years old, and he is walking from Little Diamond to Great Diamond, bare feet, and hunting for food in an economy that produced three biggest budgets ever, yet

none has touched his life thus far. The Mabaruma father, who is craving for a healthcare system that functions, who had to lift his son on his shoulder and walk through the streets of Mabaruma because the health system, three biggest budgets later, continued to fail him. Young Jesus Hernandez lost his life because a colleague of his hit him in his head with a steel rod in this country. He approached the police and the police said to him that it was a private matter that they could deal with it. Young Jesus Hernandez lost his life at 13 years old, and three biggest budgets ever has never touched him or his family.

We cannot forget the other aspect of this Budget's theme, ‘Resolute in Building Our One Guyana’. It is no secret that Guyana has struggled over the years with a national airline and flag carrier, but resolute is the national cocaine carrier since August 2020, if the headlines in the local newspapers are to be believed. The national cocaine carrier, resolute are they. How could we forget that two planes were found on 15th September, 2020, with cocaine on board in Cuyuni Mazaruni, Region 7. We cannot forget that the Belgian police seized 11.5 tonnes of cocaine, 23,000 pounds of cocaine, in a shipment from Guyana on the 5th November, 2020. Yet, in this Government, they are all honourable men. We cannot forget a boat with dead people with no engine -

“...about 83 nautical miles off Guyana’s shore, drifting 2.9 knots, moving in a westerly direction.”

This was on 15th February 2020. The Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, is still chasing that boat and, yet, the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, is an honourable man. There was a foreign aircraft with over 1000 pounds of cocaine which crash- landed at Orealla, in Region 6, East Berbice-Corentyne, on 21st May, 2021. That is the national flag carrier – cocaine airlines. On 15th June, 2020, a burnt-out plane was found on the trail in the Bisaruni area, Kwakwani, believed to be involved in illegal activities. A Caribbean Airlines plane was intercepted in Miami with cocaine weighing approximately three kilogrammes. That flight started in Guyana. Two foreign men, a Colombian and a Venezuelan, were nabbed from a small plane that made an emergency landing at Mahdia, also carrying ‘coke’ on 4th November, 2021. Law enforcement in the Netherlands intercepted a shipment of rum and cocaine. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally, would have a different meaning of this rum and coke, but it was not the same rum and ‘coke’ that went to the Netherlands. It was 1,100 pounds of cocaine in rum.

As I mentioned, a Guyana flagged ship carrying three containers of arms and ammunition worth US\$5 million was intercepted in Dakar on 20th January, 2020. A Guyana flagged ship was again spotted in South-China Sea dealing in illegal crude oil from Iran. These guys seem very resolute. The only product, the only sector, and the only industry, in this country soaring under the PPP/C is cocaine. And, yet, according to the noble Mr. Brutus, all our colleagues here are all honorable men. Even when one looks at the big projects that are presented in *Budget 2022*, one wonders, if they are so good, why are they not subjected to the same due diligence, perhaps, bringing in international investors as against having our own oil money funding those projects. If they are so good, why not submit them to the gamut of due diligence, for instance, like an environmental impact assessment. It seems to be the reverse in that all projects do not need environmental impact assessments (EIA) unless deemed otherwise.

For the new Demerara Harbour Bridge, they said that no (EIA) is needed; for the oil exploration at the Canje block, no EIA is needed; for the oil-to-gas treatment facility at Coverden, no EIA needed; for the proposed Marriot branded hotel at Goedvewagting, no EIA needed; for the 12-well exploration campaign of the offshore Kaieteur block, no EIA needed; for superior concrete company, no EIA needed; and for the government folks in Tiger Rentals Guyana waste treatment facility at Houston, no EIA needed. If all of these projects are so good for Guyanese, why can they not be submitted to the same rigorous due diligence procedures. It is the Canadian High Commissioner, Mr. Mark Berman, who stressed the importance of these environmental impact assessments to this nation. He said:

“Failure to undertake this type of due diligence could result in costly and harmful effects down the road.”

He went on:

“The importance of understanding this legal framework which governs EIA cannot be overstated and it is important that we continue to be engaged in improving our processes in keeping with the Environmental Protection Act – more so, in the light of Guyana’s new and developing petroleum sector which brought with it concerns about new and potential significant impacts on the environment...”

The EIA’s should be done, but, again, the EIA’s seem to be the contrary thing. There is a Turkish proverb which suggests that, when a clown moves into a palace, he does not become a king. The place just, simply becomes a circus. Guyana became that circus since the 2nd August, 2020.

It was under the David Ganger-led Administration and Coalition, that Guyana achieved its best rating on the Transparency International Index. Yet, these are all honourable men before us. We were removed from the European Union (EU) and the Commonwealth blacklists for money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism; yet, all these men before us are honourable men. We achieved our tier one status for our fight against trafficking in persons (TIP) under the David Granger-led Administration. It was under that Administration that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was allowed to return here after decades of efforts. When International Anti-corruption Day was held late last year, Ms. Sarah-Ann Lynch, the American Ambassador to Guyana, put out a press statement which serves as an indictment on this country and where we are, and which, perhaps, foreshadow things to come with our two points down on the international Corruption Perception Index (CPI). It was a foreshadower of things to come. In that press statement, the Honourable Ambassador, Ms. Sarah-Ann Lynch said to this Government that:

“President Biden is hosting a virtual Summit for Democracy, at which President Ali has confirmed his attendance. The United States is asking participating governments to announce meaningful commitments and initiatives, and to engage with civil society and the private and philanthropic sectors, since they play a critical role in supporting democracy, fighting corruption, and protecting human rights.”

The honourable Ambassador went on to suggest... she went back as far as 23 years before 2015, she could not find any measures out there to fight corruption. She was forced to look between 2015 and 2020, and she found some.

11.04 a.m.

She said:

“In 2018, the Guyana Public Service Commission was reconstituted after a 13-year hiatus. This was a

step towards ensuring fairness and transparency in the public service system.

The Honourable Ambassador went on to say that:

“The GoG also passed the Protected Disclosures (Whistleblower) Act in 2018, which seeks to protect persons making disclosures from retribution from others, including within the public service.”

The Honourable Ambassador went on to say that:

These kinds of legislative reforms are necessary parts of a successful plan to fight corruption”.

Yet, sometimes we hear that Mr. Granger was ambitious. From whom do we hear that? We hear that from all of these honourable men. The Honourable Ambassador went on to state that:

“Governments and institutions around the globe cannot allow corruption to flourish”.

I hope my honourable colleague, Ms. Waldron, is listening carefully because she, the Hon. Member, was the one who suggested that there was no evidence of corruption or no evidence of racism. Listen to Ambassador Sarah Lynch in this correspondence:

“Constructing a legislative framework that deters corrupt practices and promotes transparency is an essential step in addressing corruption. Enhancing the capabilities of criminal justice institutions to investigate and prosecute corruption is also crucial to exposing malignant influences”.

The Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs... and what became of that matter? We all watched with bated breath. The Honourable Ambassador said:

“Government operations should be transparent such that citizens and the media can provide oversight and hold officials accountable”.

In this country, we are very concerned about who is called what as against holding officials accountable. The honourable Ambassador went on to say:

“In addition, procurement processes that comply with international anti-corruption standards will ensure a level playing field for investors. Private sector actors must also answer for any role that they

play in corrupt practices, and when choosing private sector partners it is advisable to choose the reputable over the most convenient. Most importantly, a robust civil society and free press are critical in holding leaders responsible for their actions”.

She ends by saying this:

“We continue to look forward...”

As we do on the Opposition’s side:

“...to the government’s initiatives to combat corruption, including the Natural Resource Fund legislation that offers both transparency and clear oversight, and to a meaningful and inclusive process of stakeholder engagement.”

These are the words of the American Ambassador, Mr. Speaker. Finally, the honourable Ambassador said:

“A strong anti-corruption stance now will show Guyanese citizens...”

with the largest Budget yet again,

“...and the rest of the world, that the government is committed to transparent institutions that utilize the country’s resources to the long-term benefit of all Guyanese”.

Yet, Mr. Speaker as one reads and interrogates the national budget that the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, was courageous enough to bring to this House, one cannot help but to admit that:

“Oh judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason.”

Yet, all my colleagues here on the other side are honorable men. Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, I just want to first ask the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, to layover the documents that he quoted the Excellencies as saying. Thank you very much. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Public Works, Bishop Edghill, to make his presentation.

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I remember growing up as a young boy in a village – Cummings Lodge, just across the road. In

the days before television, we used to listen to radio. There was one radio serial, I am sure you will remember, Sir, *My bones and my flute*. Often times, the radio announcer would come on air and say that they will now take a short commercial break. After the commercial break he will come back on and say that they are now returning to regular programming. We just had the commercial break, let us go back to regular programming.

Before I present my presentation to this august House today, the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan went at length, using the media to report the activities of law enforcement in combatting the trafficking of illegal guns and illegal drugs to pin those on the Government. What a sad thing to do. I am sure any primary school student could take all of the reports under the APNU/AFC, and they could also pin them. What is more important? During the period of APNU/AFC, the brother of a sitting Minister, who was also responsible for the airport, was found in a foreign jurisdiction trafficking drugs. [**Mr. Ramson:** Is that a lie?] That is not a lie. You are trying to pin the illegal activities of the underworld on a Government and there was a Government Minister whose brother... [**An Hon. Member:** Convicted, too.] ...was convicted.

I also heard the Hon. Member going at length and quoting about corruption from this person and that person. The ultimate test of anti-corruption measures in Guyana, and in this National Assembly, is your declaration to the Integrity Commission. I call on the Hon. Members to publish, on their *Facebook* pages, the receipt of their Integrity Commission's declaration of 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018. If they were not corrupt, declare it; publish it. Mr. Ramjattan likes to talk about publishing on websites. Do you know what? They came into Government without making a declaration so that there was baseline on which people could judge them. The wealth that they are now talking about, there was no baseline to see how it grew from when they came in to where they are now. Every Member of the PPP/C consistently, every year, made their declaration to the Integrity Commission. You are coming here to lecture us about corruption. [**Mr. McCoy:** Every year.] Every year. [*Interruption*]

The *Bible* has admonished me as a student of the Theology that 'you' do not answer fools. I would like to congratulate, like I would have done year after year, my brother and friend, who I enjoy working with, the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, for a job well done in presenting *Budget 2022*. I take the opportunity, as well, to thank the hard working and

dedicated staff at the Ministry of Finance, and all the technical staff throughout the various Ministries for the hard work, the participation and the very many consultations to get us to where we are today. Today, we are debating this Budget. A budget is not just about numbers; it has a context. A budget must be discussed in a particular context. Dr. Ashni Singh, when he presented this Budget, highlighted for us that context. I would like to remind the House. I will read from the Budget document:

"Over the 18 months that have elapsed since democracy prevailed, pessimism has been replaced with optimism. Lethargy has made way for energy, superficiality has made way for substance, and pomp and pageantry have made way for humility and hard work. The policy void that existed then has been replaced with vision and clear direction, institutional inertia has been replaced with dynamism, and empty rhetoric has been replaced with concrete action. Today, investors who had walked away are returning, and projects that had stalled have resumed. Where there was once economic contraction there is now economic expansion, and where there were once job losses there is now job creation. These developments are clear for all to see, and they illustrate amply the indisputable relationship between democratic and economic outcomes".

Budget 2022 is altruistic; it is realistic, and it is futuristic. The plans, the projects, the programmes and the policies outlined are as a result of forward thinking. It is undergirded and supported by visionary planning. It could be best described as imaginative and strategic and will be remembered as the budget which laid the foundation for the Guyana that is being built, a Guyana that is the brightest spot in this hemisphere and globally. The development that is coming to this Guyana, I dare say, is not for one of us, is not for some of us, is not even for the best of us, but it is for all of us – 'One Guyana'. This Budget, which we are debating, addresses the welfare of the working class. It speaks to 'bread and butter' issues. It addresses the plight that the Hon. Mr. Duncan just spoke about. I did read the story about the six-year-old boy who was walking and begging, and the policeman who met him and bought him food. That boy is in that plight because his parents, over the five-year period that the APNU/AFC was in Office, were unable to take care of themselves; they were unable to take care of their children;

they were unable to get a job; and they were unable to have savings.

11.19 a.m.

This Budget restores hope to Guyanese people and will bring them out of poverty. When we speak about the cash grant for children and the school feeding programme, when we speak about an increase in pensions and about providing public assistance, when we speak about programmes to empower women, and when we think about taking care of the vulnerable groups in our society, this Budget addresses all of that.

Mr. Speaker, you would know as a very experienced man in the field of economics as well, that one cannot develop a country if one is not growing the middle class. This Budget, with the measures that have been put in place, is designed to grow the middle class. One evidence of the middle class growing is the announcement by the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) that the PAB series has been exhausted in six months and that it is about to go into the PAC series; in six months. Do you know what that means? The dreams of our young people... Public servants are no longer in poverty with bicycles; they are buying their own cars. They are owning their own homes. This Budget speaks about ensuring the viability of young people and their families. Benefits for their mortgage, ensuring medical and... insurance. We have to grow the middle glass. We have to reduce the bottom and grow the middle. We have to eliminate poverty. The measures and the policies and the programmes that are in this Budget help to do that.

I heard someone – I guess it is because of a lack of understanding – said, in this debate, that one cannot eat roads. [**Mr. Duncan:** You said that in the campaign (*Inaudible*).] Listen to this. Mr. Duncan, you should listen to this and put it ‘In The Ring’. Roads make people eat. I will explain to you how people eat when we construct roads just now. You cannot eat roads, but without roads you cannot eat. I will come to that just now.

Thirdly, this Budget lays the foundation and provides the framework for the modernisation, transformation and sustainable prosperity of Guyana. The projects and the infrastructural development are not just for the now. When we speak about the gas-to-shore and the gas-to-energy projects, it is not just something for now; this is about sustainable prosperity. When we reduce the cost of electricity, more investors will come to Guyana. I have

spoken about this, but I will say it again. In Guyana, we have I-CEE soft drink, we have BUSTA, and we have THRILL. I think THRILL comes from Trinidad, BUSTA comes from Suriname, and we produce I-CEE here. THRILL and BUSTA sell cheaper than I-CEE in Guyana. I guess Mr. Duncan and his group...

Mr. Speaker: I would not like to be unfair to the other local manufacturer – Soca.

Bishop Edghill: There is Soca. Thank you for reminding me, Mr. Speaker. There is also Soca. The group of journey men, who are myopic in their outlook, will never understand that Guyana must be able to compete. Could one imagine that we have wood in Guyana, and we are buying furniture overseas? Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? It is because of the cost to produce the value added here. What we are doing, when we invest in electricity, is to ensure Guyana’s sustainable prosperity. Our investments in the infrastructure to accommodate agriculture... This Budget provides \$5 billion to support sea and river defenses. It is not just boulders and rip-rap sea defenses that we are thinking about. We are thinking about the thousands of farmers who plant cash crops, rice, sugar, the poultry farmers and the cattle farmers. They have to be able to carry on their trade, so we have to keep the sea out. We are making the investment to secure agriculture. One cannot eat the stone on the sea defense, but, because we put it there, people can eat.

We all know, because we travel in the Caribbean, that tourism is one of the sectors that creates employment on a large scale. We have to put the infrastructure in place to support tourism. It means that, when tourists come here, they have to be able to get to land safely at the airstrips in the interior, go to the eco-lodges and get back out. We have to be able to put the infrastructure in place to ensure that the tourists who are coming here to rent a car to drive and see the country have proper road safety and there are proper roads to encourage that. The investment in infrastructure supports tourism. When we invest and we construct the roads, whether they are hinterland roads or whether they are urban roads or farm-to-market access roads, or we are opening up superhighways, these are not roads that are leading to just a destination. For example, there will be a new superhighway from Schoonord to Parika. While the road starts at Schoonord and ends at Parika, it opens opportunities. It is not just leading to Parika, but it is leading to prosperity. Opportunities for housing and opportunities

for farming... We have given incentives for large scale plantation agriculture. Those roads open those opportunities.

When we build all the 32 bridges from Kurupukari to Lethem, we will not just be pouring concrete and steel and putting it on earth. We will be making a corridor open to move to the next leg of linking Linden with Lethem, which essentially is opening tens of millions of people in a new market in northern Brazil. The road is leading so that people can eat.

When we invest in the Number 58 road, which is linking the Corentyne Highway with the Canje Creek and possibly be able to get over the Canje Creek, do you know what we are doing, Sir? The sons of the farmers could now get their own lands. The grandsons of those who farmed there could get their own lands. We are opening new lands so the infrastructural programme of Guyana... and the investments that we are making in infrastructure is not just brick, loam, sand, concrete and asphalt. They are opportunities to lead to prosperity for the people of Guyana. I am proud to be part of such a project.

This Budget provides for affordable housing. It provides for world-class healthcare facilities. It provides for accessible education for all, from nursery to, more realistically now, university or tertiary. It includes technical and vocational training. It provides opportunities for young people. It provides opportunities for the small businesses. It provides opportunities for improving the business competitiveness of the private sector. This Budget – I would like the Hon. Members of the Opposition to hear – provides dignity for our men and women in uniform. It provides dignity for them. This Budget addresses the health and wellness issues of our public servants. It provides for the development of their careers, and it also provides for their wellbeing. The President has been speaking over and over again. One thing to do is to give salary increases. Everyone wants to speak about salary increases but this Budget also provides for non-salary benefits such as housing, healthcare... [**Mr. Nandlall:** Scholarships.] Scholarships for free. Go tell the people ‘In The Ring’ that this Budget is not doing anything for them. They are listening to Bishop Edghill this morning.

This Budget provides for the economic advancement of Amerindians. In last year’s Budget, we bought tractors, harrows, machinery for harvesting, ploughs and the trailers to transport persons. I am proud to report to this House that, in Region 8, we were able to give contracts to all of the

communities to build the roads. One cannot just have the tractor, but one must be able to link the communities. Do you know what that means? They must be able to move between villages. We did not only confine them to Region 8, we are building the road from Region 9 to Region 8 so that they could get out to Lethem and, once they get out to Lethem, they could get to any other part of this country. That is what we are doing with our infrastructure. The PPP/C is not afraid of big things. We are not afraid of doing megaprojects. There are different types of phobias. There is acrophobia – people who are afraid of heights. There is aerophobia – people who are afraid of flying. Then there is another phobia – megalophobia – people who are afraid of big things. This aptly describes that section of the House at which I am looking. They are afraid of doing big things. Every time something big is discussed they get scared. The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, which is the one project that would have already been benefitting Guyana, they scuttled. It is too big for them to understand. Now, they hear gas-to-shore project, it is too big for them to understand. They hear \$88 billion in infrastructure; it is too big for them to understand. They hear about a budget of \$552.9 billion, it is too big for them to understand.

Let me take the time to correct. An Hon. Member stood in this House and said, up until now, they do not understand how much money from the Natural Resource Fund will be spent and where. I know we have comprehension issues. Minister of Education, I appealed to you, over and over again, to address this issue of comprehension. [**Mr. Ramson:** In the Opposition.] In the Opposition. Mr. Speaker, do you know why we are in this House? It is because every cent from the Natural Resource Fund that will be spent to support *Budget 2022* will be transferred to the Consolidated Fund. Money could only leave the Consolidated Fund by an Appropriation Act. An Appropriation Act is something that takes place in this House. Next week, every Member over there who has the capacity to understand will be able to ask questions. By the way, there are no foolish questions, so they could ask any question. Answers will be given and, at the end of it, a vote will be made. When that is done, that Bill will be signed into an Act, and that is where the money is spent. Oil money, gold money, rice money, sugar money, taxes money, all is in one fund, and it is financing a development plan. That is the simple explanation.

11.34 a.m.

I have a message for Guyana and all the 31 Members; 30 now, waiting on one. They like to quote from the *Bible*, so I will help them with a scripture. Proverb 10:4. Hear what this proverb states, that lazy hands make bring poverty, but diligent hands bring prosperity. That is the definition of what took place in 2015–2020 – lazy hands, institutional inertia, doing nothing. Hear what Proverb 10:5 states, that a wise man harvests in summer. Summer is that favourable season. You make use of the opportunity. You cease the moment [An Hon. Member (Government side): *Make hay while the sun shines.*] *Make hay while the sun shines.* Since many of them are biblically oriented, it is what is call a kairos moment or a prophetic moment – a wise man sows in summer. Listen to this – thank you, Minister, Dr. Singh – because he who sleeps in summer is a disgrace. Do you expect that the Dr. Irfaan Ali-led Administration will be sleeping in this summer season? The answer is a big no. President Ali and his team and Guyana will not sleep in this summer moment. We will work with diligent hands to implement and ensure that prosperity comes to the people of Guyana. The contributions of this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) shows that they lack foresight or they are having difficulties with intellectual insight.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about some of the achievements of the Ministry of Public Works since we came into Office. I want to start with the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. I went there for several festivities and the Guyanese coming back home. I do not need to listen to people who are anti-developmental and anti-progressive. I listen to people who, when they land here, say wow, you guys are doing a good job; I was here three years ago; I was here four years ago. The 1,500 issues that had to be fixed, we fixed them. We opened a new runway, and besides that, we have been able to put in the instrument landing system as well as the Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) System. Do you know what that means? Dr. Singh, when the pilots for the planes, the Qatar Airways or all of the transatlantic flights, come here they want predictability, in that they must be able to land and not be diverted to another airport because they cannot see the runway. We have been able to address those issues. We have been able to work with the Chinese contractor with all of the difficulties and problems on a project that was plagued by mismanagement under the APNU/AFC. We are now getting them to put in what was always required, additional airbridges and the façade. We are getting them to put in the curtain wall.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, spoke about one pothole that a contractor we gave to pave the road... one pothole. I would like to report to this National Assembly that in 2021, through the Special Projects Unit of the Ministry, we have rehabilitated and maintained 517 kilometres of roads in Georgetown, Timehri, and Berbice. So, if you want to judge us on one pothole, let the other drivers tell you what we have fixed. They have seen the visibility of what was done. We have done in excess of 300 kilometres of community roads. We have had to respond to emergencies – the bridge that collapsed at Hogg Street; the Eastern Highway leading to the People's National Congress Reform building, we fixed it. We were trying to get it fixed before congress. We wanted to do that, but we could not get it done in time because they were not sure if they were having or not having congress. We fixed the bridge in Glasgow, New Amsterdam; we fixed the bridge at Dennis Street – all emergency works. We went on to fix a number of community bridges.

We have installed more than 700 streetlights covering a 30-kilometres area, in terms of infrastructural development. We have provided for pedestrian walkways at Pouderoyen, Anna Regina, Tuschen, Albert Street and Vlissingen Road. We have done the construction of all-weather roads at Moleson Creek to Eldorado. Yes, Mr. Speaker...

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

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member has as much time as he likes, but I am confined to ask you for five minutes for him to conclude his excellent presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Member, you may continue to your conclusion in five minutes.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Sir. We have fixed those farms to market access roads. The road from Sand Hill to Timehri is no longer a dream, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. You will join me in one of those new pick-ups that we are taking off the Valued-Added Tax (VAT) and Excise Tax from, so we could be able to get to those roads and we will enjoy them. The alignment from Parika to Goshen, I heard someone out in Makouria asking if the road will be meeting Makouria. We are reaching Goshen. One has to pass Makouria to get to

Goshen. We are building the road; the alignment is being cut.

We are continuing to do our sea defences. We have been able to get the motor vessel (MV) Canawaima back in service. The MV Canawaima was down since 2019. As a matter of fact, the APNU/AFC did not have the capacity to engage the Surinamese. It looks as if they could not get anything done with Suriname. Because of the interventions at the highest level, the dialogue between Guyana and Suriname and with friendly relations, the MV Canawaima is back in service. In terms of what is happening in the maritime sector, we have already bought a new pilot boat, not one that goes in six knots and 12 knots because it would never get to where it is going with the 52 ships that it has to bring into port Georgetown every week with a six-knots and a 12-knots. We are building a better and bigger boat.

The Transport and Harbour's Department, which was an entity that all of us had great concern for because of its liability and inability to finance itself, last year, earned revenue of over \$1 billion. By the way, ask the users of the Parika/Supenaam service about the satisfaction that they now enjoy because of the additional service that was put in place. During the Christmas period, people commended the Transport and Harbour's Department for the service because they were able to get to Georgetown and get back home on the same day. It was because of visionary interventions there.

The Government Electrical Inspectorate (GEI) department has adopted 31 new electrical standards. They are now implemented across the country to ensure safety in homes and the prevention of electrical fires. We now have a register of contractors; everything there is digitised/computerised.

In terms of our report card, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) ranked Guyana as number one on the Safety Oversight Index in the area of operations. This is a testament to the country's robust safety oversight capabilities, when compared to all 35 States in South America, Latin America, the Caribbean and North America. Guyana was ranked number one. Additionally, Guyana has ranked number two on the Safety Oversight Index in the area of air navigation services in all 35 States, including the United States of America (USA), Canada and the whole of South America and so on. We are number one where safety is concerned and number two in terms of our air navigational services. We are not boasting that we have done well and we

have done everything perfectly. We are basically saying that we have repaired the damage and this Budget is laying the platform for us to take it to the next level.

For the Demerara Harbour Bridge, we have been able to make the necessary interventions. Mr. Speaker, is it not strange that for the whole period that we are in Office, we did not have one sea defence breach? Do you know why? We are maintaining and inspecting. Is it not strange that the Bridge did not collapse and people had to wait for days to pass? It is because we are maintaining and fixing. The more than \$88 billion made available to us this year in *Budget 2022* will be used prudently. I use this opportunity to call upon all stakeholders, contractors, engineers, consultants as well as the beneficiaries – the people of Guyana – for us to work together to ensure that every project that is being implemented in your community is done correctly.

I know that my time is gone, but let me just close and say that when the story of Guyana's economic transformation and modernisation is recorded in the annals of history, *Budget 2022* would be annotated as the critical point in that journey. I, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill. We will now have the contribution of the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, starting at 11.48.20 a.m.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I note how precise you are with my time. I do hope that, not when I start but when I am finished, I am given the same latitude that you gave the Hon. Member just now. As it is customary, I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2022*. Allow me to extend thanks to the committed staff of the Ministry of Finance and all other ministries for the hard work that is involved in crafting the budget.

11.49 a.m.

The nation is fully aware that you provided only the technical support and the inequitable measures including in this Budget were not your doings but that of a clueless Government.

Allow me to offer some general comments on *Budget 2022* before examining specific areas under my remit. It would appear that the Minister with Responsibility for Finance wants Guyana to become a nation of truck drivers with all the tax breaks he has granted to those businesses that want to

get into the oil and gas sector. Thereby, heightening the sucking sound as our economy glides into the vortex of a sector, which this year will contribute 90% of total exports. Disregarding the much-touted diversification of our economy. This 2022 *Budget* should really be entitled, ‘Santa Clause for the rich and Scrooge for the working poor’. The latter has been granted a miserly maximum of \$2,800 increase in their disposable income, complements of the Minister and his new tax threshold.

Instead of addressing the disposable income of the poor, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) would rather send their Ministers out with suitcases of cash into the regions and have poor mothers go before the cameras and kiss the royal hand in deep appreciation of the Because We Care Grant. That is the indignity of charity. The Government’s answer to high market prices, the spiralling cost of living, is blaming the middlemen, their friends, for price gouging. Instead of addressing the root causes of these problems, its response is farmers’ market. As for the roll back on freight charges for importers, which the Minister with Responsibility for Finance has stated would save some \$6 billion, last year the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) was compelled to beg these importers to pass any savings to the consumers. Despite all the Government’s claims of removing more than 200 taxes, thus reducing the burden on the working poor, that has not happened in the last 18 months; nothing has decreased.

Another one of the PPP/C tax breaks that has backfired is what was given to the gold sector. Recall how the miners begged and cried for concessions, yet, in 2021, this sector recorded 11.3 lower declarations, even though gold prices were at its highest level. This Budget prioritises the private over the public, the rich over the poor, individual wealth over common national prosperity. Note the measures for private health and life insurance, yet glaringly absent are measures to help the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) meet the needs of the working citizens or public hospitals and schools to keep their qualified and experienced staff; nothing aimed at even helping the working poor getting to work; not a single word on the public ground transportation, just a mention, Sir, of more roads. There is more money for prison cells and magistrate courts for those who dare to stand up against this heartless Regime. However, nothing they could do will stifle the growing voices of discontent in the population. The emptying of the full amount of savings from the Natural Resource Fund is beyond reckless; hillbillies-

type disregard for a country’s economic stability. This is a Budget for the rich and crumbs for the poor.

In my previous budget speeches, I had cause to state that the return of the PPP/C signals the return of moneys for the boys. An examination of the 2021 procurement only highlights what the nation has always known: this Government is about projects for families and friends. Here are a few examples. In 2021, last year, based on public records and disclosures in the health sector, the new Guyana Pharmaceutical Corporation (GPC) received \$13.8 billion in contracts – US\$70 million. We are all aware who is the best friend of the owner of that company. Western Scientific Company Limited, the company that was blacklisted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 2016 for fraudulent practices, we see \$5.6 billion – US\$28 million from the Ministry of Health. In fact, an analysis of the 2021 expenditures for the Ministry of Health shows that these two companies were awarded 85% of the total budget allocated for the Ministry, a whopping \$17.9 billion – US\$98 million in contracts.

Another procurement detail of interest, in May, 2021, a company, Health International Inc., was awarded a contract for \$236 million for the rental of a warehouse for the storage of pharmaceutical and medical supplies. No guess for the location of the company – Queens Atlantic Industrial Site Ruimveldt, Georgetown. And they speak about the money; \$236 million was rented; no public disclosure; nothing at all. Here is another one, the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) issued the following letters to all the agencies in 2019. It is addressed to all Permanent Secretaries, Regional Executive Officers, Head of Agencies and Head of Departments. I will just quote the last part of it. It states:

“Procuring Entities are advised that no contract...”

The subject is:

“Procurement (Suspension and Debarment) Regulations 2019”

The letter continues to state:

“Procuring Entities are advised that no contract shall be awarded to an entity that has been debarred by the Commission. The list of debarred contractors is maintained on the Commission’s website...”

I checked up to yesterday, they are still there. The letter continues to state:

“...and should be checked prior to the award of any contract.

Please see attached, a list of contractors debarred by the Commission effective 25th & 27th October, 2019.”

They have a list. I will just read some. The list is as follows:

“MOHAMED ... YUNAS

MOHAMED FASIL YUNAS TRADING AS
YUNAS CIVIL & BUILDING CONSTRUCTION
SERVICES

CHINA RAILWAY FIRST GROUP (GUYANA)
INC.

MR. V. DALIP

Mr. V. DALIP ENTERPRISE...”

Sir, there are some other names like “Ms. Sabrina Williams” and a few companies and individuals. That is the Public Procurement Commission. It debarred these... a legally sitting constitutional body. Despite being banded by the PPC, two contracts were awarded by the Central Housing and Planning Authority – one of \$890 million and one from Region 9 of \$30 million – to Mr. V. Dalip, a blacklisted company. Additionally, contracts were awarded... I see the Prime Minister just *ups and run*. They just awarded a contract for Amaila Falls to China Railway First Group, blacklisted company for fraudulent practices. Of course, there were several contracts awarded to Mr. Yunas. The PPP/C cannot even obey our laws.

What is of interest is not what is included in the budget of the Ministry of Public Works, but what has not been included. In *Budget 2021*, the sum of \$105 million was included for the studies and works to transform Lethem Airport to a regional hub – you could recall that they regaled – a new bridge at Wismar and the construction of a new Stelling at Parika. The Hon. Member just regaled us about the Parika to Supenaam crossing. After spending \$102 million in 2021, these projects have vanished from *Budget 2022*, without a single word from the Minister or anyone. The Government will be expending \$2.6 billion, they are saying, to upgrade the Soesdyke-Linden Highway, another \$6 billion to upgrade the Linden to Mabura Road, yet, they lack the foresight to make a better bridge which is linking these \$2 billion roads. The Hon. Member just came and said

that is forward thinking. If that is forward thinking, do not ever let us go backwards.

I would like to get to my remit – oil and gas. Guyana has been tremendously blessed with huge oil and gas resources. We are grateful to the international oil companies that have helped us unlock our potential in this area, thus, providing increased financial resources to our country. However, our governance systems must improve to prevent much wastage of these resources through inefficiencies and corruption. Without an upgrade in our present governance system, our non-oil economy will see little if any growth. At least, not in keeping with our oil rich economy. We see the deficiencies in our political and economic governance system, glaringly exposed in *Budget 2022*. We see a few mega projects described to be very important and transformative. The Government says that they are so important and so transformative that we do not need time to study them properly to let information guide our decision-making process.

We see little emphasis on our primary tertiary education institution – the University of Guyana – to build capacity among our citizens. We see little investment in research and development activities, which investment will provide the opportunity for our highly trained professionals to work in Guyana on our major technical problems and challenges. The solutions of which will drive national development. Our lack of intention to research, for instance, is manifestly obvious in our ignorance to the cause of low fish catch. More so, the lack of appropriate research and technology will likely cost the \$200 million solution in the Budget, allocated for fish cages, to fail, thus condemning another group of hardworking Guyanese to the breadline. *Budget 2022* is filled with throwing money at issues without proper analysis. Just last week, the Government refused to do a proper analysis on the pipeline proposals for bringing gas to shore, to allow the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources to assist its viability, which is another glaring example of poor governance.

12.04 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, a detailed study of this project would show that the pipeline solution proposed is simply not the best to utilise our natural gas resources. The pipeline, the gas-to-shore solution, is much too expensive. It is transporting gas for electricity generation at a cost of US\$4.50 per million British thermal units (Btu), a cost for transportation that

exceeds the average market price for gas worldwide over the past year. This cannot and will not result in cheaper electricity for our nation. To illustrate further, what a study would have revealed is that only recently the proposed 1,800 kilometres (km) pipeline designated to transport 1.2 billion cubic feet of gas per day between Israel and the European Union (EU), has been put on hold. It was paused partly because of concerns of a lack of financial feasibility expressed by both the Israeli and the USA governments. This concern about the feasibility of the pipeline project should have raised a red flag for our Guyana pipeline project since the EU pipeline would have been transporting gas at more than 30% less cost than our pipeline project.

If the Government had agreed to further studies into this project, it would have likely been made aware that, in some scenarios, transporting gas, in the form of compressed natural gas (CNG), to shore, in International Organization for Standardization (ISO) containers, is much more cost-effective than a pipeline. A study would likely have brought to light that transporting gas to shore by ISO containers would be almost 75% cheaper than a pipeline. Further studies would have likely brought to light that the ISO container method of transporting gas has the possibility of opening huge export markets for Guyana into the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Brazil. If the Government were willing to conduct more detailed analysis, it would have discovered that a private sector company has a take or pay contract with a power generating company in Central America to supply CNG by ISO containers for electricity generation, and has applied to the US Department of Energy (DOE) for approval to ship CNG to Central America and the Caribbean by this method, using its technology and experience in the use of this method of gas transportation.

The opportunities to utilise our gas resources are enormous and, as we have stated before, the Opposition will lend its support to the Government for negotiations with the Stabroek Block operators to get a better oil contract, lower price for the gas, and better conditions for the Guyanese public.

Mr. Speaker, on the vexing matter of flaring: flaring is the disposal of waste gas produced with the oil into the atmosphere. This gas is known to contain over 250 identified toxins including benzene; metals such as mercury and arsenic; sour gas with hydrogen sulfide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides. These form acids in the atmosphere and fall back on the earth and in our water as acid rain. Also

produced are carbon dioxide and methane, which are the two main contributors to greenhouse gases and climate change – a danger that the entire world is fighting against. The law of the land is very clear when it comes to flaring. First, paragraph 3(6) of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Environmental Permit expressly prohibits flaring, with exceptions being made for flaring during startup of the floating production storage and offloading (FPSO), emergencies, or periods of maintenance. The unexpected failure of ExxonMobil's equipment at the beginning of operations prompted the Coalition Government to take actions to stop flaring, including severely reducing oil production, and revisions of the EPA Environmental Permit to ensure compliance with our laws.

The PPP/C callously reversed the zero-flaring mandate. With this reversal, the PPP/C now gives ExxonMobil the license to flare any amount if it pays a fee of US\$45 per tonne of carbon dioxide flared. The PPP/C's declaration that the fine of US\$45 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent emitted is an improvement, is nothing but a laughable sham, giving ExxonMobil the license to flare. Money talks and our environment suffers. Most worrying was the recent statement by ExxonMobil that it still has not fixed the flaring problem which has been ongoing since the start of operations two years ago. The Government has total disregard for the nation's health, safety, and environment. This was made clear when the Ministers of Government continued parroting ExxonMobil's position, that Guyana is a carbon sink, so it has the capacity to take in more pollutants. This is coming from a Government that is also pushing a green agenda.

The foregoing also highlights that the current PPP/C Administration is more interested in prioritising monetary gains over the protection of the environment, safety, and health. This is an unnecessary and dangerous choice since today's technology makes it commonplace for both environmental protection and monetary gains to be achieved at the same time, especially considering that ExxonMobil is comfortably and willingly achieving these targets in other countries such as the United States. On assumption of Office, the PPP/C reversed the position that Guyana should be financially covered for any and all spills to little or no coverage at all when it reversed the agreement between the Coalition and ExxonMobil for the company to obtain the maximum insurance coverage on the market, with the remainder being covered by the three parent companies of Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL), thus all adding to unlimited liability coverage.

The limited insurance coverage against all risks poses a severe risk to Guyana, leaving us vulnerable to financial bankruptcy without the means to clean up any oil spill, not to mention the nation's exposure to lawsuits from bordering countries. The British Petroleum (BP) oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico cost approximately US\$70 billion, and the environmental damages persist. It is rather stunning that, with the proposed increase in production, the Government is now talking about having ExxonMobil obtain insurance to the value of only US\$2 billion. It begs the following questions: did ExxonMobil cancel the \$2.5 billion in private insurance that was put in place under the Coalition Government; why would the Government feel satisfied with only US\$2 billion worth of liability coverage, when the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico cost more than US\$70 Billion; and if the Government is satisfied with only the US\$2 billion coverage, how would any costs over and above that be covered?

In a similar fashion, as they have addressed flaring, the PPP/C have reversed every progressive measure that we had put in place for dealing with oil production. The PPP/C upon taking Office, immediately reversed the Coalition's zero dumping of produced water mandate that was developed by the EPA, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), the Department of Energy (DOE), and independent international consultants. This mandate was consistent with the World Bank's international standards that require reinjection, and not the dumping of this water, which is three times hotter than the ocean and contains oil, radioactive elements, mercury, lead, arsenic, and other toxic chemicals. There is now a serious question surrounding the cause of the drop in fishing quantities offshore Guyana as it relates to this dumping of produced water.

Mr. Speaker, no one with any inkling of common sense would think that throwing all of those billions of gallons of hot, radioactive, and toxic water into our clean oceans would not impact our fish life. More egregious is the Government's nonchalant attitude towards a study that could find out what the impact is on our fishing environment. In September, 2020, the Commissioner General of Guyana Revenue Authority reported that the audit of ExxonMobil's preproduction costs, reportedly some US\$460 million, was completed and handed over to the Government. The nation was stunned to learn two weeks ago that this was not the case. Further, 15 months later, after not making a single public comment, the Government now wants us to believe that the process undertaken by the international auditors and

supervised by GRA was defective. It was 15 months after and not a single word. I will give them the benefit of the doubt. Even if that was the case, why wait 15 months to inform the public? Why has this not been a matter of urgency for the Government? After all, an audit of the claimed preproduction costs would have provided an invaluable insight into the billing practices of the operator.

Mr. Speaker, the Government's continued failure to audit ExxonMobil's US\$9.5 billion spendings is tantamount to the Government aiding and abetting the fleecing of Guyana's resources. The PPP/C's excuse that the process has been stymied because of the absence of strong local groups to do the audits is quite frankly unacceptable. It is estimated that an audit of ExxonMobil's expense claims can garner savings of up to US\$1 billion. It is far more than the US\$604 million being removed from the Natural Resource Fund (NRF).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, at 12:19:07 a.m., I will have to ask that you get an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

12.19 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Opposition Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you have five minutes to continue so that you can conclude.

Mr. Patterson: Failure to do these audits is a commission of wrongdoing and malfeasance in office. No excuse or political grandstanding could absolve the Government of this grave sin against this nation. No one buys a bottle of water that is not full, because one can see through the container; no one buys fruits from our local vendors if the products are visibly damaged. However, if one buys a bottle of cooking gas, one cannot see if he/she is getting value, unless the bottle is weighed on a standard scale or unless one believes that the seal has been properly set and has not been tampered with. This is what the Government is asking our nation to accept, a product from a supplier without verification. There have been repeated public requests for the Minister of Natural Resources to provide the daily production information for the oil. We are paying ExxonMobil to explore for us, to drill for us, to store and mostly to sell for us. To date, there has been no information; there are no

figures to perform analysis on and no production data which can be tabulated with the corresponding oil prices to ensure that we are receiving value for our oil. The Guyanese citizen, the main stakeholder in all of this, remains in ignorance and cannot check what we have been told.

This lack of transparency dominates the People's Progressive Party/Civic's activities in the oil and gas sector and, quite frankly, characterises the PPP/C's activities in general and should be concerning for all stakeholders wherever they may be. There was a disturbing report, in our local newspapers, about Guyanese workers complaining that they were forced to eat leftovers on the Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO). This was disturbing on several fronts. However, what was most glaring was that the Ministry of Labour summoned the recruiting firm, held discussions with the recruiting firm and was pleased with the outcome of these discussions. Clearly, this is a case of a meeting between friends and not a concern of regulatory oversight and non-compliance. Further, the recruitment firm reported that due to the company's protocol, the clients of the SBM Offshore would normally eat first then the service staff. Nowhere, in the response by the Ministry of Labour, was it reported that this practice was addressed. The segregation of eating places was discontinued with apartheid and Jim Crow laws of the South. It is sad that in the 21st Century, our Government is allowing such practices to resurface which is causing Guyanese to be treated as second-class citizens in our own country.

In conclusion, we have stated before that the Opposition will support the Government in defining Constitutional Reform provisions that would result in a bipartisan approach to address our national challenges and opportunities. We will support new systems of governance which would facilitate world-class management in all areas of our economy and society. Guyana has been extremely blessed by the almighty. Let us use our blessings not just to calculate averages that look good on paper, while the standard of living of our people is declining, but rather with wisdom to improve the lives of all our citizens while positively impacting our region. I close with a reminder of the saying that we are as strong as our weakest link. Too many links are getting weaker. The time to fix them, Sir, is now. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon. Member, Mr. Vickram Bharrat to make his presentation.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to start my presentation by reading a paragraph from a letter that was published today in the *Guyana Times* newspaper. You should listen to the rebuttals to some of your comments Hon. Member Mr. Patterson because there were a lot of misrepresentations of the facts and what the APNU/AFC actually did.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to start by reading the first paragraph of a letter that was published in today's *Guyana Times* newspaper which summarises the position of the APNU/AFC and their comments on *Budget 2022*.

“Whatever the real or imagined ills of our economy or plight of the poor are, the APNU+AFC, whether in Government or as the political Opposition, lack the intellectual fortitude, integrity, and moral standing to chastise Budget 2022 as was presented by the PPP/C Government.”

When APNU/AFC was in Government, we said that they locked themselves in bubble, they are functioning in a bubble; they have isolated themselves from the people and the realities of the situation on the ground, and one would have expected this to change after the electorates burst that bubble. Unfortunately, in Opposition, they are still exhibiting the same sort of behaviour of being stuck in that bubble. They are not in tune with what the reality is; they are not in tune with the plight of our people in the country; they are not in tune as to where Guyana is going; they are not in tune as to what *Budget 2022* will do for our economy and the transformation of the lives of our people. That is what they have not realised.

We have heard so many comments and so many fancy descriptions of *Budget 2022* by Members of the APNU/AFC. We have heard that *Budget 2022* is a long waste of time; we have heard that it is a joke; we have heard that it is disrespectful. How can *Budget 2022* be disrespectful when *Budget 2022* is offering \$30,000 to every single schoolchild in this country, regardless of whether they are from Orealla, whether they are from Ithaca, whether they are from the Rupununi, or whether they are from the Corentyne Coast? Every single schoolchild will get \$30,000 – government and private schools.

We have heard so many comments from speakers on the Opposition benches. We heard the Hon. Member of Parliament (MP) from Region 5 saying that the roads in Number 28, Ithaca, Belladrum, Seafield [**Ms. Ferguson:**

Hopetown.] and Hopetown are in terrible conditions. That is a result of the APNU/AFC failing their supporters. They failed their supporters. This same APNU/AFC Opposition were in Government from 2015–2020, even though they were illegally squatting in Government. They failed their supporters in Region 5. They come to the National Assembly and say that the roads in Hopetown, the roads in Ithaca and the roads in Belladrum are in terrible states; what did you do for your supporters in those five years? Even if you did something, it was substandard work. How could it be in a deplorable state so quickly? It means that you did shoddy work in your support base – shoddy work in your support base. To come to the National Assembly, we must actually think before we make certain comments.

We heard the other MP from Region 5 using the deaths of innocent people to gain cheap political point in this august House. Those are comments that should never ever be used. We should not use the deaths of people to gain political points in the National Assembly. We heard the Hon. MP from Mocha Arcadia, saying that there is nothing in this Budget for the working-class people and there is nothing in this Budget for the women in this country, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the Hon. Member and her children, she did mention that she has five children. That Hon. Member will be collecting \$150,000 because of the PPP/C Government – because of the PPP/C Government – which is an increase of \$55,000 from a few months ago. Last year, the Hon. Member collected \$95,000 and, in 2022, she will be collecting \$150,000. What did the Hon. Member receive when her Government was in power? Nothing; nothing.

It pains one to sit and listen to an individual who was a former Minister of Education; I am not sure if she is still a Member of Parliament or not. The former Minister of Education comes to this House to say that the 5Bs Programme is better than the cash grant. She is speaking to sensible people; Guyanese are sensible people. If one has 30 buses by 30 students, how much can one transport on a given day? How much can one transport on a given day? Then, the Hon. Member is speaking about handouts as if the bicycles, slippers, boots and breakfast were not handouts. I am happy that the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, is here and fully awake because the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, seems to have an obsession with taxes. There is some sort of obsession with the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, with taxes and sugar workers – taxes and sugar workers. When he was in Government and now he is in Opposition, there is still the same obsession with taxing the poor people. Yet, they come

and say that we are taking disposable income away from people. We have to be sure about what we are saying. We cannot be contradicting each other and being all over the place. One Member is saying that we are taking away disposable income, the other Member is saying that we need to tax the population, we need to ensure that we tax them and tax them more. There has to be some sort of synergy.

12.34 p.m.

They have to be sure of what they really want. It is the same attitude that has them in the opposition benches today. It is the same attitude and their dislike for sugar workers that has them in the opposition benches. The Hon. Member, being a *Berbician* himself, one would think that he loves sugar workers. This is the very Member who, every single time we make allocations for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), has a problem. What is the problem with the GuySuCo, sugar workers and this Hon. Member? It is because they voted you out, Hon. Member. They put you back in the opposition benches where you will stay for a very long time because, obviously, there is no leadership; there is no sense of direction; and there is not even an Opposition Leader. [**Mr. Patterson:** *(Inaudible)*] There is this obsession... [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Did you hear Mr. David Patterson just now?] I will get to that; I have 35 minutes. There is an article, I think it was in the *Kaieteur News*, quoting the Hon. Member to say:

“ ‘Guyana on path of resource curse’

...Ramjattan says Budget 2022 destroying non-oil sectors”

It is obvious that the Hon. Member did not listen to when the Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, was reading the Budget, he did not take the time to read it properly or he was probably not awake when the Government Members were explaining all the measures in the Budget. How could you actually say that *Budget 2022* is killing the non-oil sectors when the money from the Natural Resource Fund that flowed into the Budget is to incentivise the very non-oil sectors, such as sugar, fishing, logging, mining, tourism and manufacturing? Mr. Speaker, you examined the Budget. Mr. Speaker, if you examine the Budget, you will see that the money from the Natural Resource Fund is flowing into those sectors. It is flowing into agriculture; it is flowing into health; it is flowing into education; it is flowing into tourism and manufacturing; and it is flowing into our security. That is what it is being used for.

They come to the National Assembly and say that oh, the People's Progressive Party/Civic is wasting the oil money and there is no evidence of how the oil money will be spent. We are saying to the people of Guyana that is how the money will be spent in 2022: on education, on health, on agriculture, on tourism, on security, on training our young people and building back the sugar industry. That is where the money will be spent, because majority of our Guyanese brothers and sisters are employed in those sectors – not just in the oil and gas sector – they are employed in those sectors. That is why we are committed, as a Government, to ensure that we continue to grow the non-oil sector, because the non-oil sectors are important in terms of job opportunities. That is why we brought to the National Assembly the Local Content Bill, which is legislation now. It was to ensure that those very sectors benefit from the oil and gas sector. That is the purpose of the local content legislation. The main purpose of the local content legislation is to ensure that the other sectors benefit, that tourism benefits, that agriculture benefits and that the training by education allows our people to enjoy the opportunities that are presenting themselves in the oil and gas sector. It pains to listen, for the last three days, to people who should have known better coming and making these remarks.

I have not heard, in this Budget debate what we should have heard from the Opposition, which should have been recommendations. It should have been, what do you think we should put into this Budget? I want to accept that there is no budget in any country in the world, that can solve all the ills of a country or that can solve all the problems in a country. No budget can do that. A one-year budget cycle cannot solve all of the problems. We know and we accept that *Budget 2022* – even though we know that it is the best budget ever presented in the history of this country – will not solve all of our problems. We will come again in 2023 and 2024 until 2030 and 2040. We will keep coming in order to make the lives of people in this country better. One of my Colleagues reminded me, this morning, that Norway is seen as a model oil and gas country and everybody wants to model their framework and their management architecture framework off of Norway. Norway found oil a long, long time ago; Guyana found oil in 2015. Look at the infrastructure in that country. How did it build those infrastructures? It was the oil proceeds that were used to build the infrastructure in that country.

I do not want to touch on the many comments that there were on racism, ethnicity and one group. I am not a person

to touch on things like that, but it pains me to have people who are elected leaders coming to this National Assembly and saying that the PPP/C is only doing things for one section of the population. It pains me because it is not true. It is not true. Is it that only one set of children will get the cash grant? Is it that only one set of people will go to the six new hospitals that we are going to build? Is it one set of people who will benefit from the local content legislation? All of Guyana will benefit. There is this perception – I wanted to say this a long time – by A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) that there is only one ethnic group that works at the GuySuCo. That is a figment of their imagination. If one is to look at the workforce at the GuySuCo it is very diverse. Sugar workers are not one race only; every Guyanese of all races work with the GuySuCo. There is this perception in their heads that only one set of people work with the GuySuCo and that is why the PPP/C is putting money into the GuySuCo. They need to go and check the order lines. It is Guyanese of all walks of life who work with the GuySuCo and are sugar workers. That is why we are building back sugar, because it is benefitting Guyana and Guyanese and not one section of the population. It pains me to hear elected leaders who are coming to this House and talking about open racism. I thought we had gone past those days. That should not be used to gain political points these days; the days for that are long gone.

Then, there are talks of corruption. There are so many talks of corruption and the Hon. Member who spoke before me mentioned a few things. One such claim or allegation of corruption is some New Guyana Pharmaceutical Company Incorporated (New GPC Inc.) drug bond story. Why did the Hon. Member not talk about the Sussex Street drug bond? The bottom house drug bond that we were paying \$14 million a month for us to store condoms and lubricants in. I could remember, on that night when a team of parliamentarians went to check, including Hon. Bishop Edghill, that is what they found, a bottom house that was rented from a party supporter. You did not say that he was given an advance in rent, almost a whole year advance in rent, so that he could have bought the same building. It was done so that he could have purchased the same building with your – not your, but the people's money. That is corruption.

The Member spoke so glowingly about oil and gas but APNU/AFC committed probably the worst crime against Guyanese people in history. I think this is even worse than Jim Jones: the Private Sector Commission (PSC). That is the

worst crime against Guyana and Guyanese. Then, you come to the National Assembly to talk about oil and gas so glowingly. We discovered oil and gas in 2015. The APNU/AFC took Office, I think, five or seven days after that. When we took over in August, 2020, the oil and gas was floating. I say that because there was no proper framework, management, model and framework to manage the oil and gas sector. There was nothing at all other than a one-man show and the management of the sector moving from Ministry to Ministry. That is what we had. There was no local content legislation in place. We brought that to the National Assembly so that people could benefit from the sector.

Talking about corruption, again, the Hon. Member did not mention a word about the \$18 million bonus. We have to remind people. We have to keep reminding the people that you collected US \$18 million signing bonus and you never told the people of Guyana that you collected the money. We have to remind them. You do not like when we remind the people of your misdeeds and your corrupt activities. You do not like when we remind the people of this country of that. That is the problem. I was in the National Assembly, at that time when a question was asked of the then Minister, Mr. Jordan, and he said that he had no knowledge of it. When we asked again, he said that he thought it was a gift. One and a half year after, then we heard that oh, they received US \$18 million and it was in a special account and that was to do with the case with Venezuela. Why did you not tell us when you collected it? When one talks about corruption, we have to talk about these things too.

Since we are talking oil and gas, we have to talk about the demurrage cost under the APNU/AFC and under the PPP/C Government. When we took Office, three lifts were completed and we collected an invoice for US\$567,000 – demurrage cost. We had to pay that. The people of Guyana had to pay that. For the next six lifts, under the PPP/C Administration, we have not paid more than \$100,000 demurrage cost. That is proper management and that is the fact. There was another comment, which I wish to address more before I go more into oil and gas and for us to speak about some of the opportunities that lie ahead, and that is of gold production. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson mentioned it and, I think, Hon. Member Ms. Fernandes also mentioned gold production.

12.49 p.m.

The Hon. Member mentioned that in 2016 we had the highest gold declaration in Guyana. That is a fact and that is true, but if the Hon. Member understands how the industry works, she would realise that it was because of the work of the PPP/C Administration, prior 2015, resulted in the highest declaration of gold. What is worse than that, the Hon. Member boasted about high declaration under the Administration. Unfortunately, when we took over Government, it was not reflected in the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) accounts. It was not reflected in the figures of the Guyana Gold Board that were in arrears. In 2015, when we left, GGMC had over \$20 billion, just as the Guyana Forestry Commission had over a billion dollars. The GGMC had over \$20 billion. When we took over, GGMC had \$7 billion, almost \$13 billion unaccounted for, yet the Hon. Members are boasting about a high gold declaration during that period. However, it did not translate into revenue going into GGMC or the Guyana Gold Board. There are a lot of questions to be asked, and that is the right question you asked, where is it and we will, Hon. Member.

Indeed, in 2021, we recorded a decline in gold declaration, but we cannot be divorced from reality all the time and not take into consideration the massive flooding that we had in 2021. The flood is not an excuse; it happened. All of us are Guyanese and we knew what happened during the flooding. The Hon. Member is from a mining town and she would know. The Hon. Member would know that mining camps were floating away, excavators were under water and the Aurora Gold Mine (AGM) that is the biggest pit in the country is still being dewatered as we speak here. This is not an excuse; it is the reality of what happened in 2021. Added to that, one of our big mining companies was hit with the Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19), plus the death of its Chief Executive Officer (CEO). These are things that people need to take into consideration before we start to be critical. The Hon. Member did not mention the massive increase in the diamond trade from 19,000 carats to 44,000 carats. The Hon. Member did not mention the massive increase in quarriable materials, stone and aggregates from 650,000 tonnes to 857,000 tonnes. The Hon. Member stopped short from mentioning that. She did not mention the increase from 600,000 tonnes of sand to 1.2 million tonnes of sand. These are the increases that we had in 2021. In the quarrying sector, we will continue to increase our production with the issuance of licence to people who have the capacity and the resources to develop those operations.

I wish to speak substantively now on our oil and gas sector. I also wish to welcome, on behalf of the Government of Guyana, the announcement made by the Canadian Oil and Gas Exploration Company (CGX) on the Corentyne Block. I say that with some amount of satisfaction and pride because I am a Berbician too; I know the difference that this will make to the people, and the opportunities that will come to Berbice and the people of Berbice.

We have now close to 30 discoveries in our oil and gas sector. As a matter of fact, very soon and weeks from now, our new the Floating Production, Storage and Offloading vessel (FPSO) Liza Unity will start producing 220,000 barrels of oil per day which would take our total to 340,000 barrels per day. Our third FPSO, Prosperity, should be in Guyana by 2024 taking our production to 560,000 barrels per day. We are in the process of reviewing the Field Development Plan for the fourth development, the Yellowtail Development, and I want to say that we are not taking things lightly. As a Government, we have already engaged two different sets of international consultants to ensure that they review the field development plan for the Yellowtail Development and to ensure that when a licence, once approved is granted and that it brings additional benefits to the people of Guyana. There are safeguards in the licence to ensure that our environment is protected and to ensure that people actually benefit from the oil and gas sector.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, spoke about the environmental hazards of oil and gas. The Liza permit that was signed by APNU/AFC Government has no provision as to how ExxonMobil should deal with produced water. There was nothing. However, the Hon. Member said that we are dumping water into the ocean. We changed the Liza permit. We upgraded the Payara permit to ensure that the water is treated to international standards before it is dumped and that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will monitor this along with other agencies to ensure that the water is treated to international standard before it is dumped.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, we want to treat you to parliamentary standard, so we will have to get you five minutes to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, you may continue to your conclusion in five minutes.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will use some of my five minutes just to speak on the gas-to-energy project which was also mentioned by the Hon. Member. The Government of Guyana decided that we will pursue the gas-to-energy project because we see it as a project that will transform the landscape of our country, as a project that will reduce the cost of living of our people in this country and as a project that will bring significant opportunities and employment in this country. This is a project that would raise the standard of living of our people, this single project. We have always said that whenever we develop the oil and gas sector, it must benefit every single Guyanese, in the same way the \$126.7 billion transferred into this Budget which we are scrutinising right now. This big hullabaloo about scrutiny of the oil money is what we are doing here. We are scrutinising how that money will be spent and next week the Opposition will be given the opportunity to ask questions, be it sensible or not. They will be given the opportunity to ask questions and to scrutinise the Budget on how the oil money will be spent and who it will be spent on.

When we talk about transparency and accountability, that is what we are doing. We made a pledge when we were campaigning that we will ensure there is transparency and accountability, and that when the money is used it will be used to benefit every single Guyanese. That is why we budgeted over \$20 billion for the gas-to-energy project because our biggest problem in this country is the cost of power generation and the reliability of the power generation as well too. In the context of climate change now, the cutting of emission is important and that is what the gas-to-energy project would deliver to Guyana and to Guyanese. It will reduce our electricity cost by 50%. We will have reliable electricity and we will have cleaner electricity most importantly.

We have always had a problem in this country of us exporting raw materials. We have always worked with industries, encouraged industries and put out incentives so that industries can into value-added products. The gas-to-energy project is the game changer. It will ensure that our manufacturing sector is boosted and it will ensure that our industrial sector is boosted because there will be cheap reliable electricity. When we have local manufacturing, we cannot discount the opportunities that will be presented to our local private sector even though they accuse us of

crafting a Budget for the private sector. We cannot discount the opportunities or employment by our people. We cannot discount the opportunities that our people will get in purchasing cheaper quality goods and services and, also, lowering our importation bill which is important in saving valuable foreign currency.

We are going to move ahead with the gas-to-energy project and the Wales development area because that will benefit the lives of every single Guyanese, be it on the Opposition side or any side. It will benefit every single Guyanese. We are not stopping there. That project will provide 250 megawatts net. Soon, our consumption will be higher than that of the pace at which we are developing this country, with the new housing schemes, with the new hotels and with the new industries. We will soon exhaust that capacity and that is why we are venturing into the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project to add another 165 megawatts to that, another 50 megawatts of solar and all the mini hydropower projects that we are investing in. This project will help all sectors and we ask that this project be supported by all Guyanese because it is a project that will change the lives of all of us.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank you and I wish to commend *Budget 2022* for passage in the National Assembly. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members this is a good time to take the suspension. A reminder to the Hon. Members of the Business Sub-Committee, Ms. Gail Teixeira, Bishop Edghill, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, Mr. Colin Croal, Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj *[inaudible]*.

Sitting suspended at 1.02 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 3.16 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please be seated. Hon. Members, my apologies. We have had the meeting of the Business Sub-Committee and that meeting has not been concluded as yet, so we are running a bit behind today. It seems that we will have a very long day and night on 3rd February.

Before I call on the next speaker, we have a Standing Order which refers to persons/legal entities that cannot represent themselves in the House. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, listed a number of companies that were debarred by the Public Procurement Commission. I allowed it, knowing that the Hon. Member and Hon. Members are responsible. As he

was speaking, I was still wondering if those companies were still listed as debarred. One company has actually sent me a letter dated 26th October, 2020, signed by Ms. Carol Corbin, Chairperson of the Public Procurement Commission (PPC).

3.18 p.m.

That person was taken off the list as of 25th October, 2020. I am going to have to stop now. The first time I allowed it to happen, and we now have to correct ourselves. I am asking Hon. Members, when you are going to list the names of companies and persons who are not here, I am going to stop you. The entire Assembly has been embarrassed by this particular listing which the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, read out. I do not know if other companies will send me similar letters. Our next Speaker is the Hon. Member, Mr. Vincent Henry. Hon. Member, you may proceed. We are starting at 3.19 p.m. and 19 seconds.

Mr. Henry: I rise on behalf of the Guyana Action Party (GAP), a member of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition to do some examination of the National Budget for 2022. For the past few days, we have listened to Members of the Government talk about the rigging of the last elections and more. Outside of Parliament, we have seen the mortal fear from the top to the bottom of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) hierarchy as they tried their utmost to derail the elections petition process.

If the PPP/C is so confident that it was the APNU/AFC that did the malpractice in the elections, then why not allow the proceedings to go forward where the PPP/C will prove to the world that it is right, and the APNU/AFC is wrong and is guilty? Instead, the PPP/C, by its actions, has shown its slip. *Actions speak louder than words* and by its actions the PPP/C is showing that it has a lot to hide, and that it was indeed an installed Government. We listened to the Hon. Joseph Hamilton who did not take long to show his inability to take his nose out of the gutter by showing disrespect to our female Parliamentarians. He has also shown disrespect to the PPP/C's female Parliamentarians, and all of our Guyanese women. It is not a hidden truth that the PPP/C has no respect for the women of Guyana.

It was fitting that the youthful Hon. Juretha Fernandes lectured the Hon. Ashni Singh on the many failures of his budget and his miserable performance as the Minister with Responsibility for Finance within the Office of the President. If there is one thing that one could compliment the PPP/C on

is their ability to tell untruths and, come *hell or high water*, keep repeating the untruths with a straight face. One example that comes readily to mind is the constant repetition that APNU/AFC fired some 2,000 Indigenous Community Support Officers (CSOs) in 2015. The truth is that in March, 2015, the cheque to pay the Indigenous CSOs was cancelled by the Permanent Secretary acting. I would not call her name. The instruction to cancel the cheque was given by the People's Progressive Party/Civic's Cabinet and the instruction was signed. The letter instructing the cancelling of the cheque was signed by the PPP/C's Cabinet Secretary who happens to be in this honourable House at this moment. I will not call her name, but I will look at her.

It was not the APNU/AFC that fired the 2,000 CSOs. I repeat. It was not the APNU/AFC that fired the Indigenous CSOs. It was the PPP/C that fired the Indigenous CSOs. Yet, the PPP/C will look the Indigenous peoples and Guyanese in their eyes and tell them this untruth. Just imagine, the number of untruths that the PPP/C sprays on the Indigenous people and the people of Guyana. They keep spraying it using a spray. The APNU/AFC, because we care, allocated funds after the elections to pay the stipends of the CSOs and invited them to be part of the far better Hinterland Employment and Youth Services (HEYS) programme. The Indigenous people are a quiet people, but our quietness must not be taken for granted. One example of this is, at the last Toshaos elections, the Indigenous communities in Region 9 quietly went against the strong handed attempts, including threats to force the Indigenous people to vote for leaders chosen by the PPP/C. Generally, the people of Region 9 rebelled against the PPP/C's bullyism and voted for leaders of their choice. It must be noted that most of the Toshaos, currently elected, especially in the larger communities, were friendly to or were supporters of the APNU/AFC and the Guyana Action Party or are apolitical in their beliefs.

Amidst all the disasters of the floods, the PPP/C faced its own disaster when it was soundly rejected by the people of Region 9. Let this be a lesson that Indigenous people are a proud people and will not be bullied by the PPP/C or anyone. The Indigenous people of Guyana are waiting on the PPP/C to facilitate the elections and activation of the National Toshaos Council (NTC). If the PPP/C cannot do this because of excuses such as the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), then do as proposed by the former Member of Parliament, Hon. Mervyn Williams, when he suggested that the last elected NTC body continue to serve another term of office. The Indigenous peoples of Guyana had requested that

the Amerindian Act of 2006 be revised. They are waiting to hear when the PPP/C will continue this process started by APNU/AFC. What about the promised increases for Toshaos and the honorariums for Indigenous village councillors? We are waiting on the Minister to tell us if this is in the Budget, maybe it is hidden somewhere.

I wish to promise that the comprehensive development strategy for the hinterland be developed. It is in the hinterland that we have the people who have for thousands of years kept the environment in tack. To date, it remains a valuable asset to Guyana and the world at large. I ask this because although there is a provision in the Amerindian Act of 2006 that states in section 51 (3):

“(3) The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission shall transfer twenty per cent of the royalties from the mining activities to a fund designated by the Minister for the benefit of Amerindian Villages.”

The Indigenous peoples have not heard a squeak from this installed Government about the status of this fund. However, on doing the research on the benefits for the Indigenous peoples from mining activities, I came upon a part of the Auditor General's Report of 2014, paragraph 235 (d) and (e), which states *inter alia*:

“the sum of \$11.314M was received in 2012...”

That is into the fund. It continues to state:

“...but acknowledged by the Ministry until April 2013. The reasons for the late acknowledgement could not be ascertained. Further, receipts totalling \$1.105 billion applicable to year 2013 were traced to the bank account but were not recorded in the cash book during 2013. A similar situation existed in 2014, where amounts totalling \$27.793M for which no receipts were seen were deposited into the bank account but, the amounts were not recorded in the cash book. In addition, receipts were written for amounts totalling \$1.278M and deposited in the bank account but were not entered in the cash book;

(e) payment vouchers which were presented for audit were not numbered and examined by the competent officer. Further, the cash book was not properly maintained in that all payments were not recorded therein. As a result, the balance on the Fund at a given time could not be ascertained from the records. This situation continued in 2014;”

It would have been a great help to the people of the hinterland if the Amerindian Purposes Fund, now known as the Amerindian Development Fund, was a financial vehicle to facilitate the transfer of funds from the oil and gas industry to the First peoples of Guyana for their accelerated development. Unfortunately, from looking at the Auditor General's Report of 2014, the funds seem to have been more of a slush fund for persons unknown. I wish to bring to this House that the custodians that are involved in this, what I call a catastrophe are currently in the House. I would not call names, but, they are here. One was a PS before and a Minister. The PS is now a Minister. I will have to look at them. **[Mr. Mahipaul: Watch them.]** I am watching around. How can the Guyanese people trust the PPP/C Government in the management of the Natural Resource Fund? How could anyone trust to put a cat to watch over milk?

When one examines the Budget and sees the large sums of moneys that are there for broad areas such as community development without any further explanation, one is forced to ask questions, knowing the nature of the animal, the nature of the PPP/C. Some questions that flash through your mind are, how much of this amount will be spent on bloated contracts? How much will be siphoned off? How much will actually reach and benefit the beneficiaries? The natural resources sector of Guyana, which includes the oil and gas industry, is a very important facet of our country's future development. It is sad to note that the Parliamentary Sub-Committee known as the Natural Resources Committee has not convened a single meeting since the advent of this Twelfth Parliament. One could ask the PPP/C Government, what they are trying to hide from the people of Guyana?

I note that one of the 'transformation projects' that was touted to be a saviour to Guyana is the Amalia Falls Hydropower project. According to Guyanese, the Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous Peoples on their Facebook page, the Indigenous peoples who reside in the area and would be directly affected by current hydro project, have not been granted the common courtesy of being told about the project, much less being allowed to give their free prior informed consent. Yet, we come to the Parliament to hear wooing words about it, and the Indigenous people are still in the dark. An article with the subject 'Amaila Falls Hydropower dam threatens the territory, livelihoods and forests of the Patamona people', by Lawrence Anselmo and Oda Almås states that the Indigenous communities which would be affected by this project directly are Kopinang, Chenapou and Kaburi and together with others who have been indirectly

affected in 2014 had a population amounting to some 6,000 inhabitants. It is estimated that roughly 26 square miles of forested areas will be flooded because of this project.

3.33 p.m.

As a part of the conclusion of the article, the following points were made:

"A review of the World Commission on Dam's Criteria and Guidelines for a rights-based approach to decision making shows that the Government of Guyana has not conducted consultations in line with international norms and obligations, and has failed to respect indigenous peoples' rights, including the right to free, prior and informed consent."

Also, a recent Facebook post by Mr. Michael Mc Garrel of Region 8 display a recent picture of the Amaila Falls and states:

"This is the Amaila Falls in Region 8, four days ago. The river is currently high and is where the hydropower plant is going to be built. When the river is low (during the dry season) the fall trickles."

I will repeat that part.

"When the river is low (during the dry season) the fall trickles. I will share a photo of that in time. To supply enough power to turn the turbines, it means a dam will have to be built, this will flood hectares upon hectares of forest. The covered forest over time will rot producing methane gas. [when green energy really isn't green energy]."

I noticed a headline in the news that suggested that this Government is in a great hurry to start and complete the project. Before any commencement of the first phase of this project, I do request on behalf of the Indigenous people that an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) in line with international standards, be conducted. Just imagine anyone building a major hydro-plant using a waterfall that at times only provides a trickle of water. This Amaila Falls Hydropower project is heading to give Guyana another white elephant. The difference here would be that the white elephant will also have a large hydro attached to his derriere.

The arrogant PPP/C installed Government continues to run roughshod over the Indigenous people of Guyana. Quite recently, a mining agreement was signed between miners and the Government of Guyana for mining in the Marudi

Mountains in south Guyana. The Marudi Mountains and the southern areas are traditionally occupied by the Wapishiana people. It is also interlinked with the head waters of the Essequibo and Rupununi Rivers. Although the Wapishianas are the original right holders of the area and will suffer the effects of the destruction of the environment in the area, the Ministry of Natural Resources and, by extension, the Government of Guyana, have deliberately ignored and bypassed them.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, talking about extensions, you will need an extension. Before you do, let me remind you that you quoted from some documents talking about the Amaila Falls as a trickle. Please provide a copy of that for the records. Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, you have the floor.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes to continue to conclude.

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Wapishiana people have even been denied the common courtesy of receiving a copy of this agreement. One speaker on the Government's side mentioned that the first step in development is building infrastructure. However, when there was a massive state of infrastructural development by the APNU/AFC, I can recall the PPP/C saying in the villages that people do not eat roads and buildings. The APNU/AFC, in a short time of three and a half years, not only made massive positive strides in infrastructural development all over Guyana, including the hinterland, but concomitantly looked after the welfare of the Guyanese people. It must be noted that the amount of people-centred developments that the APNU/AFC did in three and a half years was far more than what the PPP/C did in its 23 years of Office.

The hinterland people of Guyana demand that the hinterland youths be given opportunities to get specialised training so that they can participate and get benefits from the oil and gas industry. Leading up to the presentation of the largest Budget in the history of Guyana, one would have hoped that the majority of Guyanese would have been included in getting a reasonable piece of the pie. After examining the Budget, one can safely say that most Guyanese indeed got a piece of a wind pie, perhaps they were even treated to some sky juice. I heard Members of the installed Government seeking to justify the inadequateness of this gastric Budget

by itemising what the APNU/AFC accomplished in 3.5 years in Government.

Firstly, the APNU/AFC did not have funds from the oil industry at its disposal. Yet, the APNU/AFC, during its 3.5 years, increased public servants' salaries by roughly 75%. The APNU/AFC, without the oil money, caringly increased the take home pay on a monthly basis. Only someone with limited cognitive capacities would tell Guyanese that a one-off month's salary at Christmas time is better than a monthly take home of 75% increase in their salaries. It is common knowledge that although the APNU/AFC did not have oil moneys at their disposal, they raised the pension for old people from \$13,000 to \$20,000 in three years. The caring APNU/AFC would have raised the pension further, but the PPP/C's facilitated no-confidence motion did not allow the continuing of Parliament to allow budgets to happen. Today, the PPP/C has riches from our oil fund left by the APNU/AFC for the people of Guyana, but the PPP/C can only offer the pensioners of Guyana a whopping \$100 per day increase in their pensions.

It was the Hon. Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks who said that numbers do not lie. She called this a blessing. One wonders what she can buy with \$100 every month. According to one pensioner, "*Dem tek dem eyes and pass we*,". I am now asking the pensioners of Guyana to remember that the PPP/C promised them that they would have increased the Old Age Pension to \$40,000 per month. According to the Wapishianas of South Rupununi, the PPP/C is a *coride* Government. According to the Macushis of the North Rupununi, the PPP/C pension's increase can best be described by the term, *achuung*.

The PPP/C promised Guyanese an amount of \$50,000 per child but because they do not care, they have only granted the sum of \$25,000 per child. This amounts to roughly \$68 a day. In an attempt, under the caring APNU/AFC, students were transported to and from schools using the David 'G' school buses. Today, students have to pay at least \$1000 per day for taxis hired to attend school every day while the David 'G' buses are parked and allowed to rot in a compound. So much for a PPP/C that cares. We are told that only 500 more CSOs will be added to the existing amount of the programme. I want to let the young people know that if it had been the APNU/AFC, we would have increased this amount to 2000 youths.

Further, we would have activated the first hinterland training technical institute at Bina Hill in Annai Region 9. The

Budget of 2022 is said to be transformational but what the Government seems to miss is that it is only transformational for the pockets of the PPP/C and their close supporters. Recently, reports came from affected persons that the Lethem Regional Hospital ran out of bed spaces in the male and female wards. I recommend that a two-storied regional hospital be built and equipped to cater for eventualities, bearing in mind that Lethem is now a growing border town. We must also start thinking out of the box and stop stocking anti-venoms in the dispensaries across the region. Also, the people of Region 9 are waiting on the announcement that there will be a new secondary school in Maruranau and Karasabai. If these announcements cannot be made this year, then it is not a transformational Budget but a dysfunctional one. Also....

Mr. Speaker: Before you could go to also, you need to conclude. You are already two minutes over the five minutes.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, this Budget has lost its way. It has lost connection with the majority of the people of Guyana. It is a Budget for the Dubai boys and girls. It is a Budget for those to utilise taxpayers' money and take their wives, girlfriends and boyfriends to Dubai. It is not a Budget for the majority of Guyanese. I rest my case, thank you, Sir. [Applause]

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Mr. Speaker, it is my utmost pleasure under the PPP/C lead Government to present my contribution to the 2022 Budget Debate. First of all, I wish to congratulate the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his dedicated team for the thorough work done leading to the successful presentation of *Budget 2022* – the largest Budget in Guyana, intended to benefit every Guyanese across our beautiful nation. It is a Budget that will continue to strengthen the PPP/C's efforts since it arrived back at the helm of the leadership of this country. It is a Budget that will position our nation to build a prosperous Guyana. The Budget's theme is appropriate, *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. The PPP/Civic-led Government continues to display resilience against all challenges. Evident by a tough response to every action which seeks to undermine the democratic culture and norms required for a safe and secure future for our people.

Recalling that the PPP/C collaborated with the smaller political parties and the majority of the electorate in a

coordinated joint action in defence of democracy; in defence of the rule of law; and in defence of barefaced rigging of the elections. It is this Government that now leads our beautiful country, taking a tough stand for over five months in 2020 to wrestle away victory which the APNU/AFC was unwilling to relinquish amidst the court's ruling and in full view of the respected Caribbean Community (CARICOM) leaders and the international community, all of whom were fully convinced that the PPP/C was the rightful winner of the 2nd March, 2020 Elections. So, I want to say to the presenter before me that the PPP/C is not an installed Government. It is an elected Government. It is an elected Government by the electorate of this country. It was the APNU/AFC of which GAP is associated, which held tight to victory that they thought that they were going to keep forever.

3.48 p.m.

It is laughable as you sit and listen to the debate contribution of the Hon. Members on the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change's (APNU/AFC's) side in which they described the Budget...and only yesterday, it was described as deceitful, disrespectful and not people-centred. They levelled criticism by labelling the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government as a corrupt Government when, in fact, the *shoe is on the other foot*, as not so long ago, the APNU/AFC presided over a failed state. I say, again, a failed state, and a failed economy, a failed education sector, a failed agricultural sector, a failed attempt to address, holistically, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and they failed to ensure the security and prosperity of the Guyanese population. Mr. Speaker, that is why the APNU/AFC sits in the Opposition. It is because they failed to convince the electorate that they are good, quality leaders and that they deserve to lead this country. The electorate had all the evidence, and what did they do? They voted the Hon. Members out of office.

I want to remind this House that the APNU/AFC went into Office after 2015, and in less than 16 months, a whole host, a long list, of corrupt cases were exposed. I will just mention a few which come to mind: the drug bond scandal. Do you all remember that? Even the Parliamentarians had to suspend the National Assembly to go down to the drug bond to examine what was actually in that bond. [**An Hon. Member:** Unbelievable.] Unbelievable. What did they find? They found that the issue was that they were storing unserviceable medical equipment in there, and not what they had said to the honourable House, which was that they were storing medical supplies and medical drugs for the nation. In fact,

one of my Colleagues just mentioned that, in addition to the unserviceable pieces of equipment found there, they were storing boxes of expired condoms. Shame.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the use of “shame” and Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, I hear you shouting “lie, lie” from across the room.

Mr. Mahipaul: No (*inaudible*).

Mr. Speaker: I will find the record.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: My apologies to the House, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw the word shame. To remind them again, the D’Urban Park project was one of the biggest scandals in 2016. There was no accountability for private donation to that project. There was no disclosure of the spendings of the company that was in charge of ensuring the construction was going apace. The amount of money expended on one of the APNU/AFC’s ugliest legacy in this country was \$1.5 billion which we had to force out of them during the parliamentary debate. However, that is not the true cost of the ugliest stadium that we have in this country but the scandal surrounding there is recent in the mind of all Guyanese and the evidence is in the face of this nation every day.

The new Demerara Harbour Bridge, that study, too, was a big scandal and I say no more. So, this allegation and trying to taint the PPP/C Government as a corrupt Government should, once and for all, be laid to rest because, as far as we know, this is not the maximum or the expansive number of scandals that were exposed. These are just a few to remind those on the opposite side that when they bark, we can bark back as hard and harder than they. Do they want to hear more? We can also talk about the COVID-19 hospital at Liliendaal. That, too, was an enormous scandal. Guyanese people are not short minded; they remember.

The inability of the APNU/AFC to execute projects was a complete disaster and they tend to want to criticise the Budget. They were a government of parked, relic projects. In the past, when it was the People’s National Congress (PNC), there were white elephants. Now, there are parked projects. Just to remind them, they parked the deep-water harbour project. The PPP/C will do it. They parked the Amelia Falls Hydropower Project that was just being criticised here in this House. The PPP/C will examine it, and I can assure you that we will address that too. They parked the Linden to Lethem road project. This PPP/C Government will establish that road for that critical link that will ensure that it contributes to the development and the prosperity of this nation. They parked

the Kurupukari bridge project. I remember sitting for four budget speeches when we were in Office before 2015, and five budget debates during the APNU/AFC’s period in 2015-2020. The former Minister of Indigenous People’s Affairs, in every single budget speech, said that his Government was going to build the Kurupukari crossing bridge. Today, I want to assure you that it will be the PPP/C Government, which will remain in Office for a very long time, that will realise that project.

The speciality hospital was another parked project. We can assure you that this Budget is laying the foundation to bring to this nation a state-of-the art medical facility that will, maybe, even rival future speciality hospitals. It will be done by the PPP/C. Another parked project was the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) project. That project was parked. Not a single land title was approved by the APNU/AFC Government in five years. Sitting at the helm of Government, they did not approve a single piece of land to be allocated as an extension for villages that had applied. It is the PPP/C Government that will take that parked project and make it into reality and, once and for all, deal with land matters for the indigenous people. We have a track record of doing that. We have just been in Office for one year and a couple of months and we have re-established the ALT project unit, and we have already approved Kapaiwau extension, and the title will be handed out shortly.

Beyond that, they sat there and did nothing for five years. In one year, the PPP/C Government has demarcated five Amerindian villages. Five, Mr. Speaker. You could have done one every year and we would have matched up and equalised, but you sat there and did nothing and has the gall to come to this House and speak about our Government not being people centred, that we are not fair, that we discriminate and that we are not doing anything for the Guyanese population. Moreso, you are moving to tell us that we do not do anything for the indigenous people. The Budget is one of Guyana’s largest budgets. It will not be only one; bigger budgets will come, I can expect, but this Budget is a Budget that provides a platform and a foundation for the improvement of all sectors in this country. Improving every sector is ensuring that Guyanese people could rest assured that their security, their livelihoods and their lives will be taken care of by this Government. It is setting the foundation. I want to say to you on the other side, *yuh betta get yuh* act in order to contribute to development and not to continue to attempt to destroy this country. It is too beautiful.

I now want to turn to the Amerindian Development Fund. Our Government has provided to this Fund a total of \$1.880 billion. Let me correct myself before I am quoted. We are allocating a total of \$1.835 billion towards the Amerindian Development Fund. I want to say clearly that assertions were made by the speaker before me. He even quoted from the Report of the Auditor General. I do not have the Report of the Auditor General here before me, but I could recall reading it and I can recall reading in the media that the APNU/AFC's Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs could not have accounted, in one year, for the entire Amerindian Development Fund and a figure was printed. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Provide the evidence.] Mr. Speaker, I am saying that I do not have the book before me, but I read it and I read it in the media. I spoke about it in previous budget debates when I held the evidence up and I provided the evidence then. More than \$860 plus million could not have been accounted for by the then Government and the Ministry that was responsible for Indigenous people. I want to say that, under the Amerindian Development Fund, we can expect a number of things that will remedy the neglect, remedy the marginalisation and remedy the fact, that in the past five years, there was no delivery. We are now delivering. If you want, I could give you one single example. For three years under the APNU/AFC, no school uniform was delivered to the hinterland students; none whatsoever. I was campaigning in Paramakatoi when an aircraft landed, and if you had seen bolts of cloth and bolts of uniform materials that came, for the first time, just about four days before elections.

4.03 p.m.

That is how they treated Indigenous students. And you have leaders from the other side of this House, under the APNU/AFC Coalition, speaking about the PPP/C not caring about the Guyanese people or caring for the Indigenous people. That is a fact. I saw it with my own eyes. The officers who delivered it were probably so ashamed they did not even want to acknowledge Ms. Pauline Sukhai at that time. I am telling you, it happened right before my eyes. I can speak about it because I felt it for the Amerindian students, whom I was campaigning and working among for so many years, five years, and they did not receive school uniforms. I want to say that the PPP/C Government did not only deliver but now we have increased it two times fold. They are getting \$5,000 as an assistance for school uniforms, and the 'Because We Care' grant has now moved to \$25,000. Let me again correct the perception which the earlier speaker held, that we were expected to pay \$50,000

per student. He needs to go back and read our manifesto, and he needs to go back to the time when we were campaigning, because there are lots of writings about it. We said that at the end of our first term, children registered in the school system will receive a total of \$50,000.

Agricultural support for Amerindians. We agree that Amerindians are the breadbaskets in their own villages. They depend a lot on agriculture. I can assure you that, in this Budget, agricultural support from the Ministry of Agriculture will be forthcoming. In fact, in one year of our Government, the Ministry has been able to provide funding for a number of Amerindian communities throughout the hinterland to augment and strengthen their capacity to cultivate and to grow more food. The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has also complemented the support from the Ministry of Agriculture, and we have delivered to Amerindian communities 112 tractors complete with trailers. We are in the process of completing the delivery of the implements in a short period to those areas that are logistically difficult to meet. There was no time in Guyana's history when the Amerindian people received such staunch and strong support for agriculture. Those tractors will be increased in number by another 71 this year, and other communities which are eagerly awaiting their allocation will have their allocation delivered before the end of 2022. That piece of machinery is multipurpose, and they could use it for a number of activities. They could use it in forestry because they are engaged in forest production; they could use it for transportation when they are taking bulk materials and supplies to their village; and they could use it for maintaining roads, *et cetera*. That is the vision for our country, where we will give substantive support and make substantive interventions to the Amerindian villages so that they, too, can be able to progress and increase their opportunities of having a better life.

Economic projects: Our Government continues to provide the Presidential Grant to Amerindian communities. The sum of \$300 million will be provided this year and an additional \$25 million will add to looking at economic and productive projects in those communities. Let me give you the scenario for the five years under the APNU/AFC as it relates to the Presidential Grant fund. For the first year, do you know what they did? They took away that grant and termed it a 'Jubilee Grant' and told the villagers that they had to spend this Jubilee Grant to celebrate. The only Jubilee Grant project that I have seen is in Kako. They made a little park, and they had their Jubilee Park. That is the only evidence in the five

years. They allowed villages to lose the Presidential Grant and send it back to the Consolidated Fund. If they had any interest in the development of Amerindians, they would have done better to ensure that the total sum allocated under the Presidential Grant every year of their tenure in Office, for those five years, reached the village fund to do projects and to benefit the people.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard them speaking umpteen times in this House about the David Granger's 'Five Bs Initiative', as if the hinterland communities benefitted from those Five Bs. In fact, almost every single Amerindian community in the hinterland, Regions 1, 7, 8, and 9, have not benefitted from the David Granger's 'Five Bs Initiative'. In fact, when we went to communities during their time, they said that all they got was a sting from a bee; they did not get anything. I was at a village called Kumu, the satellite of St. Ignatius, right in the region where Hon. Mr. Duncan comes from. There, they were excited to receive the Granger bicycles. When they turned up with their parents, they were told no, they could not have gotten it; it had come for specially assigned students. Those children from Kumu who go to the St. Ignatius Primary School continue to walk. Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that it is under the PPP/C Government that the service and the distribution of modes of transport, both water and land, began. The David Granger's 'Five Bs Initiative' never had an impact in the hinterland.

Likewise, they spoke about the school feeding programme. If they are truthful, they will know that the school feeding programme started under the PPP/C Government. The statistics that were given by the Hon. Minister of Education yesterday tell a story. Their support for the school feeding programme was concentrated in specific regions on the Coast, not in large numbers but in a handful of areas, and they listed the areas and the coastal regions in which their school feeding programme was established. I also want to speak about and put to rest this issue, again, about the Community Service Officers (CSOs). The CSO programme began under the PPP/C Government, and we are very proud of it. We were very disappointed when the APNU/AFC unceremoniously disbanded that programme. They disbanded it and they took away from young Amerindians, both males and females, income that was so useful.

I want to say, because my time is short, that we are proud to be back, to have been elected in the majority by the Amerindian electorate, and to have fulfilled our manifesto promises to them by re-establishing the CSO programme. Today, this Budget is providing \$1,050,000,000 in the

pockets of young people. That \$1,050,000,000 is not going to remain in paper form in the pockets but it will be circulated in the villages. The village entrepreneurs will benefit, and it will stimulate development as it relates to economic ventures, and business will, once more, begin to survive in those communities. I also want to speak about land titling. I know that I said a word, but I want to assure this House that, under the Budget, there will be 15 villages titled, and there will be 20 villages demarcated in the year 2022. Imagine comparing this to five years when nothing was done.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, five is a good number to introduce someone to ask for five minutes for you to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, you have five minutes to continue and conclude.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I want to turn my attention now to the region that I have some responsibility for as a Member of Parliament (MP). I want to say that, over the last five years, we have been championing support for that region and there none were forthcoming. There are many sad stories in Region 8, particularly in the North Pakaraimas. I continue, as a Member of Parliament, to challenge the terrain and also to bring hope to those communities. All of those communities will be treated in similar fashion as any other community across this country under the Budget. They will receive the Presidential Grant; they will receive investment funds; and they will receive tractors. They were able to, for once in five years, maintain and look after their road with an injection of \$100 million last year. Today, they are able to use the road in a much more improved state. We have been able to also improve some of the conditions of the schools and the hospitals in the last year. In this year, Region 8 could expect the extension of the Kato Secondary School. We will be looking at Sand Hills, which is found in the Waipa community, their health centre. We have completed in Karisparu the medical workers' quarters and have also upgraded its health centre. In the last year, we have been able to provide safe water supplies to Cheung Mouth and some other communities. In this year, we expect even more robust attention in terms of water for Region 8.

No amount of political rhetoric can wash away facts. Democracy did not prevail; an installation prevailed. Our Constitution was disrespected and the optimism of which the Hon. Member spoke shall remain a fleeting illusion. The will of the people, I will maintain, was dashed and it was smashed. Wake up, Hon. Member Benn. The great thing

about a democracy is that you can run but you cannot hide. An election awaits you.

I now turn my attention to the public security sector. It is well established that there can be no security if the people cannot afford to eat. There can be no security if endemic poverty persists. We cannot feel secure in our homes if a bag of tennis roll with five in a bag is almost \$500 and the price of a pound of plantain remains outside the reach of the poor. We cannot boast of public security when the elite and those in Government circles are the only ones sipping on champagne, while the rest of population cannot find lunch to put in the lunch kits of their children. If the intellectual authors had considered the aforesaid, they would not have produced this Budget. There can be no security if a small section of the society is the only beneficiary of the wealth available in an average country. Public security begins and ends with addressing the everyday survival needs of the people. In this regard, the allocation of \$47.9 billion in *Budget 2022* towards public safety will mean little if we do not address the starvation, suffering and economic carnage which has been brought about by the mismanagement of the economy by the PPP/C Administration.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot achieve public security only with guns, dogs, barbed wire fences, drones, helicopter and personnel. These efforts must be coupled with strenuous efforts to deal with endemic poverty and the suffering of the people. The studies have shown – and I would layover everything that I quote today – that as much as 50% of the prison population are typically from the bottom 20% of the income ladder. This is why we have recommended that there be an increase in the income tax threshold from \$75,000 to \$125,000. Are you listening to me Hon. Member, Mr. Benn?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you know you should quote the source, then you can quote the particulars and lay it over because I am quite familiar with quite a few of the studies. The other thing is, I am getting a bit confused. The Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings, said \$100,000. Is the proposal now \$125,000?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: This is my recommendation, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: All right. It is your recommendation.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I am quoting from the Brookings Institution.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Like I said, everything that I quote today, I have it here to layover this afternoon. It is important to fight rising cost of living and to fight the bitter poverty that so many Guyanese face. Sir, I say this. The security apparatus of a nation represents that basic working definition of security, but it also includes those sections which are not necessarily seen as primary security mechanisms. For example, we may consider the Ministry of Agriculture to be an essential part of Guyana's security apparatus, but when we think of it, one thinks of food security as a part of the concept of security. That view would automatically change. What I am saying is – and I will be quoting here and like I said, I am going to layover everything that I quote – the Centre for Strategic and International Studies noted that national security is food security. They have also noted:

“...sharp rises in global food prices in 2007/2008 jolted global political leaders out of any complacency they might have had regarding the future of food and agriculture. Street demonstrations and food riots broke out in more than 40 countries across the world, provoking unrest and violence in several places...”

This is a deep understanding of what public security constitutes. If we do not deal with the high food prices, we cannot boast about public security.

4.33 p.m.

I read the Budget over the last couple of days, and I will say that I am not seeing anything from the Ministry of Home Affairs which suggests that the Government has reimaged the public security sector in the age of oil. Guyana continues to witness the importation of deathtrap vehicles, some more than 20 years old, and they are fitted with used tyres which this uncaring Government has allowed. These vehicles are not only a drain on our foreign exchange to import parts, but they also bring significant safety concerns to our citizens. I see my honourable friend acknowledging this. Guyanese have also witnessed the deterioration in road safety. There must be a national approach and the engagement of all stakeholders in an effort to combat this situation. I do not think the Hon. Minister, Mr. Benn, gets any of what I am saying.

It is often said that the Opposition only criticises and that it offers no alternative options. We are well aware of the ploy to steal our ideas and to learn how to govern. Nonetheless, often times, we must propose ideas, especially if they are

taken on board in the interest of the people of Guyana. In the interest of that service, here is a proposal coming from the government in waiting. There should be an immediate formation of an inter-ministerial committee on public security. This committee should include the Senior Minister in the Ministry of the Presidency with Responsibility for Finance, the Minister of Human Services and Social Security, the Minister of Home Affairs, the Minister of Agriculture, among so many others. This committee will signal the recognition that public security needs a multi-dimensional intervention in these unprecedented times of relentless crimes. There must be acknowledgement that public security is not restricted to heavy handed enforcement but that it involves a holistic approach.

Please note that, according to World Population Review in 2021, Guyana was in the top 10 in the world for crime and I say that this is totally unacceptable. Further, public security in the age of an oil and gas economy has to be reimagined and reflect our newfound reality. It cannot be limited to the same old, same old; the times are different. We are on the big stage, and we must recognise that this will not exempt us from security threats. As a result, Guyana must modernise its security apparatus. We must protect the nation's emerging oil and gas industry from threats which have the potential to disrupt the value chains of industry and, thus, the economic base of the country. I am not convinced that *Budget 2022* understands this. I am not convinced that the Ministry or the Minister of Home Affairs has the basic appreciation for these facts. This is the reason I proposed an inter-ministerial committee on public security. It is that serious. Do not hold your head in shame, Mr. Benn. Public security also constitutes human rights. Dr. Bertrand Ramcharan, and I will circulate the article, puts the issue this way:

“The link between security and human rights is important. This link is reinforced if we consider that human rights define human security.”

What the learned gentleman is saying is that there cannot be the execution of husbands in their beds while they sleep, young boys cannot be decapitated without any justice and then there is boast of the achievement of public security. Justice for the Henry boys, Orin Boston, and all those who have been subjected to extrajudicial killings under this Government, must be of the highest priority if public security will be achieved. Over the last 18 months, I visited depressed communities, and I walked among the poor and powerless. They told me harrowing stories about how their basic human rights are denied. I spoke with several young

men and women who described how the police officers use their powers to arrest them without any cause and violate their constitutional protection of the 72 hours limit. They also spoke about being beaten for no reason. These developments stir insecurity. When this seething anger reaches to its boiling point, no one is safe. The continuing series of intimidatory actions and violence against powerless women and unlawful seizure of their personal belongings by errant members of the Guyana Police Force – and I emphasise on the word ‘errant’ – leaves very much to be desired. No government could crackdown on freedom of speech and use the entire security apparatus to chase down a cartoon character and expect a secure society.

Since 2nd August, 2022, Guyanese have lost the basic indulgence of speaking their minds on social media. We cannot... even I cannot post on *Facebook* in peace, because the Government cyber security teams are scouting our pages and they are scouting the pages of ordinary Guyanese to abuse the Cybercrime Act. We are well aware of the argument which suggests that this Act was introduced by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). This is a fact; this Act was introduced by the APNU/AFC, but it was not intended to chase down ‘Mudwata’ and others. It was intended to stop child pornography, the sharing of nudes without permission and the use of electronic devices for terrorist activities. It was never envisaged to be used to protect thin-skinned snowflakes in the Government from emotional abuse and trauma because they are subject to public critique and ridicule. We call on the Government to stop abusing the Cybercrime Act. We want to return to the simple pleasure of posting our candid views on social media in a very candid and responsible way.

As I speak, if we are to take a look at social media, nobody is posting about this debate in the manner in which they did during 2015-2020 era. They are fearful that they might emotionally abuse a Member of the Government, and this is a fact. During the Administration of Mr. David Granger, social media was abuzz; freedom of speech was alive and well. I know people, and I know close family friends, who have signed off *Facebook* for fear of being arrested for some post. Some of my colleagues here have also signalled to me that they intend to sign off. What I am saying is that we now live in an Orwellian society. Big brother is watching every post, every status and every social media upload. The only solution is to ensure that one has one's identification cards (ID) cards waiting and ready to return the APNU/AFC to

power so that we can return to the glory days of freedom of speech.

Additionally, you simply cannot trample on the human rights of your political opponents by denying them their basic right to counsel, and you stand here and preach about public security. If the \$44.7 billion allocated in this Budget is not spent to resolve what I just mentioned, we are simply throwing this money into the winds. Guyanese are living in fear and their human rights are not being honoured by the Government. This is your legacy. When you leave very shortly, this would be your legacy. Thus, we are severely affected where security is concerned. One must recognise that, if the oil and gas sector does not operate in a manner that protects or considers the environment or the impact of climate change, this could present a threat to the security of the citizens of Guyana. Hence, there is a need for the security apparatus to be prepared for any eventuality. Like I said earlier, we simply have to reimagine our security sector.

We live in a country where about 80% of our population lives on 10% of the land. It is for this reason that, when we were in Government, the APNU/AFC Government embarked on the regionalisation of the country by creating several capital towns. Why was this done? This was done to make other regions livable and to decrease the dependency on strictly life on the coast. This is grand vision. This is what distinguishes us from our colleagues on the other side. *Budget 2022* did not envision these things in the context of public security. What they think about is the next hustle; but, what we on this side think about is of long-term benefits to the nation. Public security is not about bells, batons and whistles. We ask you to stop using the security apparatus to chase down ‘Mudwata’ and get down to serious business. Somebody was showing me an article that there was a prison break. Is that what you said to me, colleague? [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Yes, there was a prison break] There was a prison break, get down to that and stop chasing ‘Mudwata’. I call on you, like I have done three times ago, to reimagine our public security. Importantly, if the oil and gas economy does not result in the equitable distribution of resources, this could spark social unrest and, by extension, provide a major risk to the security of the country. Professor Lawrence cautioned:

“A concern for ruling classes throughout the world must be the potentially destabilising effects of inequality, resulting in more than simply their governing parties losing elections. Civil wars,

revolutions and terrorist incidents are possible outcomes of inequality.”

The literature on the subject is abundantly clear as it relates to the issue of security. It is much more than guns, uniforms and troops. Insofar as this is concerned, the literature is extensive.

4.48 p.m.

As early as the 1990s, theories and thesis noted the great benefits and the results of black gold. Terms such as oil curse, paradox of plenty and the Dutch disease have been made popular because they have been proven to be true, over and over again. Guyana cannot simply escape proving these theories to be true if the security apparatus does not modernise to deal with the challenges of this industry.

I now turn my attention to the Guyana Police Force, the Guyana Fire Service and the Guyana Prison Services. I say that all efforts to restore and preserve law and order at all levels of the society will be rendered useless if the Government continues on the destructive path of wanton politicisation of the security services. I say this to my most honourable colleague on the other side of the House: My personal research has uncovered massive disaffection among the Disciplined Services. Some have pleaded with me and some who you see walking across there, who looks at you in the eyes, have pleaded with me to use this Budget speech to highlight their plight. I gave my word to them, and I hereby honour my commitment to them, because I am raising this issue here. The men and women in uniform have complained that their ranks no longer matter. Junior ranks are refusing to heed instructions because they boast about having connections to the ‘big politicians’. Ranks are accused of being sympathetic towards the Opposition and are being side-lined for this.

Professional officers are not seeing the point of furthering their studies or going beyond the call of duty. Promotion is no longer based on merit. Promotion is based on perceived loyalties. The structure of the Guyana Police Force has been dashed and this is a reality. No amount of heckling could change this fact. The Members of the Guyana Police Force are demoralised. If they were not demoralised, they would not have reached out to me. They would not have reached out to any of the Members of the Opposition side, crying and calling for help. The \$4.9 billion allocated to the Guyana Police Force will mean little if the political interference remains. The \$120 million allocated to ranks for training will

enter the political fray and ranks will be selected based on loyalties and connections. Hon. Members, this is a reality.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the reality is that you will need an extension. Go ahead, Chief Whip.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Members, this is the day of elevation. I heard one person refer to Members as President and so on. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In essence, what I am trying to say is that we must fix the low morale and political interference. As part of the \$400 million allocated to rebuild the Brickdam Police Station, part of it should go towards an inquiry – any sort of inquiry – into that mysterious fire. You cannot simply rebuild without answers. It is in this context, Sir, that I say that you can allocate millions, billions or zillions, but it will make absolutely no sense. Ranks will not respond to calls to provide protection for the citizenry if there is no guarantee that their efforts will be rewarded and recognised. This is a reality. If you go on the ground and speak to them, you will see that this is, indeed, a reality. The low morale permeates the entire disciplined forces. The \$795 million allocated for the construction of the police station, I would say, Sir, that it is a very good thing. If there is something good in the Budget, I will point it out. I say this is a good thing. Who would argue with that? However, Mr. Speaker, one could construct the largest police station, but if the men and women within those stations are not comfortable and are in fear of politicisation, there could be absolutely no progress.

The firefighters are still upset about the promotion list being subjected to political directions. The nation has never seen this level of mysterious fires. It seems that every day there is a fire. Fire comes, places burn down to the ground, the Hon. Minister inserts himself in all the ongoing and makes loose allegations. There are no public reports. We wait for the next fire and the next round of allegations and the conclusions by the minister of *fireology*. It pains me to see that, every time there is a fire, the Hon. Minister reaches on the scene before the fire service professionals and even attempts to direct who should hold the hose.

This is gross incompetence, and the micro-management of the highest order is indicative of the political interference. I say to you: Take your feet off of the necks of the professional men and women. Let the public service system revert, and professionals will emerge. I assure you that professionals will emerge based on merits and the right people will be in the right place. You would not have to leave your office and be dripping in sweat and incompetence at every fire scene. Allow the systems to work; end the political interference.

The 2021 Budget allocated \$120 million for the installation of 139 fire hydrants, yet we continue to see fires daily. This year, \$100 million has been allocated. Should we expect an improvement or more of the same? This Government simply fails to understand the concept of the development of human capital. It is not all good and well to only focus on infrastructure and to throw money at every problem. You must focus on the morale of the professionals who occupy those buildings. We are happy to see that the APNU/AFC's safe security programme has received the sum of \$2.5 billion. We are elated that the Government has had no choice but to continue what we started. Our only concern rests with the fact that, based on the *modus operandi*, we could not say that the cameras will be used for crime fighting.

The sum of \$120 million has been budgeted for the training of ranks. I urge the Hon. Minister to ensure that the ranks are trained on the standard operating procedure (SoP) to deal with high speed chase. There must be risk assessment and clear SoP of risk and chase. Let us learn from yesterday's tragic accident. This is a request that I received from the people of Region 5 and Region 6.

In conclusion, I will say that I cannot go on record supporting any measure that hurts Guyana badly. I will simply not be a part of the destruction for generations to come. As a consequence, I cannot support the Budget in its current form. However, I recognise that we on this side of the House will continue to talk as much as we are allowed to, but the Government will continue what it wants to do. The only solution lies in an election. I say to my Guyanese brothers and sisters, who are listening to us, to get ready to exercise your powerful franchise and let us stop the destruction of our country. It starts first with a clean voters list. I thank you, Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I now call the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, the Hon. Member, Mr. Horatio Benn. Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I come to enjoin the debate on the 2022 Budget and to give my unequivocal support to its passage. In so doing, I also want to congratulate Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and his team, for the diligent work that he has done with his team to bring this Budget to the House. I also want to congratulate and thank the staff of the Ministry, the Permanent Secretary (PS), Ms. Mae Thomas and the other staff who worked very hard, over many long hours, to bring the data, the information, in respect of fashioning the budget of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

I have to point out that every time Dr. Singh brings a budget to this House it has always been bigger and better. Particularly at this time, with the advent of the oil and gas revenue and with the return of the PPP/C to Government, we have the finances of our country, again, in safe, reliable and incorruptible hands. I will say that the guidance of the President, the Prime Minister, the Vice-President and Ministers of the Government, in giving information and consultation of this Budget, is invaluable when one reads it and when one looks at the data, the interventions and the measures in the Budget.

It is indeed regrettable that Dr. Singh's predecessor in the office of the Ministry of Finance brought the management of the finances of this country into a ruinous state by comparison that, beyond the imposition of negative and regressive taxes, overseeing the closure of sugar estates, the throttling of rice and malicious attacks on first investments, bauxite and other mineral development to the detriment of the economy and the social and economic well-being of thousands of Guyanese of every race, ethnicity and social and economic status... That former Minister of Finance has earned the unenviable reputation of the only one in the western hemisphere who has overseen the deliberate dismantling of a vibrant economy in the shortest possible time. No earthquake, no floods, no tsunami, no volcanic eruption, or even a war was required to bring our country and its finances to the state that we met when we returned to power.

5.03 p.m.

All the experts in the Granger Administration, the absentee Leader of the APNU/AFC in that time – Mr. Granger himself, including the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, who is a relic of that Administration, along with other flotsam and jetsam, worked at creating and did not object, did not have any position, did not weigh in on the positive impacts and

the positive interventions of doing the right things for the Guyanese people and the economy during their time in Office. Perhaps, naturally, it is indeed regrettable that the former Minister of Finance's actions in Government are attracting the attention of the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU).

I would like to deal with some of the utterances by the shadow Minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond. The honourable lady stood here and spoke about setting up an inter-ministerial committee on security. The honourable shadow Minister is perhaps completely unaware that there is a National Security Council (NSC) and that there are committees at the top level of the Government which deal with the national security of the country. The Hon. Member is completely unaware. Could anyone, including the Hon. Member Ramjattan, not inform her, at any point in time, in respect of that simple fact? It is strange, too, that the Hon. Member is suggesting an inter-ministerial committee for national security. I thought, perhaps, she would have recommended participation of the APNU/AFC in issues of national security. I would like to say to the Hon. Member that the APNU/AFC was invited to join with us on the National Commission on Law and Order. I hope that she would be there where we could discuss some of the issues she has concerns about in more intimate circumstances. I am disappointed when the Hon. Member speaks on these issues. In fact, I am forced to think that, perhaps, I need to reimagine the Hon. Member.

The Hon. Member has railed against issues of cyber security for an Act which they put in place about cybercrime. The Hon. Member is avoiding the issue of cybercrime and does not wish to recognise cybercrime as cybercrime when persons affiliated with the APNU/AFC are delinquent in respect of those issues.

The Hon. Member has come here to this House, irrespective of the information, which is public knowledge, and suggested and said that she is aware of great disaffection in the Disciplined Services. I would like to remind the Hon. Member, or to inform her if she is completely unaware, that it is the interventions of the APNU/AFC in respect of actions of certain members of the Disciplined Services which brought this country to a point where we would have gone down the slippery slope of destruction, where members of the police force and some other members were involved in aiding and abetting the rigging of the elections, assaulting Members of the then Opposition and others, and creating an

environment which was unsafe, fearful and extremely insecure for all the people of this country, even for their own supporters. It took the intervention and the supervision of the international community and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) team, over a long recount period, to make sure Guyana was brought back on the correct path of democracy, safety and security for each one of our Guyanese people. But, here it is, we have lots of rhetoric about these things, about safety and security, and lots of rhetoric about crime and poverty.

Of course, there is a link between crime and poverty, but how is it now, looking at the statistics, that we are aware that one of the regions which has great difficulties and the lowest improvement in terms of security is Region 6? It is Region 6, where the sugar industry was devastated by the APNU/AFC, while in power and supported by the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. Seven thousand workers went home without a daily bread. Multiply that by four or five families and we can understand why Region 6 has made the least improvement in terms of security. Here it is that they can come to this House and *brass facedly* speak about the association between poverty and crime when they do not understand or make the connection of the growing of marijuana on the Canje Creek and on the Berbice River as a result of the destruction of the sugar industry. They do not make the connection between the encouragement they gave to the blocking of the Berbice River to prevent bauxite shipments coming down to the transshipment at Crab Island... One thousand workers went home without a job. These Hon. Members, by convention of the House of course, come here and want to lecture us and speak about how good they were at these things, and how bad we are in even proposing measures to change the situation we found when we came.

The honourable gentlemen and women have to take stock of what they say and the impacts of what they say. If it is that they go to New York, go on a stand and participate with people who will say that Georgetown will *bun* down if the PPP/C does not come out of power... Here they come and speak about me, perhaps, going out when there is a fire to try to encourage people to do a more professional job. Here it is that they want enquiries into the arson of the Brickdam Police Station which has forced us to spend, in the beginning as the first tranche, \$400 million to build a new multistorey, multilevel modern facility. We wish we would have had that \$400 million to spend on other things for security in the country rather than now having to build that facility. We will

do it. It is regrettable that most of the Hon. Members, with the exception of the Deputy Speaker, would stand here and make presentations of the kind they make. They continue to make exhibits of themselves in this House. They spoke about crime. We spoke about their efforts to steal the elections.

We had the most recent disgrace in this House where, to prevent the passage of the Natural Resource Fund Bill, they stole the Mace and nearly decapitated the Speaker. They broke the Mace. They not only did that here, but they did it live, direct and virtually in the face of a national audience and an international audience to the disgrace of our country, and where they could sit and *skin teeth*, and catcall in this honourable House. The reason that they behave like this is because they are all essentially joined in the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R).

The PNC/R has had a history of violence. Once one joins the PNC/R, seemingly one is unable... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Your father was Burnham's right hand.] Mr. Speaker, if I were to answer that person over there, we may have a physical altercation in this House. This is the way they behave. They cannot change. It is in their deoxyribonucleic (DNA). They cannot change. Violence, insults, vulgarity – that is what you represent on the floor of this House for our country. When we talk about one nation, 'One Guyana' and unity... What we have to fight against to bring this country to the position where it could move forward in the new environment, and where we have the proceeds from oil and gas... We have to make sure that, as was said by other speakers from this side of the House, they never come back to power in this country. [**Mr. Jones:** (*Inaudible*).] It is because you stole the 2015 elections. You started rigging since then.

I want to recall the efforts over successful PPP/C Governments to pursue the eventual discovery of oil during a time when there was much scepticism, derision and laughter in some quarters. While the Guyanese people, as a whole, kept quiet but fervent hope and faith in wishing success to the endeavour, while President Janet Jagan, as Minister of Petroleum, determined and signed the first exploration agreements with Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL), the PNC was busy on Vlissengen Road *wukkin pon she* and ramping up illegal protests and other activities which went well into the Jagdeo Administration.

5.18 p.m.

Leading to politically inspired murders, riots, and mayhem, over practically all of Guyana with tragic results, which led

to much lesser development than we could have hoped for. In spite of all the efforts to the contrary, and the lack of interest in consulting, oil was discovered in 2015 under the Mr. Ramotar's PPP/C Administration. What did the Opposition People's National Congress (PNC) say then? They said that it was an election gimmick, that oil was not found.

They have never had the profound understanding of the real care or interest required in the implications of the discovery nor in the importance of preparing Guyana for the discovery of oil. Their five years, which they misspent in Office, has resulted in our being much less prepared than we should have been, now that the industry has been realised and is on the go. While they revelled in the trappings of Office and took flight to Texas and jet setted to various Caribbean islands, the diligence in making agreements and in positioning Guyana to optimize its participation in the new industry failed miserably. Now, finally out of Office, they pontificate as experts. Their mouths roll with oil and *ile*. Their only interest here is because they do not want us to benefit from the development of the oil and gas discovery. They do not even want us to pass a natural resource fund bill. Their antics in this House and the violence which took place when they attempted to steal the mace were all an exhibition in retrogression, backwardness, insults, and their real interest in the zero-sum game, which I have spoken about before in respect of their attitude with respect to Guyana's developments. When these things happen, we need to paraphrase what was said of Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: the fault is both in your stars and yourselves.

The only recommendation I could give to the young people who could be saved over there is to exit and leave that Coalition, that reck of a party. You still have time to depart from them and make a good and positive contribution to our country. I could speak about it because I have worked as a geologist exploring for oil. I worked in the bauxite and gold industry. I have been the Commissioner of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission and the Chairman of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission. I signed with President Janet Jagan the first exploration agreement with Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited. I can speak of these things. I can say now that I feel a great sense of personal vindication when we see the landscape of Guyana changing now in Georgetown, East Bank of Demerara, and all over the country, in respect of the oil developments and other developments. I do not know what anyone of you could speak of over there.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, stood up here in this House and said that the Wapishana was not consulted on the road project. I am aware that there was a social and economic study linked to Mott MacDonald's feasibility study for that road where consultations were held with both the Macushi and Wapishana communities in the South. The Hon. Member also stood up here and said that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, which I worked on as the Minister of Public Works, and which the APNU/AFC shutdown, would have brought cheap power to Linden, the first place in Guyana, and where there is the greatest support for the APNU/AFC. Power would have been made cheaper there and would have brought energy and development there, but they shut it down – zero-sum game. The Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, said that the water dries sometimes and the water trickles over the falls. Even the great Guri Dam in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Venezuela) had to be shut down some years ago because of extensive drought. When we are wet in Guyana, it is dry in Brazil, that is why we have the opportunity to export power to Brazil from Turtruba in the Upper Mazaruni when we get that development. One would expect that if one has a dam that is managed, one would have water to run and manage power delivery up to 165 megawatts from Amaila Falls.

Those who are wedded to a zero-sum game do not have the ability to work and make the kind of contributions to take the country forward. Let us have the kind of discourse that would take the country forward. Some persons and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) had a forum at Moray House Trust where they talked about [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I can talk about many things; I do not know what you could talk about. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] That is why he is not in the *wuk*. The Moray House Trust forum spoke [**Mr. Mahipaul:** (*Inaudible*)] I will leave that for another time, because when firearms were being sold from the Office of the Minister of Public Security, that is the destabilising of the country and making things difficult for us. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] That is the game you are in. I am speaking what the facts are.

I have to report quickly on the issue of security and the work of the Ministry that, in spite of all that has been said in Guyana, serious crime has been reduced by 20%. The instance of fires has been reduced by 30%. What is different now is that there are arson attacks on the Government buildings, particularly, police stations. For the first time in more than 16 years, road deaths have dropped below 100 in Guyana. While we make mention of that fact, I have to say

that, of course, we at the Ministry are distressed, and I am personally distressed, at the accident at the Mahaica Bridge yesterday. And, of course, we want to pass on our condolences to the family of Ms. Sheereda Persaud and Mr. Christopher Bhagwandat who died, and also to wish Constables Tucker, Sam and Johnson a speedy recovery. In respect of this incident, the requisite reviews will be done.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, while we review, we will need an extension for you to continue.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Minister, you may continue and conclude in five minutes.

Mr. Benn: During the time of the past Minister of Public Security, who is now exiting the room – maybe he has gone to make a contribution to the ablution area, and I want to suggest that he does not flush because he might disappear – from the period 2017 to 2020, 36,000 persons passed through Guyana, 94% of all who arrived from a particular country and disappeared. When we talk about people smuggling and trafficking in persons, we have to look at these statistics. For another set of 35,000 persons, 87% of all who arrived in the country between 2017 and 2020 disappeared and cannot be accounted for. One would want, perhaps, to deny that there was not an organised smuggling network being run by persons at the highest level in the APNU/AFC Regime, overseen by the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you may want to withdraw that because it is imputing on the Hon. Member.

Mr. Benn: Just to say that I was moving on the fact that the gentleman was responsible for the sector and received the same statistics that I received.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, basically, what I heard was ‘a smuggling ring overseen by’, so please... Thank you.

Mr. Benn: Presided over perhaps is a better phrase. We have had great efforts by other agencies of the Ministry in respect of the fight against narcotics trafficking, illegal firearm and in respect of making cases by the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU), where at this moment, there are 77 cases totalling \$75 million, which are up for referral to the courts, and another \$4.3 billion, in respect of money

laundering cases which are going to be referred to the courts. I want to quickly speak about an initiative coming from the Ministry in respect of helping persons who exit the prison and re-enter normal lives with the ability to take care of themselves and reintegrate with their families.

5.33 p.m.

In an overall program called Increasing the Peace in Guyana, we are looking, amongst many of the measures, at having a fresh start for prisoners, having them trained, having them be given the tools to start out to relaunch activities. We have all kinds of craftsmen and professions in the prisons. We want to reduce the level of recidivism in the prisons which are at a 13% overall and 9% for first time offenders.

Importantly, as I said before at some time in this House, if we are going to have peace in Guyana, it has to start from the floor of this House. It has to start from democratic, polite exchange with those who are elected to this honourable House, on all sides of the House. We need full partnership and better understanding of the initiatives which are being proposed by the Government, by the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, in respect of pulling us out of poverty and passing on a better, viable, and more secure life, to the new generations of Guyanese who will replace us. We have a responsibility to pass on that better life to the next generations. This would not happen if we continue with this type of behaviour. It would not happen if we have the type of presentations, the naysayers, the zero-sum game from the other side. It would not happen if they really cannot come up with a leader. **[Mr. Jones: (Inaudible)]** I know my time is up. Yes. I know that you are grateful and happy that my time is up. I will, in any event, keep passing on this message. I know that you do not want to hear us. I know your only interest was in barbershop chairs, and you want to come and talk here about security and pride.

We need to take a national pause. We need to have some retrospection and introspection on the question of how we go forward in Guyana. While we wait for it – but we cannot wait too long – we have to move ahead. We want to, here and now, commend this Budget to this honourable House for rapid, quick and emphatic consideration and passage. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. I now call on the Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings to make her presentation.

Dr. Cummings: Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Members, members of the media, and visitors, good afternoon to you all. Today, I rise to join my Colleagues on this side of the House to register my disappointment at this \$552.9 billion Budget under the theme: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*.

This Budget is the same as the two previous budgets, except that this current one has seen an increase of 44% more than the former and has capitalised on moneys from the Natural Resource Fund. This Budget is dismal, unexciting, unstimulating, insensitive to the needs of the average citizen; it is anti-poor, heavy on infrastructure but light on people's welfare. There is the absence and lack of evidence of strategic medium to long-term planning. This Budget is a wish dream but wishes do not catch fish. Our people need land, housing, jobs, and funding available for investing in entrepreneurship for the next generation. The Budget contradicts reality. In listening to the Minister as he read the Budget, I was wondering if I were listening to a version of some fable. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, tells stories that could be amusing but unreal. In paragraph 1.3 of his Budget presentation, the Minister said:

“Where there was once economic contraction there is now economic expansion, and where there were once job losses there is now job creation.”

In the typical characteristic of the fable, his remarks on occasions veered from reality. For example, in talking about economic contraction, Dr. Singh, the Hon. Member, did not tell the Guyanese that the last time the Guyana economy contracted it was under the PPP/C Government, and that interestingly, the Hon. Member had been a part of that Regime. What the Hon. Member did not say about unemployment was that when the Coalition was in Government, unemployment was as low as 12.8% in the first quarter of 2020. No one must take my word for it. A look at the Guyana Labour Force Survey as published by the Bureau of Statistics has indicated that the unemployment rate was over 15% at the last report in 2021. Yet, the Hon. Member stands before this National Assembly and says that there is job creation. My Math tells me that 15 is greater than 12, so to me, that shows contempt for the people of this country. The Budget contradicts reality.

This Budget is full of exaggeration about the accomplishments of this Government. The Hon. Member, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, speaks to the growth rate of the

non-oil economy. The largest growth rates are found among the smallest industries in the economy. That is only part of the issue. One of the largest growth rates is found in the accommodation and food industry; and this growth is a direct result of the demand coming mainly from the oil and gas industry. Therefore, it has absolutely nothing to do with any policy of the Government. That industry will grow if the oil and gas production increases. Further, five of the industries with the highest growth are so small that collectively they account for about 2% of the economy. Under this same section, paragraph 1.3, it is interesting that the Minister would stand and talk about democracy and state that within the last 18 months democracy has prevailed. I am tempted to ask you, Mr. Speaker, if these words, though they may not be unparliamentary, should not be expunged from the record of the National Assembly. As you may be aware Mr. Speaker, none of the persons leading his Party were democratically elected. We had elections the other day. They were handpicked. Yet, the Hon. Member stands in this noble Assembly with a straight face and tries to lecture to my Party about democracy. The advice to be given would be that the Members of his Party must first practice what they preach.

While actively championing local content provisions for local companies, this Government has been actively blocking other local businesses from enjoying economic freedom and competing in their own economy. With this practice the promise to ensure that Guyanese businesses could compete successfully under the new local content framework is biased and rings hollow. Local content, therefore, means nothing if a Government decides who should participate in the economy and who should not. This act is despicable and must stop now and must go. Please permit me, for a while, to highlight some of the recommendations the APNU/AFC Coalition detailed to ensure that development should not only mean an increase in material wealth for a particular section of society, but must include the welfare of the entire populace.

As an oil-rich country, we are saying that poverty among our citizens should end forever in Guyana. The question to be asked would be, what is this Regime's comprehensive anti-poverty strategy based on the fact-finding national poverty survey? How do you plan to lift the working poor out of poverty and misery? The Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, has claimed that there has been more disposable income to the populace but has failed to explain the difference between disposable income and purchasing power. We, on this side of the divide, are saying to you, Sir,

to conceive of work-paying initiatives. We are giving the goodly Minister a few recommendations, because he claimed we come here without recommendations. In his rapping up, he would tell this noble Assembly that these important revisions would be made. We are saying to him, be bold, confront these challenges steadfastly, as you make the necessary adjustments to the Budget before its passage in this noble Assembly.

As an oil producing State, we are positing that as a minimum there should be a 25% salary increase for all public servants, stat. Let there be no taxes on the minimum wage which should be no less than \$125,000. Yes. Using the colloquial parlance, we are an *ile* producing state, when compared to sister CARICOM countries that just export bananas or rely on tourism. Guyana has been blessed with a plethora of oil finds, with gold, bauxite, manganese, sugar, plus the non-oil sector such as forestry, fishing and the other mining and quarrying subsectors comprising of diamond, sand, and stone mining and, according to the Minister, they are on an upward trajectory. Therefore, let the minimum wage increase even more, maybe to \$130,000 in the pockets of the citizens. Let the tax threshold be equitable and fair. Can we do it MPs? Yes, we can, Hon. Members.

5.48 p.m.

The APNU/AFC Coalition further recommends that a people-centered approach be considered to include an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), to improve the lives and livelihoods of the elderly, the disabled, and home-based caregivers.

Page 17, section G, paragraph 3.46 talks about the prudent debt management of this Regime. Hence, there should be enough fiscal space to accommodate and to assist the poor and vulnerable. There must be a people-centered vision, yes, and a focused approach while addressing Guyanese with varied circumstances – the low-income families, children in single-parent homes, frontline workers, and the residents in the hinterland communities among others.

At number five in our recommendation, the APNU/AFC Coalition requests that there be small business grants of up to \$5 million *per* business. In other words, no Guyanese must be left behind. I reiterate, that the goodly Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the Hon. Member, should give clarity to the Guyana populace and let the Guyanese citizens know that though he sought in his presentation of this *Budget 2022*,

with great effort, to allow for an improvement in disposable income – which is good – the truth is that he has now realised that many persons would not have any purchasing power. It is not too late, Sir, to fix this anomaly. In addition, the APNU/AFC Coalition supporters want to know what the financing priorities of the Natural Resource Fund are. They asked me, what are they? What are the priorities? What are the projects to be financed using this Fund since none has been identified?

Mr. Speaker, I have noticed that the Hon. Minister has emphasised the ‘One Guyana’ concept. I am assuming that the Hon. Member is aware that Guyana’s motto reads, *One People, One Nation, and One Destiny*. However, as the Minister strives to build this oneness, the Hon. Member has not been steadfast in addressing the challenges of a section of the populace that still has pink slips from the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) grant roll out or the portion of persons who were unable to obtain the much-needed flood relief. It is our wish to hand over the list of names of Guyanese who were unable to obtain such grants, soonest. At the end of 2025, what will Guyana look like? What will it be like? In this Budget, there has been no evidence of the use of the logical model. Come on Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, what are the performances that are being evaluated? There is no evidence of outcomes and data to support outcomes. As this Budget agenda skips and flips, yet our people need a budget that fits. How are the people in the hinterland going to benefit from taxpayers’ dollars?

I must turn my attention to the health sector – investing in our people. Paragraph 4.115 talks about leveraging public-private partnerships. However, the Ministry of Health (MoH) currently does not have the technical infrastructure, Hon. Member Dr. Frank Anthony, to be steward over such highly complex partnerships which often involve performance-based contracting. For the evidence, under the PPP/C in 2011, while the present Minister of Health was garnering no experience in healthcare leadership, as he was the Minister of Culture, Youth, and Sport at the time, his current Advisor failed to successfully administer a service-level agreement (SLA) between the Ministry of Health and the Linden Hospital Complex (LHC). This led to the PPP/C giving up on further use of such complex health financing methods between the two entities.

The greatest risk with public-private partnerships is that if the contracting ministry or agency does not have the ability to administer and monitor such partnerships, then the service

provider would be placed in a position where the Ministry of Health could be easily fleeced. In healthcare, this would mean delivering less health services, with poor quality, for higher prices, with a spin-off leading ultimately to a greater number of untimely deaths, disabilities, and illnesses from disease complications. Thus, increasing morbidity and mortality, which becomes a public health burden.

At paragraph 4.116 there is an allocation of \$73.2 billion earmarked to be spent to achieve the outcomes for interventions to modernise the health sector and manage the pandemic. However, the Ministry of Health has failed to produce any consolidated report that would identify the results achieved from the expenditure of their 2020 and 2021 budgetary allocations. Thus, it is not advisable that the Parliament should increase the Ministry of Health's budget by over 36.8% – \$19.7 billion – when it has failed to demonstrate, in a clear and data-driven way, the outputs, outcomes, and impacts of past allocations. Budgets must be results-based and performance-focused. It has been alleged that the Ministry of Health, in this regard, has no proven track record over the past year.

Facilities and Equipment – paragraph 4.117: there is the flagship spending of the sum of \$2.3 billion in 2022 to modernise and expand facilities including the Festival City Polyclinic, the Diamond Diagnostic Centre, and the Lethem Regional Hospital. These are undertakings that were piloted by the APNU/AFC Coalition Government during its term in Office. The PPP/C merely inherited these projects that were in their final stages. It is our wish, on this side of the divide, that these projects be completed in the shortest possible time. The Hon Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, has reported that the sum of \$19 billion was expended for the purchase of medical and non-medical equipment. Here we stand again with no results or performance measures from the Ministry of Health on the outcomes and impacts of this investment. In our quest to demonstrate best practices, and according to *Diaconu et al. (2017)*, in the journal titled, *Globalization and Health*, we must be wary of medical devices and equipment that are “unfit for purpose”. The authors further stated:

“Undiscerning procurement processes are at the heart of this issue.”

Some questions to be asked when considering facilities and equipment include, what percentage of the items were delivered on time; what percentage is operational; what was

the average lead time between their delivery and operationalization? How many people benefited and in what way; how has this investment impacted the lives of ordinary Guyanese; and are Guyanese healthier with a better quality of life? The honorable House should be expected not to give money for which the returns are not adjudged.

Paragraph 4.118: note is made of the need for additional regional hospitals. However, these additional regional hospitals must be built in areas where they could facilitate access to care and impose minimum geographic hardships for the admission of the least number of persons. Regrettably, we are unsure if this is the case for the proposed regional hospitals to be constructed at Anna Regina, Tuschen, Enmore, Bath Settlement, and No. 75 Village, Corentyne. What about Buxton on the East Coast? What about Mahaica? To our minds, this singling out of locations, based on voter population, should be disallowed as it would be a clear violation of the constitutional rights of all – to access healthcare services under article 24 of the Constitution. In addition, it bars Guyana from achieving the goal of health for all people everywhere, that is universal healthcare coverage. Health should not be politicised, and thus, the location for this hospital must not be determined by if the area is PPP/C's or APNU/AFC's stronghold or not. Thus, we ask for the evidence that justifies the selection of those sites. In addition, Mr. Speaker, according to the Hon. Member, these regional hospitals on page 48 are expected to catapult healthcare delivery beyond current levels. The West Demerara Regional Hospital and the Bartica Regional Hospital are slated for upgrades, so a relevant question would be, if these regional hospitals have problems with human resources and remuneration for health workers, where and in what way shall regional hospitals at Anna Regina, Tuschen, Enmore, Bath, and No. 75 Village appear?

Paragraph 4.119: there has been the proposed expenditure of \$359.3 million for laparoscopic surgical equipment for the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). Of course, the provision of surgical care is essential to public health, though the prominence should be on primary care and preventive medicine. That is where the effort should be. We know the new emphasis is on procedures and dollars. However, the spending of \$359.3 million dollars for laparoscopic equipment for the GPHC, needs to be justified. Across Guyana, people face great challenges in accessing essential surgical services. For Guyana to meet this challenge, according to *Vansell et al. (2015)*, there needs to be approximately 10 fully equipped such devices and well-

trained staff operating theaters per 100,000. Currently, we only have about two per 100,000 population. Therefore, to enhance our national referral hospital, providing laparoscopic surgical equipment at the cost of \$359.3 million would not meet this challenge. Rather, this move would only serve to widen the disparities between the demand for surgical services and the supply of infrastructure along the hinterland and coastland divide. In addition, significant disparities along ethnic lines at surgical departments at the GPHC and within the surgical training programs, need to be addressed, Hon. Member and Minister of Health. These folks tell me these things and I think this is the forum for me to tell you. It has been alleged that young black doctors, who are aspiring to be surgeons, are unlikely to get into surgical residency programs, not because of a lack of intellect but because they might not be of the right race. To this end, and to confront and remedy this situation, we are asking for a race disparity and remuneration audit into the admitting of residents and the hiring of registrars, be it junior or senior consultants. As the shadow Minister of Health, I am going somewhere, and I am telling it as it is. I am feeling it is because of a certain section of the populace.

Paragraph 4.120: human resources constitute an important health system component, as the work done in the sector is performed by and for the people. On average 50 % of health expenditure should go towards the health workforce. This would require approximately \$36.6 billion out of the proposed allocation of \$73.2 billion to be spent on those directly engaged – our healthcare workers. However, summing up, in the distribution of the proposed allocation for the 2022 Budget, \$47.34 billion will not be spent on healthcare workers. So, we ask the Government's side of the house, how much of the remaining \$25.86 billion would be allocated to our hard-working healthcare workers who have toiled so hard during the pandemic risking not only their lives but that of their families.

6.03 p.m.

Is there any mercy, understanding and reward for our healthcare workers? Health workers are long overdue for a meaningful salary increase and risk allowance. Also, it would be timely now to review the on-call rate with a view of increasing the same, some is \$4,000, \$5,000 but with Diamond and Georgetown, they are different. The uniform allowance, the on-call risk allowance, if that can be looked at and maybe move it from \$20,000 to \$50,000. Hon. Minister, you can address that.

Chronic Diseases - at paragraph 4.121, the performance of health services is not determined by solitary numbers of a simple count of the persons screened for just one major cause of disease burden, as presented by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. The performance of health services is measured by health outcomes and the impact of those outcomes. Hence, the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change Coalition would like to see soon the scaling up of the diabetic clinics not only at Lusignan but throughout the administrative regions. To remind the Minister of Health, Dr. Frank Anthony, the Hon. Member, of some examples of performance indicators that we, on this side of the Assembly, are talking about. It is not just like that; we are not just talking wild. These indicators include but are not limited to the per cent of children under five with acute respiratory infection taken to a health facility; the unmet needs for family planning; knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding key health issues, and services; the per cent of women who seek care for specific health intervention by source and income group; life expectancy at birth; the existence of other processes assuring quality of care besides supervision; the maternal mortality rates; the under five and neo-natal mortality rate; and the existence of national Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) plan, just to name a few indicators.

Emergency Medicine - at paragraph 4.122, the acquisition of two ambulances for emergency use are unable to adequately bridge the gap in emergency medical services. The people of Guyana need more such as a trauma centre in Region 4 and an ambulance service that extends beyond Liliendaal on the East Coast Demerara (ECD) and Agricola on the East Bank Demerara (EBD); also, the Accident and Emergency (A&E) rooms across all our regional and district hospitals need to be adequately equipped and staffed, more so, in the hinterland where access to the National Referral Hospital poses a significant challenge. Given medevac by air is a significant consumer of health expenditure and critical to the saving of the lives of our brothers and sisters in the hinterland. There is a real need to explore a Government of Guyana air ambulance service. Looking at emergency medicine, the APNU/AFC Coalition recommends the building of a level three trauma centre which would be essential because of an increase of oil and gas companies and the fabrication of heavy-duty machinery. We must be prepared for mass casualty, God forbid.

The Members, on this side of the National Assembly, are saying that with the emerging oil economy, there must be a strategic shift into a new approach. A fresh approach is needed. No more working in silo but working together with a sense of integration considering human capital and intersectoral linkages for growth and development.

Mental health - at paragraph 4.123, the global experience has taught us that medicating and hospitalising persons with mental health illness should not be an option or should be of last resort. Leading scientists and international organisations concerned with health, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), have recommended that countries should shift away from institutionalised care for mental health. I have been advised that currently 10–15% of Guyanese have experienced some form of mental illness at one time and more so, in this COVID-19 time and three to five per cent have a chronic mental disorder, according to the Government Information Agency February, 2017. Additionally, it has been noted by those who are engaged in research that unipolar depression stands as the fifth largest contributor to disease burden in Guyana, with approximately 20,000 Guyanese suffering from severe mental disorders. That does not include mental retardation, alcohol abuse and epilepsy.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up and you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thus, given the substantial real need for mental health services – as evidenced by the above statistics – the relatively high cost associated with provision of comprehensive mental healthcare, the \$538 million that have been allocated to procure drugs and to augment mental health would be insufficient. In fact, would only serve to strain the health budget with no real improvement of the mental health of Guyanese. To date, the Ministry of Health has failed to produce any report, as I mentioned before, on the COVID-19 pandemic showing the competent handling and management of the public health threat. Under the People's Progressive Party/Civic, Guyana has seen the highest recorded cases of infection each day and month. Guyana has experienced two

deadly waves of COVID-19 where one is more deadly than the other in 2021 and 2022. To date, the death toll stands at a whopping 1,176 deaths, confirmed cases 60,385 and with 8,399 Guyanese on home isolation. Thus, even though \$6.8 billion have been allocated in the 2022 Budget, we must be assured that the PPP/C will utilise the resources effectively.

The APNU/AFC Coalition firmly believes that there should be an assiduous effort to train the traditional birth attendants and also booster the single-trained midwives programme to provide better outcomes for mother and child, so as to achieve the global maternal mortality ratio, the child mortality ratio and neonatal mortality ratio. The maternal waiting homes at Moruca, Kato and New Amsterdam project begun under our stewardship. It is our wish that tireless efforts would be made for the completion of these waiting homes to ensure that there is zero maternal, child and neonatal mortality.

The APNU/AFC Coalition looks forward to a reduction in teenage pregnancy as part of a comprehensive programme in our schools across Guyana, where they would be adequately and accurately counseled even in the context of peer interaction. It is our wish that the safe space initiative or youth friendly spaces be sustained and that there be evaluations to assess the effectiveness of such an important and life-changing programme.

We welcome the \$154 million to reduce unplanned pregnancy and the expansion of the contraceptive programme. We are happy for the promotion of menstrual hygiene by the First Lady. However, we await a report of the success of this programme and look forward to the inclusion and scaling up of such programmes to cater especially for the vulnerable and poor.

In conclusion, the Budget cannot be supported in its current form, as the small man cannot be the real man. The bulk of the population would not benefit from *Budget 2022* which lacks a human face. The transformational approach posited and proposed by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility of Finance allows the Guyanese to eat from the Natural Resource Fund before there is any earning. There is also no evidence of an exit strategy and no comprehensive plan to reduce the deaths from this COVID-19 public health threat. The Budget feeds the rich and kills the poor. When is this Government going to care about the people's welfare by being fair? The APNU/AFC Coalition looks forward to taking back the helm of government to ensure that there is transparency;

accountability; effectiveness in the public health sector and, overall, a good life for all Guyanese. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. It is now the turn for the Minister of Health, the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony to make his presentation.

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members, I rise this afternoon to support *Budget 2022* under the theme: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in building Our One Guyana*.

First of all, allow me to commend my Colleague, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his team at the Ministry of Finance for putting together a fair, balanced and transformative budget. This is going to lift us into the 21st Century and beyond. There is no doubt, in my mind and in the mind of the Guyanese people, that the APNU/AFC policies were reckless. They wreaked havoc in our economy and have hurt thousands of people across this country. No one was spared of their callousness. As we recall, they took away the Because We Care cash grant from the young and innocent schoolchildren. They took away the jobs from the sugar workers and, as if that was not enough, they took away the jobs from the Community Support Officers (CSOs). They took away bonuses from the police, army, fire service and the prison service; all the annual bonuses disappeared under the APNU/AFC. Of course, the pensioners were not spared because they also took away electricity and water benefits. There is a big philosophical difference between the PPP/C and APNU/AFC. We are here to serve the people of Guyana; while they were there, they served themselves and their cronies.

This Budget restores fairness by giving back expanded benefits to the young people, the old people and the working people of our country. This Budget is also a balanced one; it provides the right policy mixed by bringing relief to vulnerable people while incentivising businesses to create jobs. It is not one or the other; it is doing both, so that the whole country could benefit. We have heard repeatedly here, over the last several days, that we should give away, give away this and give away that, but we did not hear any thoughts from the Opposition on how we are going to create jobs and how we are going to grow the economy, so that we can make it sustainable. This is a recipe for disaster; just recall the People's National Congress's track record; just recall the PNC's management every time it was in Government. Its economic model left us drowning in poverty

under Mr. Burnham, under Mr. Hoyte and under Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger. This Government, the PPP/C Government does not apologise for working with businesses be it big, medium or small. Businesses are the engines of growth and the creators of jobs and prosperity in our country. With the PPP/C's sound policy, prudence and stewardship we have steered Guyana back to prosperity.

Under the leadership of President Ali of this Government and this Budget, we are going to lead the peoples of this country to collective prosperity, not one set of people or that set of people, but all the people would be led to prosperity. This Budget sets the foundation on which the future of Guyana will be built. It is not just to share size of the Budget; it is about the content of the Budget that is genuinely transformative.

6.18 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, when you go into the Budget and look at the contents, you would see the enormous investments that are being made in health, in education, in housing and in social well-being of the people of this country. You would see the investments being made in the traditional sectors such as agriculture, construction of bridges, roads, hotels and so many other things that our country needs. It is not only that, but while we look at the traditional, we have also looked at the next generation of projects in the oil and gas sector – the gas to shore pipeline that is going to help us to get cheap energy in this country. Affordable energy is necessary if we are going to industrialise and move this country forward.

Here we are on these debates, with the PNC and the AFC and I do not know if there is still A Partnership for National Unity (APNU). They have been here at their best worst behaviour, stirring all sorts of political mischief with patent misrepresentations and failing on all counts on what it means to be honourable in this House. We have heard from them, fairy tales and fictional characters. We heard about some Tamana and Sunita, fictional characters worthy of going for the Guyana Prize for Literature, which the Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson, has just resuscitated. It is not only that, Mr. Speaker, but all of a sudden, the Members on that side of the House have found empathy. They are now lamenting all sorts of things, but their lamentations will fool no one. If anything, these absurd presentations that we have heard, the sorts of race bating and we just heard some of that from Dr. Cummings, these sorts of juvenile tantrums that we have seen here would only serve to widen the credibility gap between themselves and the Guyanese people. It is sad to see

how much the palm tree has withered. Then, again, why are we surprised? Agriculture was never there forte so; we should not be surprised.

We just heard from Dr. Cummings about things that we should be doing in the health sector. Under the APNU/AFC and their stint from 2015 to 2020, the health sector was in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). The whole health sector was in the ICU. It was a period distinguished by scandals in procurement. We remember that there was a man in a basement in New York who was selling medicine to the APNU/AFC Government. We remember all the scandals of how they were going to procure drugs and medical supplies. We recall that when we just got into Government in 2020, one of the things that we had to do was to throw away close to \$10 billion of expired drugs. That is the track record while there were shortages across this country and people could not access basic medicine. Not only that, but there were scandals in drug storage. We recall the Sussex Street bond. There was a bottom house and, on the bottom house, they were paying \$14 million a month for bottom house storage. Not only that, but some of you would recall the Report of the Auditor General, when they rented seven rooms at the Ocean View Hotel so that they could store drugs and medicine. When the audit was done, what was found? They found expired drugs, cockroaches, rats and everything infesting the storage area. That was not to be undone. There was another offsite, somewhere in Water Street, where they were storing lubricants. All of that is in the Report of the Auditor General. They come here today to try to lecture us on how to run the health sector.

There were also scandals in the infrastructural projects that APNU/AFC did. Recall how much money they were spending on the head office at the Ministry of Public Health. Millions and millions of dollars were wasted and we had to fire the contractor before we could have gotten progress on that building. Do you recall what happened at Ocean View? They are proud to say that they built a hospital at Ocean View but, what was there? I want to remind the people of this country of what we took over. First of all, we took over a building that was not even ready to be a hospital. Guess what? It had no electricity; it had no water; it had no sewerage; it had no oxygen; it had no equipment; and it had no beds. They called that a hospital. That is not all. What was even funny is that while the thing had nothing, three times they changed the name of the hospital. Then, finally they got Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger to go over there to open the hospital. What they opened was a shell; nothing was

inside. We took that and we were able to turn it around to buy the ICU equipment, the ventilators and to bring them in so that we could have gotten patients in that hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know what sort of barefacedness you would call this, when people can come here and try to lecture us about some of these things. We had three Ministers during the APNU/AFC period, namely: Dr. George Norton, there was Dr. Karen Cummings, and there was Ms. Volda Lawrence. I am surprised that when Dr. Cummings was a Minister in the Ministry of Public Health, the Hon. Member did not know all of these things that Member was just talking about. I am surprised, because none of it that the Hon. Member was pontificating about just now was the Hon. Member able to do while a Minister in the Ministry of Public Health.

Let us address some of the points that the Hon. Member raised. First of all, the Hon. Member spoke about the allocation to the sector. I am proud that this PPP/C Government has given \$73.2 billion for health in this Budget. This is the largest single allocation of resources to the health sector. The Hon. Member, on the other side, Dr. Cummings, came here and opened her speech by saying that she is disappointed in the Budget. Guess what, when the Hon. Member was the Minister in the Ministry of Public Health, the Hon. Member, Mr. Winston Jordan, the then Minister of Finance, gave some paltry sums of money the Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings, was loud in praise to him. When they got \$33.3 billion, she said that whoa, what a whopping amount that is going to the health sector. This was in 2017. Then, in 2018, when they got the allocation again, the Member made some comments along the same vein. Here it is, the largest allocation to the health sector and the Member is disappointed now. This is the sort of behaviour that we get from these Hon. Members. This is the sort of behaviour, when they come here and they try to tell us that what is in this Budget is not going to help people. The Hon. Member came here and said to us that if we go into public/private partnerships, we would not be able to manage them. Apparently, when the Hon. Minister was there, the Minister did not realise that there was a public/private partnership with the Caribbean Heart Institute (CHI). Under this Government, we have been able to increase surgeries, cardiac surgeries for the patients that need cardiac surgery. Not only that, but we are also going to ensure that we broaden the scope and that we can get more partners so that we can perform more services for the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, you had seen in the Budget one of the things that Dr. Ashni Singh spoke about was dialysis for patients. That is one of the things that we spoke about and that is because when somebody was diagnosed with end stage renal failure and that person had to get dialysis, it was a one-off payment of \$360,000. After that, the person had to find the resources to continue dialysis. Many of these patients could not have afforded it and that is why we decided that we were going to ensure that we help these patients by providing them with \$600,000 per annum. Not only that, but the medicines that they would need to make sure that their blood levels are good. We are going to provide epogen from the Ministry of Health. We are going to make sure that they can get that. That is another \$9,000. Sometimes every month they would need that sort of medicine. In addition to that, every three months they are required to do a set of laboratory tests and we are also going to provide that at our hospitals. The Hon. Member talked about partnerships and us not being able to manage these partnerships. Most of the dialyses that are done today are done by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector partners. We are going to partner with them to make sure that this service is delivered to every single dialysis patient.

6.33 p.m.

We heard from the Hon. Member about chronic diseases and, in particular, the Member spoke about mental health. One of the things that we saw happen during their stint in mental health was the creation of a Mental Health Unit and that Unit is supposed to help with suicide. There were about 21 persons who were employed in that Unit and they were supposed to be going out into the communities that are affected by suicide. Guess what? The places that have suicide are in Region 6, Region 2, parts of Region 5 and Region 4 and maybe some in Region 3. The Unit is centralised and these persons who were employed to help persons prevent suicide are not going out to the regions and there was no hiring of anybody in those regions to help with the prevention of suicide. If we are going to really have an impact on suicide, we have to decentralise the response to make sure that we are closer to where the problem exists. That is what we are going to do and not the centralised business that they had.

Not only that but, very shortly, we will be bringing to this House, two pieces of legislation, one dealing with suicide prevention and the other one dealing with mental health services. I hope that when they come to this House the Hon. Member on that side would give us the support. When we

talk about mental health in this country, we have been partnering with Columbia University. If the Hon. Member does not know, just last year, right in this hall, we had an international psychiatry conference with some of the best minds in psychiatry coming to Guyana talking to us and delivering papers. They continue to work with us and will be working with us for the next five years in mental health and in psychiatry. That is what we have been doing.

If we look at the other chronic diseases such as diabetes, we have said and we have set a policy that we want to find all the persons who are affected by diabetes. We want to ensure that we are able to control their blood sugar and we want to ensure that we are able to control their high blood pressure. If they are 40 years and over, we want to make sure that we can give them statins. As part of that programme, we have been collaborating with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). We introduced a programme last year called HEARTS. That is going to decrease the risk of getting these chronic non-communicable diseases and, also, we have changed many of the algorithms required to treat patients with these diseases. We bought medications that are going to be more effective in treating these patients. This year, we are going to roll out that programme for more than 80 health centres across this country. That is the shape of progress, Hon. Member.

It is not only in diabetes and hypertension, but we have also been looking at how we can extend cancer care. As you would know, Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we celebrate World Cancer Day and one of the programmes that we will be rolling out, in a very comprehensive way, is to make sure that we can reduce the incidents of cervical cancer in Guyana. We have to develop a programme where we can do primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. For primary prevention of cervical cancer, which happens to be the second most prevalent cancer among women, the first being breast cancer. If we focus on cervical cancer, it is a preventable disease. It is a disease that if young people get an injection, it can be prevented and there have been attempts. The first time we started that programme it was started under the Hon. Member, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran. When it started under Dr. Ramsaran, we did not get the support of the PNC at that time. They campaigned against it and, what happened? It resulted in a lot of young women not getting their vaccines. When they got into Office, they tried to start the programme and it ended up not taking off. I hope that this time around, because this year we are going to start a

massive programme to give the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination to girls between nine and 14 years of age. I hope we end this with their support.

For secondary prevention of cervical cancer, one of the things we want to do is to extend screening to make sure that women 30 years and older can access screening. Therefore, we will be having more of the Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA) clinic, more pap smears and we will be introducing HPV tests so that we can screen for cervical cancer. At the tertiary stage we are going to create more access to ensure that people who need surgery can get surgery. Those who need chemotherapy can get that and those who need radiation therapy would be able to access that as well. That is how we are looking at this, in a wholistic way, and not a little piece there and a little piece there, then they do not fit together. This is what we will be doing for cervical cancer. In addition to that, the most prevalent cancer among men is prostate cancer. One of the things that we will be introducing with the resources that have been allocated in this year's Budget is Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSAs) Tests because for the first time we now have the money to be able to buy that machine and we will be doing PSAs in the public sector. Hopefully, we will get the men to come out so that we can screen them and that we can make sure we can prevent prostate cancer.

One of the main things in this Budget that is going to transform the health sector is the hospitals that we will be building. There are six new hospitals. The first one and let us start from Region 2, would be in Anna Regina. It is the most populated area in Region 2. Why should it not have a hospital there? That is what we are addressing, so we will be putting that hospital in Anna Regina. In Region 3, where is the growth pole? There is have Tuschen, there is Parika and there is all of those communities around there where there are lots of people living because of the housing development. We need to make sure that they have access to healthcare and that is why we are going to put a hospital at DeKendren. We looked hard to find land and that is where the Government's land is located, so we are going to put the hospital there. We make no apologies for that. When we come to Region 4, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation has always been seen as the national referral hospital but also the regional hospital for Region 4. We want to change that. We want to ensure that the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation can remain a national referral hospital and do the complicated cases. That is why in Region 4 and the two corridors, we will be making two new regional

hospitals. There would be one on the East Bank Demerara, at Diamond and the other one would be on the East Coast Demerara, at Enmore.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, we are going to have to give you an extension to tell us where you are going to place the others.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the two in Region 4, we are going to build a new hospital, in Region 5, at Bath Settlement. Again, that is where the population is located. While at the same time, Hon. Member, we are doing a lot of renovation works right now in Mahaicony. Mahaicony over the last year, got a new Accident and Emergency (A&E), new theatres and they are all functional with recovery areas. You should go out some more, Hon. Member and you would see the development that is happening in the health sector.

Then, we go to Region 6 where we are going to replace the Skeldon Hospital with a brand-new hospital at Number 75. What would these hospitals look like? We recognise that many of the outpatient are not comfortable for patients. Many of the Accident and Emergency, some of them do not have the necessary equipment so that when people come there, they can be attended to. We do not have modern equipment and infrastructure.

In this country in the public sector, we have about three Computed Tomography (CT) scans. Each one of these regional hospitals would have their own CT scans and each one of them would be equipped with digital x-rays. Each one of them would have ultrasounds so that people do not have to travel from all parts of the country to come to Georgetown to get access to these things. It will not only be that. All these devices are also going to be internet enabled. What that means is when you do a CT scan in Skeldon or in Anna Regina, it will go to the Cloud. It would then be pulled off at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and read by the experts at the hospital, so that one can have a very professional interpretation of those results. Modern laboratories would be at these hospitals. It will not only be

that. In this country right now, our regional hospital stack is about nine hospitals. We have already fixed up the Lethem Regional Hospital. We have just completed the Mabaruma Regional Hospital. We are also finishing off the district hospital at Leonora. We just finished the Diamond Diagnostic Centre and all of these are now operational. In addition to all of that, one of the things we will be doing is to ensure that the West Demerara Regional Hospital is also fully rehabilitated.

I want to move on to another flagship programme that we have in this sector and that is the maternal and child hospital that we will be building. This hospital would ensure that we take healthcare to the next level. All the high-risk mothers would have access to services at this particular hospital and every sub speciality in paediatrics would be offered at this hospital.

6.48 p.m.

So if a person has children with cancer or with any other illness, he/she would be able to come there and get speciality service. This is what we are doing, when we talk about transformation, we are not just talking, we are ensuring that we could deliver on this transformation that we spoke about. I heard the Hon. Member talking about human resource, and I just want to say very quickly, that we have partnerships with Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, York University, McMaster University, Northwell Health Hospital chain, Mayo Clinic and Mount Sinai Hospital. All of these are world class partners who are going to help us to develop this sector. This is what *Budget 2022* brings to the people of this country. Thank you, very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Mr. Shuman]: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Our next contributor is the Hon. Annette Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, a pleasant evening to you. Before I get into my actual presentation, I must say how disappointed I am after hearing the Hon. Minister of Health. While health is important, 35 minutes of his presentation he spoke about buildings, buildings and buildings, but nothing on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), a pandemic our country is grappling with. One could clearly see where its priority lies. It is a distinct pleasure for me to join with my

colleagues, from this side of the House to contribute to this year's budget debates, themed and I quote:

"Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana"

Moved by the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, totalling a whopping \$552.9 billion which he painstakingly read for five hours 15 minutes. I, like many other Guyanese were expectant of a budget that was resolute. A budget that would build the confidence and capacity of the average Guyanese citizen or resident to improve human development. Admittedly, I like many Guyanese were truly taken aback and utterly surprised, since the budget failed to meet our expectations. It failed at explicitly stating what are the challenges and it is steadfast against strategies the regime has in place addressing these challenges. Instead, we were entertained for 5 hours, 15 minutes on how a few will be enriched through a few infrastructural projects, which we just heard a few and a few cash handouts which it intends to distribute. This budget is riddled with massive corruption, disparity and discrimination. It is about greed and making their friends, elites, families and cronies, Hon. Prime Minister, richer than they are.

Sir, may I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to all frontline workers who continue to perform their duties as we battle COVID-19. My condolences to families who have lost loved ones due to the incompetence, mismanagement of the regime handling of the pandemic. Additionally, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh failed to tell the Guyanese population during his marathon five hours, 15 minutes presentation about the deficits attributed to the last two budgets presented by his installed regime and what is the projected deficit for 2020 likely to be? Well, Sir, though I am not a trained economist by profession and will not profess to be but having basic knowledge of Introductory Microeconomics (ECN 110) and Introductory Macroeconomics (ECN 120) respectively, I would endeavour to provide to the people of Guyana, the overall surplus deficit of central government's revenue and expenditure for the years 2020, 2021 and 2022, recorded in Volume Three of the budget estimates. In 2020, \$86 billion, in 2021, it had a projection of \$76 billion, but there was a revise of \$109.9 billion. In 2022, it projected a deficit of \$64.8 billion. Therefore—with an accumulation of the deficit numbers, \$260 billion—it is clear to the eyes that even the sums it would be drawing from the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) would not be sufficient to assist in clearing budget

deficits. I guess the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh would provide clarity.

What I found quite interesting, is that there was no mention in the budget speech, or the estimates of the \$30 billion bond secured by the Coalition Government for the Guyana Sugar Industry (GUYSUCO). I cannot locate the issue regarding the \$30 billion bond Mr. McCoy. However, I vividly recall several questions, I, personally posed to the Hon. Minister to provide explicit responses as it relates to the \$30 billion bond. Do you know in many instances vague and rude responses were provided, such as check the budget speech of 2021 or its estimates. This I consider to be an absurdity from the Hon. Member, and such attitude should not be tolerated by the substantive Speaker. May I remind the Members on this side of the House, regardless of which side of the aisle we sit, we are representing constituents, and by right, it is our task as elected representatives to seek information on matters and issues affecting our people, which include detailed accounting of taxpayer's dollars. This is not the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) moneys. This is the people of Guyana money. Therefore, it is my fervent hope to see a change in behaviour by Members for the new, 2022.

Sir, one would agree with me that *Budget 2022* would not have been possible without the involvement and engagement of the thousands of public servants who provided their skills, expertise, knowledge, training and competences in ensuring timelines and targets for *Budget 2022* were met.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, while we do tolerate heckling to some degree, I would simply ask that you keep it at a level where I could hear the Hon. Member's presentation. Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your protection. We are all cognisant that our hardworking public servants who keep the wheels of government turning over the last 18 months, operated and functioned under strenuous conditions due to COVID-19, while simultaneously enduring the oppression of an uncaring and reckless installed administration which failed to express any empathy towards them or to remunerate them handsomely. Nevertheless, they were given a paltry taxable seven *per cent* increase in salaries. To you, public servants, whether you are here in this honourable House, or you are listening to me across the airways, on my own personal behalf, kindly accept my commendation for your sterling support and contributions to *Budget 2022*. Be reassured that

the Coalition administration will return to government and provide that good life which we started in May, 2015.

Over the last three days of these budget debates, my colleagues on the opposite side spoke gloriously about *Budget 2022* and deemed it people centred and poor people budget, just to name a few, but a sticking record of pre-March 2020, rhetoric. Many of the Members failed to provide an overview of its sector's performance for 2021 and defend with substance, his/her sector's allocation for 2022, and Guyanese expectations from this oil budget. What I do know is that many are sorely disappointed and snubbed at the installed regime's description of *Budget 2022*. While I support the views and opinions given by many right-thinking Guyanese, I will describe *Budget 2022* as delusional and hopeless for the poor.

Budget 2022 fails to address issues faced by single mothers who are struggling daily to make ends meet for their families. What does *Budget 2022* have for the young man who trades his business in the busy streets selling water, drinks and other implements to ensure food is on the table? What does *Budget 2022* have for the vendors down Bourda Market, Stabroek Square, Water Street, Regent Street, Robb Street and in all of the communities? What does *Budget 2022* have for our hard-working public servants? Were there widespread consultations with these categories I just alluded to, to ensure what they would want to see in *Budget 2022* to better their lives? My simple response to those questions is that *Budget 2022* has absolutely nothing to offer them. In contrast, it has six billion recorded for a failing industry—GUYSUCO

7.03 p.m.

What a waste of money. A few Members on the opposite side quoted from the Books of John and Proverbs. They must be reminded of the words contained in Proverbs 31:8-9 - New International Version (NIV). This is what I will quote. Proverbs 31:8-9:

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute”.

Verse 9 states:

“Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy”.

This is exactly what we on this side of the House have been doing and will continue to do. This is the third budget by the installed regime in less than two years, where billions of

taxpayers' moneys have been approved. The question we must ask ourselves is whether the circumstances and situations of the people in Agricola, Albouystown, Linden, Queenstown, Achawib and Laing Avenue have changed. I am on the ground. I could tell you nothing has changed for these ordinary people.

Due to time constraints imposed on me, I will outline the following why I cannot give my blessings to *Budget 2022* in its current format. My desire is for the installed cabal to adapt a few recommendations I will proffer. When I look at *Budget 2022*, in the introductory remarks one heard about hooliganism. We were called all sorts of names. Do you know what, it has forgotten what transpired in September, 2019, where it was about to overturn my Colleague's vehicle. The gentleman who now sits as the installed President of this nation, was equally guilty of what my Colleague went through.

We saw what went on in this House in 2018, with my goodly Bishop Friend – we came a long way, we saw what my Friend, Ms. Manickchand performed and saw what transpired on 5th March, where Guyanese...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I think the Standing Orders are very clear. It is Cde. or Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: My goodly Cde., the Hon. Bishop Edghill. Thank you very much. We recall what transpired in Lusignan and in Bath Settlement. When they are calling people hooligans, they should look in the mirror. It is talking about democracy. It neglected to give Guyanese the constitutionally due Local Government Elections (LGE) in 2021. It failed to consult with the Leader of the Opposition on national issues and it is talking about democracy?

Article 13 is very clear when it comes to consultation. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker, I would personally say that the budgets presented by the installed regime to this House, all lack vision, lack direction, and lack planning. It fails to provide an assessment of the performance of the sectors over the last years. It was an operation where numbers were plugged –Ms. Rodrigues– copied and pasted. If we are to comparatively assess budgets presented by the two administrations over the last six years and eight months, Sir, truth be told the Coalition's five budgets provided a clear-cut direction for Guyana, Guyanese and the environment. It does not like to hear the term the Green State Development Strategy to deliver the good life. While the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) budgets focused more on

enriching a few which could be termed mega projects and their elites... I have so much to say from this book but I will put it aside.

I will now turn my attention to the sector that is dear to my heart. That is the housing sector. The housing sector, where a lot of corruption is going on, but we will talk about that later. I now turn my focus as I said before to the sector to which I have parliamentary responsibilities – the housing and water sector. Before doing so, ... [**Ms. Parag:** How many house lots you got?] Do you want to know, ask Jagdeo? That is why I have him where I got him. If you do not watch, you will be the next. I must rebut the false accusation and misinformation peddled by the Hon. Parag. I want her to listen to me carefully. In her presentation reference was made of PPP/C transparency on house lots distribution. That is where allottees were allowed to put his/her hands in an envelope to select a number. What she failed to tell the people of this nation is whether the last Minister of Housing, who now sits at the helm of this nation, and who is yet to prove evidence of his certification – where his qualifications are concerned, allowed for the *wanna be* Vice-President, who is Vice-President, to put his hand in an envelope to select his two acres of house lots. This equates to two house lots and paid under market value. You best watch your mouth because I will come after you.

What do you call such an action, Ms. Parag? If you are suffering from amnesia let me remind you Ms. Parag, currently they are cabinet Members [**An Hon. Member:** Hon. Member] Hon. Member, there are Cabinet Members who were also provided allocations in that very area – “Pradoville II”. You should find out from them, whether they too put their hands in bags or in an envelope to select their allocations. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Ms. Manickchand, I am not touching you. Some of them sold their properties for \$100 million and more. What do you call that Ms. Parag? Do you call that transparency? [**An Hon. Member:** Is who you are calling Parag?] Hon. Member...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, I think when the Speaker has the floor, Sir there should be silence in the House. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, I will remind you once again, of the Standing Order that the Members in this House are referred to as either Hon. or Cde. Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When yuh blood hot up yuh does get thing... Sorry about that. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Let me publicly use myself as an example, so that we could set the record straight. I was

given an allocation, I paid for my allocation, I put my hand into a brown envelope, and I selected my house lot, as against what the Hon. *wannabe* Vice-President did not do. Let us be very serious. Housing is a major problem in this nation. Just before coming to this podium, there was a young lady who reached out to me, and I must let her story be heard here today. This is what she had to say to me. I asked the question, could you provide an update with your house lot? She said good afternoon, in response. She said the last thing she was told was they are not ready with the paperwork for those lands. She said this month is two years since she got her allocation letter. I asked her which area was this. She called an area, I would not name here, which is on the East Bank Demerara. I said 'cool'. I asked her if she received her Agreement of Sale and when last she visited?

I have here a copy of her allocation letter dated 2nd February, 2020. She said, we have paid in full, and we have all of our receipts. We really need access to our land. She said all infrastructures are in place – water, road, electricity, so I do not know what the problem is. Why can we not get our Agreement of Sale or Transport to build our home. Is it because they were given an allocation under the Coalition Government that they were treated like this, Mr. Croal and Hon. Member, Ms. Rodrigues? This is high class wickedness. This is just one example. It was painful and disgusting to see where the housing sector was when it was led by the PPP/C former Minister of Housing and currently installed President.

On assumption to Office in 2015, the Coalition Government was tasked to restructure the sector, to reflect equity and reduce the backlog of applications for house lots and housing. Therefore, may I inform this honourable House, particularly the Hon. Members who sit at the helm of the housing and water sectors, to be correctly informed by researching the paper done by the Coalition Government. This paper detailed what we found in the housing sector. The Coalition Government in November, 2017, did an assessment and this is what our findings were. Pre-May 2015, throughout the two decades of the then PPP/C Government, the housing delivery approach was primarily site and services schemes. Over a year ago, *Budget 2021* I reported at approximately 60,000 service lots were developed and distributed since the 1990s.

7.18 p.m.

I challenge my Friends across the aisle to refute this, and in so doing it must provide the evidence. Pre-May 2015, it was

in Government for 23 years. It was alarming to see applications, not current but pending as far back as 1992, 1993, 1994, up until it left Office in May of 2020. At the end of 2016, the total number of pending applications at the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) was 56,566. That was comprised of 44.25% applicants who were prequalified for a house lot, but no offer was made. Do you know what, Sir? This document, the forensic audit that we did in 2017, proved all the wrongs that were being done in the housing sector. What a shame.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I would ask that you retract that word.

Ms. Ferguson: I so do, Sir. Untruth. The Coalition was not overreaching with its expectations by plucking wild numbers from the air to boast that 50,000 house lots will be allocated, as we continue to hear on a daily basis. We are yet to hear what are the Hon. Members' visions for the Ministry of Housing and Water.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, my sincere apologies for interrupting you. However, in order to hear about these fantastic house lots, one will need a five-minute extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Opposition Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: I do not think that 30 minutes have been exhausted so quickly. In 2017, the Coalition set a realistic performance indicator through medium term strategy from 2017 to 2021, to provide at least 10,000 various housing solutions. We are not saying 50,000. Every time one opens their mouth – 50,000. What we see happening these days is that when they are giving allocations all that the people are receiving is a piece of paper, but they cannot access the lands.

I also need to rebut what I heard on the programme, *Budget in Focus* and this is what the Hon. Rodrigues had to say...

[**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] The Hon. Member said that when we were in Government, the Opposition never gave allocations, we never did roads, we never installed lights in communities, but this document tells the story. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** Read out the document.] I do not have time. What we were told is that the Government distributed over 10,000 house lots for 2021, but

when I posed the question of the areas to the Hon. Minister, Collin Croal, this is what he provided but I will do a sample. Three different figures were given for Edinburgh – 292... When I check what I have here... I will use Williamsburg in Region 6 on the Corentyne Coast. This is what was provided to us in this honourable House through questioning. The amount of 105 lots, 39 lots and 147 lots. When I checked the total that I have, we had given out 400 house lots just before leaving Government. Therefore, what I am concluding is that we have a duplication of numbers being given to allottees. I will go vigorously after the housing sector. They have no shame.

I now turn to the water sector. I know that they have about \$4.9 billion for the water sector. Even before I move to the water sector, when the Hon. Ministers, whether Collin Croal or Susan Rodrigues who speaks after me, they will have to say to the nation and to this House that their projection for 2021 was \$1.9 billion as it relates to sale of assets which includes lands *et cetera*. When I checked the budgets of statutory bodies, Appendix T, on page 872 – if my memory serves me accurately – I think the Ministry sold assets totalling over \$5 billion. The Minister will have to say to us where these lands were and to whom these lands were sold. Quickly, I do believe that for the water sector a lot must be done because many schools are out of water and the Ministry has failed to conduct an assessment to determine what is the best possible for these schools. I urge the Ministers to ensure that thorough assessments of the schools are done. My recommendation to the Hon. Members is that we need to treat the housing and water sector with seriousness. The Ministers...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I give you the one-minute warning. I will give you another minute to wrap up.

Ms. Ferguson: In 2021, the Hon. Minister, Collin Croal, promised single-window processing. He promised to bring the amendment as it relates to the Condominium (Regulation and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act. We are yet to see these things. I trust that the Minister will be able to address the squatting situation in our country in the 2022 budget. My recommendation to the Hon. Ministers is that with the oil industry, the Government should allow for lands to be made available to Guyanese at cheaper costs or in some instances without them having to pay. The Government must consider subsidising houses for low-income owners. The time has come for the Government to partner with the Guyana Public Service Co-operative Credit Union Limited and with

cooperatives so that we could provide affordable housing to our people.

As I prepare to conclude my presentation, I must iterate that *Budget 2022* lacks substance, vision and directions on the improvement of ordinary Guyanese lives. If I am to give my support to *Budget 2022*, I will be doing so with a heavy heart, acting duplicitously and hypocritically to my constituents and Guyanese whom I represent, knowing quite frankly that it will not aid in shaping or making their lives better. I will be equally guilty as the installed Regime that has presented it. I therefore conclude by saying that I cannot support *Budget 2022*. I urge the Regime to revisit its measures and make the necessary adjustments. May God richly bless us all. Thank you very much, Sir. *[Applause]*

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, Ms...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Deputy Speaker, just before...

Deputy Speaker: Hon...

Ms. Ferguson: There is an important announcement I wish to make.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member...

Ms. Ferguson: The koker at Success on the Essequibo Coast is currently breached. I call on the Minister of Public Works to attend to it, Sir. Thank you very much. That information just came in. *[Interruption]*

Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Hon. Member Annette Ferguson, you quoted from some documents during your presentation. We look forward to you laying those over to the House at your earliest opportunity.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you. I now call on the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water, Susan Rodrigues, to make her contribution.

Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water [Ms. Rodrigues]: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope the Hon. Member, Annette Ferguson, will take her seat because class is in session. The Hon. Member, Annette Ferguson, was physically absent from the debates all week until today. I can only assume that she took three days to prepare that litany that she just delivered. However, I think she would have done a greater service to the Opposition if she had forfeited that speech and made a second attempt to

grab the Mace. Let me deal condignly with some of the comments made by the Hon. Member. She spoke about greed, but the Hon. Member Ferguson conveniently forgot that she did not only try to snatch the Mace, but she also snatched a scholarship for herself while she was a sitting Minister of Government. She then went on social media and carried on with a rant – scholarship, scholarship, scholarship.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Opposition Chief Whip, you have the floor.

Mr. Jones: Comrade Deputy Speaker, in reference to the Standing Orders, imputing improper motive on the Hon. Member.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She got a scholarship for herself, denying hundreds or thousands of Guyanese the same opportunity. Yet, she has the audacity to come to this House and speak about greed. She also spoke about Local Government Elections and that the People's Progressive Party/Civic is not calling Local Government Elections. She is clearly delusional – a word that she used in her presentation. Perhaps, she is confusing the period... [**Mr. Jones:** The Hon. Member Ferguson.] The Hon. Member Ferguson perhaps is confusing the period of when the APNU/AFC was in Office and they controlled the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). No Government holds or conducts elections or Local Government Elections.

7.33 p.m.

When the Guyana Elections Commission is ready to hold its elections, we are happy to participate in those elections and we will deliver the same trashing that we did at the last two local government elections (LGE).

The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, also told us a story. We heard a lot of stories in this House over the last four days. She held up an allocation letter for an allottee that received her allocation on 2nd February, 2020. They delivered those house lots as we have made public, almost 2,000 house lots in the year 2020, during the period when they were a caretaker Government. Common sense will tell you, if you have a letter and you are making a point that the allottee cannot access her land or she has not been given possession of her land, why would you not state the area? Why not give full disclosure? You are standing in this House, give full disclosure. Do you know why she did not give disclosure? It was because she knows why. She knows the problem with

that area. She does not have to call the name of the area, I can call the name of the area.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much. The Point of Order is Standing Order 40(b). It speaks to the issue of elucidation. This Hon. Member is misleading the National Assembly.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I think you would have to ask the Hon. Minister if she is willing to yield time to you to elucidate.

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The area is Perseverance. The Hon. Member, as the last Minister with responsibility for Housing and Water during the APNU/AFC, was fully aware that area has a legal problem, in terms of the description of the area and it has to be corrected through the courts. The Hon. Member and her Government did nothing in the five years that they were there to make that correction. We are doing so now. All the documents have been prepared and the area will be sorted out in terms of the name and those allottees will be granted access and will be able to take possession of their lands in that area. We will fix it as we fixed everything else.

We heard a lot of dreams, fantasies, Shakespeare, and biblical scriptures, but I am yet to hear a single constructive coherent thought-provoking or even a logical criticism of *Budget 2022*. They cannot seem to make up their mind whether they want more or they want less. One Hon. Member said, smash brakes. The other one said, we need more, you did not do enough, the public servants need more, increase the threshold, and give more cash grants. Their presentations were riddled with inconsistencies. One of the other criticisms was a lack of consultation. It is obvious that they did not even consult among themselves the line that they want to take when they come here to debate this Budget.

This Budget, *Budget 2022*, represents a dramatic increase from *Budget 2021*. Our Government has managed to find the fiscal space and many of you would remember where that term 'fiscal space' came from. The then Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, used that term when he said that he could not find the fiscal space to continue the cash grant for the school children. But we have found the fiscal space to bring to this House the largest budget and we did so without introducing any new tax or without increasing taxes. As a

matter of fact, we have removed taxes and reduced in certain areas as well. We were able to do this because we understand what it means to prioritise. We have our priorities in order and when we say to the nation that we are going to do something, we ensure that we do it. In spite of all of the tax reliefs and social programmes, which support our men, women and children, we are not burdening this generation with increased taxes, and neither are we saddling our future generations with debt.

The APNU/AFC does a very curious thing, they boast about the collection of taxation. They love to boast, and they love to hold up newspaper articles with bold headings of hundreds of billions of dollars in tax collection. That is their philosophy and ideology, to tax the nation into poverty. Who pays the taxes? It is the ordinary man and woman who pays the taxes that the APNU/AFC Administration gloats about. They did so in Government, and they continue to hold that line even in the Opposition. That is because they sincerely believe that is the way to run a government, to tax the ordinary people. That is the way they believe they could develop a country.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, spoke about following the money. She did so and insinuated that there was something sinister about the allocations that are made in this Budget. I agree with the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir. Let us follow the money, Sir. Follow the money in infrastructure and energy for us to modernise our country and cut the cost of electricity in half. Let us follow the money in education so we could qualify our people. Let us follow the money and help so that we can build new facilities and ensure there is quality healthcare for the sick. Let us follow the money in security so that we can keep our people and country safe. Let us follow the money in agriculture so that we could guarantee food security and create jobs in our traditional sector. Let us follow the money in housing, water, and sanitation so we could continue our work in providing affordable housing, clean water and sanitation for all. The Opposition has all the solutions now. They had an epiphany and they know how to fix and solve all the problems now that they are in the Opposition. They did not know to fix or solve anything when they were in the Government. They know who should be getting what and they know how much, *et cetera*.

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair]

The mass giveaway of money that they talk about is unsubstantial and they know that. They would not be

allowed to come to this honourable House and mislead people into thinking that they could receive...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, 'mislead' is not a parliamentary language, so please withdraw those two misleads.

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is disinformation, and it is reckless and it is irresponsible. The Hon. Member Juretha Fernandes, who is dubbed the finance guru for the APNU/AFC, came to this House with critiques that could best be described as pseudo intellectual arguments. She came with some shallow arguments that clearly came from *Google* articles. She came to this House and did not speak about economics and trickled down economics, she spoke about cut and paste economics. That is what she spoke about when she came to this House. Her insipid arguments lack depth. There was no sophistication to her arguments; there was no critical analysis. It is easy to speak in a blanket way about cash distribution because it may be popular among people, but it is not sustainable. We have to plan for the post-oil economy. There will be steep increases in the growth rate due to the windfall of oil money. We have to utilise that windfall to build capacity for future non-oil growth, investing in renewal energy, pursuing the targets set out in our Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), in education, training and tourism.

Through the Local Content legislation, we will build capacity for longevity and sustainability. The expected growth in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 47.5%. This does not happen by accident. This is unheard of anywhere else in the world. The growth in the construction sector, the growth in the production of sand that the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, spoke about, the growth in manufacturing, the growth in export and the growth in real estate loans, these things do not happen by accident. It is the result of careful planning and implementation of our Government's policies. The growth in the construction sector in 2021 is directly correlated to our infrastructure programmes and housing programme. The \$5 billion increase in real estate's loans issued by commercial banks is directly correlated to our policy increase in mortgage ceilings and mortgage interest relief. These direct results are because of careful State planning and prudent management of the economy. We will not be reckless. Every time we come to this House, and we speak of a new project, or the Hon. Attorney General introduces a new bill, we hear a chant from the other side; 'Coalition programme', 'Coalition project', and 'that started under the Coalition'. If that was

true, then it is an indictment of their own failed records of being incapable of passing any laws and implementing any of those projects.

Another criticism I have heard was about implementation. They were incapable of critiquing the budget, so they plant seeds of doubt about capacity. That is like *putting the cart before the horse*. Watch the ride, Hon. Member, *watch the ride*. The people elected us to do the work. You do not have to worry about implementation. Let us worry about that.

7.48 p.m.

We have a proven track record of implementation and the delivery of projects. Watch and learn. You must learn to do things. There is a big difference between you and us. Do not compare yourselves to us. You are not in our league. You are comparing oranges and apples, chalk and cheese. Do not go there.

Budget 2022 is carefully aligned with our manifesto and with the vision our Government has set out for the development and transformation of our country. To this end, the people of our country could be assured that all of the policies and programmes they voted for in 2020 will be achieved during our first term. With the return of the PPP/C to Government in 2020, the housing sector has been revitalised and rejuvenated. There is enthusiasm and anticipation, especially among our young applicants, since there is clear and undeniable progress under our Government in delivering affordable housing to our people. In order to fully appreciate the accomplishments over the last 18 months in the housing and water sectors, we must examine the state of affairs we inherited. I heard a lot of speakers on the opposite side speak about incompetence. Let me not tell you, Sir, but prove to you what real incompetence is. It is well known that the Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA) lacked leadership and clear policy direction for years under the APNU/AFC Administration. The sector was lethargic and non-productive. A meagre sum of 7,534 house lots were distributed in five years. A figure that we have long surpassed in only one year in Government.

If the Hon. Member Annette Ferguson or the other housing Ministers who were there under their Government had been productive, we would not have found a backlog of 70,000 applicants as of the 2nd August, 2020 when we came into Government. There is a deeper reason why house lots, affordable housing was not delivered to the people of our country during the tenure of the APNU/AFC Administration.

It is something that is not often highlighted, but I will highlight it today. I have here the budgeted allocations for the years 2015-2020 under the APNU/AFC Administration. It is simple. In order to produce anything, in order to produce house lots, in order to have infrastructure in your housing schemes, you need money. If you make a promise, you have to deliver it, you have to budget, you have to plan, you have to make the financial resources available. In the year 2016, when the APNU/AFC presented its first budget, the budgeted amount for housing – zero budgeted allocation for housing in 2016. In 2017, the amount allocated to housing, zilch – nothing again. In the year 2018, zero. No moneys in a budget for housing. How else can you produce house lots? How else can you have infrastructure work done in your housing schemes so that allottees can access their lands?

Do you know when they made resources available for housing the first time? It was in 2019. When they faced a vote of no-confidence, that was when they found the first allocation in the budget for housing. That was when they made the first set of money available for housing in 2019. This is despicable. Not only providing house lots, but they neglected to do infrastructure works in the housing areas. This led to several consequences apart from people not being able to access their house lots. It also led to us not being able, not for them and certainly not for us, being able to hand over these housing schemes to the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) because the infrastructure work was not done in those schemes. I also want the people who are listening to know that the condition of the roads in the housing schemes did not happen overnight. This is why we found the roads in our housing schemes in such a deplorable state. For five years, when they were in there, they never made any resources available to continue to maintain those roads in our housing schemes. It was caused by a lazy, visionless and careless Government that failed to make resources available to maintain those schemes. These are the people who spoke about using drone technology to plant rice, and then they said rice is private business. You cannot trust anything that these people say. These are the people. Could you imagine the APNU/AFC promising to deliver health care to the hinterland communities using drone technology? They cannot even put some money in a budget to do the roads in the housing schemes and they are going to deliver a health care with drone technology – *pipe dreams*.

The lack of infrastructure in housing schemes also led to the slow occupancy within the schemes. People cannot access

their lots. How else are they going to build? Even if they could identify their lands, there is no drainage network, there is no water and no electricity, so that led to the slow occupancy in housing schemes. Not only were people denied infrastructure, but they were also denied homeownership. Another Member, I think it is the Hon. Flu-Bess, spoke about the marginalisation of the work that we do and the marginalisation of certain communities and she mentioned Mocha and Kaneville in Grove. I want to remind the Hon. Member that it was the PPP/C Government that built the road in Mocha and it is the PPP/C who is currently constructing a four lane highway that will pass through Mocha, will pass through Kaneville, and will pass through all of the areas she mentioned on the East Bank, thereby bringing development to those communities. We do not circumvent any community. We go into all of those communities, especially the vulnerable communities and we take development to them.

[**An Hon. Member (Government)** What did they do? Tell us about what they did.] Yes. Let us talk about something they did. When they do something, Sir, it becomes a total flop. Take for example, the failed duplexes. It is regrettable that I cannot talk about the record of the Hon. Annette Ferguson. I cannot find any articles on her; she did not do anything. This article was when the Hon. Valerie Patterson-Yearwood was the Minister then. They came up with a bright idea to deliver housing units, the duplex units, which has two houses in one on one portion of land. When they introduced this housing solution, they failed to amend the legislation to ensure that the allottees who will get one these duplexes would be able to get their title. Our laws do not provide for that, and they did not amend the law to ensure that these people could have title or transport to their land. They charged \$6.8 million for a duplex. This is more than our allottees are paying for a low-income house now, where they are on a plot of land by themselves, and they could have a title to their land. This was back in 2017.

We had to resort to ensuring that the people could live in the duplexes and now the APNU/AFC has reduced the Central Housing & Planning Authority to a landlord. The people now have to pay rent because we cannot give them title. An agency that was founded in 1947 to deliver affordable housing to the people of Guyana and to transfer freehold title has been reduced to a landlord under the APNU/AFC Administration.

Mr. Speaker: To continue, you will need an extension. Before I ask, I am hearing words like, criminal, foolish,

nonsense, wicked in the noise that is emitting from the Dome. Please do not let us disintegrate as we approach the final hour today. Hon. Minister Teixeira, you have the floor.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Directly at the hour of 8.00 p.m. Hon. Minister you could continue for five more minutes.

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Turning my attention to the Guyana Water Inc. (GWI), our Government inherited a potable water sector that was faced with significant challenges as a result of bad Governance. These included: a low treated water coverage; high water losses, or non-revenue water; unacceptable service levels in many coastal communities and housing areas; poorly maintained water infrastructure; and a low customer metered coverage. Simply put, the quality of service did not meet the expectations of the Guyanese populace. Further, the company's financial position was in a dire state as it could not meet its financial obligations to suppliers and restocking of basic materials was unavailable. When we took Office, the Guyana Water Inc. owed Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) \$7 billion. The company's ineffective leadership and lavish spending led to an increase in operating cost by \$1.1 billion in the five years that they were in Office. The bank balances decreased during those five years by \$1.8 billion. There were two water tariff increases under in the APNU/AFC, one in 2018 and one in 2019 which totalled a 87% increase in water tariffs. The Coalition did that, but they love poor people. An amount \$800 million was owed to suppliers. Four years financial statements were not audited. We are completing those from 2017 to now. The public procurement rules were being breached by the Director then, Dr. Richard Van-West Charles, to facilitate the purchase of a questionable water treatment chemical sequest for iron content. A sum of \$1.8 billion was spent to procure this product and the product was found to be ineffective in treating water in most of the wells.

8.03 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, so much for the transparency and accountability that the APNU/AFC speaks of. As a matter of fact, the only transparent thing the Coalition ever did was transparently rig elections. No receipts or paper trails for those transactions were ever found. Over 5000 customers were denied service connections because the basic inventory

levels were not available, Sir. The most ridiculous one yet – the Guyana Water Incorporated had a container on the wharf at John Fernandes Limited with well maintenance parts since 2017. Do you know when it was cleared? It was cleared when we came into Government in September, 2020. It was parked on the wharf for all those years, and nobody bothered to clear it to ensure that we do the maintenance on our water treatment plants. Both the housing and water sectors reeked with incompetence... [Mr. Nandlall: And corruption.] And corruption.

The Ministry's goal is to provide a better quality of life for all. In this vein, we take into consideration the commitments made by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government in its 2020 Elections manifesto. These promises are as follows: create 10,000 house lots annually; invest in supporting infrastructure in existing and new housing schemes; reverse value-added tax (VAT) on building materials; facilitate affordable financing for homeownership; promote homeownership, particularly among youths and young professionals through tax and other incentives; and promote partnerships, and incentivise private sector involvement. I am pleased to report to this House that to date, we have already accomplished all the commitments I just listed from our manifesto, including the allocation of 10,000 house lots. Out of that, 3926 house lots went to women. Women in their own rights, women as the sole applicants with no co-applicant on their applications – 3926 women received their allocations. There are so many programmes that I can stand here and elaborate on – our core home programme; our housing construction programme; and our Community-Based Employment Stimulation Project (CESP) where we are in vulnerable communities giving jobs to people to build – building blocks – to participate in the construction sector.

We will also see the building of new water treatment plants and I can go on. I know that my time is up. To sum up, our competence, capability, experience, and track record on implementation and execution should bring comfort and assure all Guyanese that the plans, programmes, policies and projects contained in *Budget 2022* are achievable and will be achieved. Thank you very much, Sir. I fully endorse *Budget 2022* and commend it for passage in this House. [Applause]

Mr. Datadin: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. As the first order of business, permit me to thank the Hon. Minister Ashni Kumar Singh and his staff for the hard work in preparing and presenting this Budget to this House. Let me say from the

outset that I fully support this Budget and I commend it to this House for passing.

There are turning points in the history of every country. This Budget is one such turning point. History will judge this Budget like the one that started the transformation of Guyana. My Friends in the Opposition, most of whom have left already should be careful on which side of this debate they stand. [Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, you have a nice voice.] Thank you. This Budget will transform Guyana. It is a Budget to transform Guyana from the place that it is now to the place that we all want to see it to be. It lays the framework and the building blocks – pillar by pillar – to make the transformation of Guyana possible. Transformation in Guyana is already underway. Any citizen who is honest and objective will agree that process has already started. Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am just going to ask the Hon. Members on your side, like the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, I want to enjoy your nice voice.

Mr. Datadin: Transformation: we cannot flip a switch and we cannot wave a wand. It is a process. We have to engage and embrace a process. We have to deliberate upon this process. We arrive at the process of how to go about transformation after careful deliberations, calculations, and considerations. Clearly, this is what His Excellency the President and his Government have done. This is the first step of that transformative agenda that Guyana will experience.

Now, a lot has been said in this House over the past four days. We have – I hope it is an allowed word – 'nasty' rhetoric. We have things that have been said of installed governments. We have things that have been said that have no meaning. We have things that are not true – half-truths and twisted versions of events. When I said that, nobody on this side of the House spoke. The Members on the Opposition's side are all quick to deny that this is what was said. I have not heard in this House from the Opposition's benches anything resembling a recommendation, a critique, or an offer as to what should happen to transform Guyana. We have heard the tearing down, we have heard the snide remarks, but we have not heard a recommendation that should be considered.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, spoke about democracy. Respectfully, Ms. Ferguson, you have no right to speak of democracy. Democracy has never been an obstacle to a

group of persons as it is to the Members who sit on the Opposition benches, the Deputy Speaker excepted. Right now, we have no Leader of the Opposition. Why do we not have a Leader of the Opposition? This is because the democratic process by which the leader of the party is elected stands in the way of whoever is here and stands in his way of getting here. We have heard versions of a resignation. We have heard versions of space that must be made, resignations that must take place, and all kinds of chicanery. The simple democratic process of holding an election among themselves is creating all sorts of mayhem.

The transformation of Guyana has to be through various projects. I will illustrate it with just a few, for example, electricity. Everyone in Guyana would admit that electricity is a major problem; it has always been. The supply is irregular and expensive. In Guyana, the cost of a kilowatt-hour (KWh) is about \$0.32. Montserrat is the only place that it is higher at \$0.40. The cost in Trinidad, for example... [Mr. Seeraj: It has a volcano.] ...and a volcano. Trinidad has an electricity cost of approximately US\$0.05 per kilowatt-hour.

Mr. Speaker: Just a comment, your volcano comment, I think you should withdraw. Montserrat on the 20th February celebrated 70 years of elections to the legislature.

Mr. Datadin: They have a volcano that is why electricity is expensive. The cost of electricity and the supply of it drives the world. So, depending on which research you accept, you have various formulas about how much manpower hours are lost; how much productive hours could be spent; and what could be achieved? This is all nicely quantified. There can be no disputing that in Guyana, the higher cost is a disadvantage. The irregular cost is a pain and a disadvantage. This Budget faces that problem frontally. The problem is addressed in two major projects that I wish to refer to. There are, of course, several projects. There is a solar project and there is a Moco-Moco Hydropower Plant. There is the Gas-to-Shore Project and the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. These two projects address electricity frontally. Their aim and objective are to reduce the cost of electricity. That transforms this country. It makes for every household for less money to be spent on electricity and for every opportunity.... Entrepreneur manufacturers can take advantage of it and they could engage in productive and commercial activities.

Now, the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, who produces reports that apparently were obtained when he was a

Minister of Government and no one else seems to have. He produces research that he was again privy to when he held office. He respectfully, wrongly assesses the project. The Gas-to-Shore Project cannot be measured by its cost. It has to be measured by its economic impact, its gain, and its development. If we reduce the cost of electricity, we will create manufacturing industries. It will be simple industries that require electricity. That in itself will generate income for the country. You cannot be that myopic.

8.18 p.m.

You could not have sat in Government that long and not realised that Guyana, as a poor country, cannot grade projects simply on cost. It is the economic impact and benefit that must be ascertained. [Mr. Nandlall: It is the same problem with sugar.] It is the identical problem, as the learned Attorney General said, that exists with sugar. The complaints of the Hon. Members on the other side about cost is overly simplistic and does not consider Guyana for the place that it is. Guyana is a poor country. We need to get on the path of being the country that we should be and that we want to be, but we cannot do that in a vacuum. We have to go through a process. This electricity is part of that process. The same, respectfully, is what the Amelia Falls Hydropower project means. It means cheap electricity being produced in a way that can go long into the future without great increase in cost. So, the future of Guyana, the future generations, can benefit from that.

Another pillar that is frontally addressed in the Budget is roads. Roads have to be built. We can say all we want about the road projects, but without road projects people spend too much time in traffic, manpower hours are lost, family time is lost, and people sit in their cars and burn fuel, which has another impact, but we can ignore that for a minute. We can look at it from this point of view: a road network means easier access to more land; more lands mean more development and more development means transformation. This is how it happens. So, we have to build the road network, a proper road network. The claim of the Hon. Members in the Opposition is that what they constructed was a roundabout. They did not do what a roundabout is supposed to be. A roundabout should have an entry and an exit. They created a bypass to the exit. The car that is exiting has to stop. We should call it the *pattobout*. Maybe that is the name it should have. [Mr. Nandlall: They got that wrong too.] They did. Integral in a road network are bridges. The Demerara Harbour Bridge (DHB) Corporation, on its website, indicates that 18,000 vehicles per day traverse the

bridge. It estimates, on average, four persons in each vehicle; some it is less and some it is more, like minibuses. We are talking about 65, 000 persons on average per day who use the bridge. The bridge is closed to vehicular traffic with the tide, so the time changes. Those of us who live across the river understand the hardship that creates. If one lives on the East Bank, then the traffic is backed up while persons are waiting for the bridge to reopen to traffic. Maritime traffic uses the bridge which is why this happens. It is beyond doubt that if we get a bridge that is of a high span, which does not have to open, then the flow of traffic is easier. We save manpower hours, and we transform Guyana. People could commute easier. The APNU/AFC came up with a genius idea for the bridge – three lanes. We are not sure which two are going in which direction. This is a genius idea. It means, essentially, that what you should do is...Let us say you come across to Georgetown side with two lanes... [Mr. Nandlall: One lane would be reversing.] The Attorney General took the words out of my mouth. One side has got to be reversing. Then, you should perhaps take the boat over when you go back so that you will benefit from coming back from the two lanes this way. Preposterous.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it might be preposterous but in order for all of us to continue to hear your sweet voice, you would need an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for the Hon. Member to have five minutes more, please.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue for the next five minutes and conclude.

Mr. Datadin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have this preposterous bridge. Thank God, they did not build it. Could you imagine this country for generations reversing in one lane across the bridge? Thank God that did not happen. This Budget provides a much more orthodox solution. The bridge is to be high span, and it will have four lanes, two lanes going in each direction. There is no requirement that we reverse. We have to understand the underpinning of how transformation takes place. You need the infrastructure. We are a poor country, and we still have to help people. So, there is an entire raft of measures that are being introduced to make more disposable income available. The increase in the tax threshold, not taxing income interest for when one puts one's money in the bank, cash grants being given, and school grants being given. It is easy to sit down and say it

should be more. It is easy to do that but poor countries, like poor people, always have to manage their budgets. You cannot spend what you do not have. It is as simple as that. At the same time, you cannot build at the same time, and you cannot improve your asset base as an individual and, in fact, as a country, if what you want to do is to spend. The two things have got to be balanced. You need to get the infrastructure projects to move the country forward and to transform it to what you want, but you can still do some to assist people by giving them more disposable income. We took away the taxes because taxes really put the income into the hands of the Government. The disposable income puts this into the hands of the people. Spend as you like, as it were. In transformational programmes, your record is important. As much as I do not want to single out Hon. Members in the Opposition, there are things that we must not forget. We were told that the people of Guyana are really the stakeholders in the oil and gas industry, and they should be informed, and reports should be published and that hymns and bhajans should be sung about what is going on in oil and gas industry. They signed the Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs) and they did not tell anyone for two years. Regrettably, as it turns out, maybe, they did not even tell themselves for two years and maybe they did not know they had signed. It was signed and witnessed by Members of the Opposition and their spouses. That is how close knitted it was. They collected \$18 million as a signing bonus. They did not tell anyone. They did not account for it in two years either. They passed a cybercrime Bill and now they do not want you to implement it. What are the police to do? Mr. Granger insisted on this Bill. What are the police to do? The police have to enforce the law. It is the law. They tried to rig the elections. Thank God they got caught or we would have had the reversing bridge. They have disrupted the budget presentation in the last House, not wanting to contribute, by banging on tables. They tried to steal your *Mace* a few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker. Now, I am not surprised that they have no leader. They have no vision, and they have no objection to this Budget that is rational.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and, once again, I commend this Budget to the House for its passing. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I know you mentioned hymns and bhajans and you would want me to add qasidas too. Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m.
on 4th February, 2022.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Motion put and agreed to.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m., tomorrow, Friday 4th February, 2022.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. 4th February.

Adjourned accordingly at 8.28 p.m.