

# Official Report

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2016) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN*

---

48<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Monday, 5<sup>TH</sup> December, 2016

---

*Assembly convened at 10.13 a.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

### **Letter of complaint**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, on Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, I received a letter from the Hon. Member Amna Ally, the Government Chief Whip. The letter was in the nature of a complaint. It concerned a publication, which displayed images of Hon. Members of this Chamber who were in an addendum to the letter of complaint, which was sent to me. When I examined the letter and the addendum, I formed the impression that they could be interpreted as intending to place the Hon. Members, whose images were on that complaint, and by extension this House, to ridicule.

The fact is that members of the press attend this House and report on the business of this House without let or hindrance. The fact is that members of the press attend this House at the invitation of and with the permission of the Speaker of this House. The fact of the matter is that that particular complaint has caused, in the Speaker, disquiet. I must point out that it is of some concern that members of the public and the press are perhaps unaware that this House provides facilitates, both for the members of the press to pursue their avocation and also for their rest and recreation at the appropriate time. It is reasonable, therefore, I put it no higher than that, to

expect that your guests, if I could use that term, having enjoyed your hospitality, if I may use that analogy, would then hold you to ridicule.

There has to be a balance between whatever is perceived as the rights of the press and the obligation in the exercise of those rights that would not expose Members of this House to ridicule, to reduce, or seemingly to reduce, respect for the practices, decencies and decorum which everyone - I emphasise the word "everyone" - who sits in this House, must observe.

I bring this to the attention of the House. I notify the House of this and I intend to request the offending journalist to meet with me - Hon. Members, I am speaking and I would expect silence from both sides of the House - and I would report to the House at an appropriate time of the result of that meeting.

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

## **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

## **MOTION**

### **MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2017**

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2017 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2016-11-28.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2017, of

a total sum of two hundred and thirty billion, three hundred and forty nine million and seventy nine thousand dollars (**\$230,349,079,000**), **excluding nineteen billion and seven hundred and seventy four million, and eighty seven thousand dollars (\$19,774,087,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to further provision in respect of finance. [*Minister of Finance*]

*Assembly resumed budget debate.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I must tell you that I also received another letter on Friday from the honourable Chief Whip, and that letter contained the plans which were agreed upon between the Government Chief Whip and the Opposition Chief Whip as to the disposition of times for our debate as well as the time allotted to speakers. I will, with your leave, read that letter which has been presented to me as representing the agreement reach by the parties in relation to this matter.

The letter, Hon. Members:

“The under-mentioned has been agreed by the Government and Opposition Chief Whips.

- (a) All Ministers and Shadow Ministers may speak for thirty minutes.
- (b) All backbenchers may speak for twenty minutes.
- (c) There would be sixteen speakers each day. Session will end when the sixteenth speaker concludes....”

I would have a comment to make on that in a few minutes.

“...(d) On the final day there will be only four speakers.

(e) The Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister and the mover of the motion will be allowed equal speaking time.”

The above having been agreed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of December, 2016, between Ms. Amna Ally, M.P. and Ms Gail Teixeira, M.P.”

It has been signed by Ms. Ally and Ms. Teixeira. I think this is a very promising occurrence that the two Chief Whips agreed in a very short time on these details.

Hon. Members, having read that to you, I must say this, that the estimate of the time allotted, which is 12 hours, of which ten could easily be said to be time for the debate, making allowance for time allowed for refreshment, is more than adequate for 16 speakers, given the fact that speakers, who are entitled to 20 minutes and those who are entitled to speak for half an hour, are mixed in each day.

I say that to say this: the progress of our work is in our hands, but if it transpires that at the end of a day the sixteenth speaker, with five minutes to 10 o'clock, is asking for the floor, I would not grant it. We are well in a position to handle all of our work. I insist on the time allotted here. The Speaker would not grant extensions of time, so if requests are made for extensions of time beyond the half of an hour, and beyond what is agreed here, that would not be allowed. I say that now.

Hon. Members, we would now proceed with the debate on the budget speech for 2017.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, the Government Chief Whip and I went through the timing and there is ample time. That is why, in the letter to you, we removed the issue of no extension because we felt that the frequent interruptions that take place, the speakers must get their full time and if a speaker need some time to conclude that we would support that, so we cannot say that there would not be any extension whatsoever.

Secondly, you would notice in the letter that although there is an agreement of equal time, and there is an understanding between Ms. Ally and myself, that it is not less than two hours for the Leader of the Opposition and on the last day the speaking order has not been resolved. We still hold our position that the order on the last day, regarding the Leader of the Opposition, is not correct. We do not agree with it and hold tradition of this House. Therefore that is why the letter did not include that, so we just want to make it very clear. What the letter did not include is also part of the discussion with Ms. Ally and myself.

There is ample time to allow even five minutes for speaker to conclude. It is just to remind you, Sir, that the opening of the debate in the last two Parliaments on the budget was given ten to 15

minutes more than the half hour. It is the opening of the debate by Opposition, by the Member of Parliament who did that. In both cases, it was Mr. Irfaan Ali.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Member. Am I to conclude that this agreement is not an agreement? If it is not an agreement, then it seems to me that it is left to the Speaker.

*10.28 a.m.*

We are not going to have a long debate on this. I know that it was done in a hurry and in a short time, but surely an agreement has got to be an agreement.

**Minister of Social Cohesion [Ms. Ally]:** Mr. Speaker, I just would like to endorse what you said, that an agreement is an agreement, but I would like to address two points. Firstly, on the question of time allotted for the Leader of the Opposition, Prime Minister and the mover of the motion would have equal times. Our proposal was 90 minutes each for them and not two hours. Secondly, I would like to indicate that our position on the order of speakers for the final day remains what we have here.

**Ms. Teixeira:** The 30 minutes allocation and the 20 minutes allocation have to do with the allocation of time for speaker. It did not include or preclude any extension if required for a speaker to conclude their speech. I went back to the budget debates of 2015 and 2016 and on most days when there was...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, allow me to interrupt you to say that in the face of an agreement that happened before, it seems strange that you must reach back to a time before you would have reached an agreement. I do not understand. We are not going to have a long debate on this, please.

**Ms. Teixeira:** I appreciate that, Sir. The issue of no extensions was removed from the letter. It was originally in the draft that Ms. Amna Ally gave me and I said that we would not agree to that and it was removed. That is why the sentence states "30 minutes and 20 minutes" to allow for the speaker to have some time to conclude, because we have time to do that. We have time. We are going to end some days at 8.30 p.m. and others, such as the last two budgets, by restricting speakers in this manner. In relation to the Leader of the Opposition, we never discussed 90 minutes. It was equal time and I had to contact her to advise her, but the time that I said was not

less than two hours. That is why there was equal time left open for discussion, this period, because in the past it was unlimited time, unlimited time for all of the last three speakers. We decided that we would have equal time to make the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have equal time if they thought the Leader of the Opposition was taking unlimited time. It is not less than two hours, because there are only four speakers on the last day. There is no time constraint on the last day. There is no need to do this. That is why the sentences are very frugal to allow for us to be able to make these decisions during the week.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Member. I think we will proceed with the work and there is still time for the two Chief Whips to reach some understanding on those matters which appear to still have questions on them. My understanding, as Speaker, is that 10 o' clock represents the outside time of our sitting here. The Speaker of this House is inclined to stick with that.

Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the debate on the budget speech for 2017. For the budget debate and for the Consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2017, we will sit as follows: 10 a.m. to 12 noon – sitting, 12 noon to 1.00 p.m. – suspension, 1.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. – sitting, 5.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. – suspension, 6.00 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. – sitting, 7.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. – suspension and 8.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. – sitting.

The first speaker today is Mr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. I remind Mr. Ali that, in accordance with the agreement, Shadow Ministers will speak for half of an hour. You have the floor, Sir.

**Mr. Ali:** First of all, let me thank the Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Winston Jordan for reading the Budget 2017 to us. I am reminded by a statement the Hon. Minister made a few days ago on a radio programme when he said there are two certainties in life - death and taxes. The Hon. Minister has delivered both in one blow to the Guyanese people – death by taxes.

The Budget 2017 is no different from the last two budgets presented by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) coalition. This budget, as the previous budgets, is littered with inaccuracies regarding our economic performance, saturated with an extensive range of new punitive taxes, devoid of measures to rescue our ailing economy and improve the well-being of our people or deliver the so-called “good life”, and is not grounded in any policy framework that would green our economy and diversify the economic base of Guyana.

In view of these harsh realities, it is difficult to praise the Hon. Minister of Finance for his Budget 2017. Probably the one thing we can applaud the Hon. Minister of Finance for doing is publicly acknowledging that our economy is underperforming because of marked contraction in most of the key sectors - agriculture, forestry, manufacturing and construction. However, I was extremely disappointed that the Hon. Minister of Finance stopped short by providing tenuous explanations for the country's poor economic performance during 2016.

The paltry 2.6 % economic growth, which is the lowest recorded over the last eight years, can hardly be due to external factors or the state of the economy at the time the coalition assumed office. It should be noted that when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) demitted office, the country was deemed as one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the year prior to the 2015 Elections, the economy posted 3.8% growth. It should be noted that the robust performance of the economy was due mainly to expansion in sugar - 16%, rice - 19%, forestry - 14%, manufacturing - 11%, with construction contributing to 18%, and services to 3%. Indeed, the sterling performance of our economy, since 2006, was attributed to growth in all the key sectors. Thus, the performance in 2014 was not unique, but typical of our economic growth history.

This undeniable fact, therefore, questions the claim by the Hon. Minister that our economy was weak, undiversified and incapable of coping with small shocks. This is by far the most pathetic excuse given for our recent economic plunge.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the world faced its worst financial crisis in decades during the years 2008 and 2009 and Guyana outgrew all of the Caribbean and most of Latin America by 3.3%. The fact of the matter is that our economy was paralysed by the following:

- (i) poor policies of the APNU/AFC Government that generated considerable uncertainty which in turn discouraged investment by the private sector;
- (ii) ineffective implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) that starved the economy of \$15.9 billion;

- (iii) one hundred and thirty plus new tax measures introduced in the Budget 2016 that squeezed almost every entrepreneur; from the ‘donkey cart’ operator to small and medium-scale miners;
- (iv) absence of specific initiatives to support the key sectors such as the rice sector, small-scale mining industry and sugar industry.

Of note, it is as of today, for the first time in the history of the sugar industry, we are unable to pay the sugar workers an Annual Production Incentive (API). This is coming from a Government that promised the sugar workers more than 20% increase in their wages. Today, those workers cannot enjoy what they enjoyed for more than 50 years – an Annual Production Incentive.

- (v) The fifth reason for the present state of the economy is deliberate actions by the APNU/AFC to discard the PetroCaribe Agreement that crippled the rice sector.

These are the factors that are responsible for our underperforming economy. Therefore, for the Minister of Finance to come to this honourable House and sell the myth that the local economy is back-peddalling because the APNU/AFC Government inherited a weak economy is simply pitiable.

It is public knowledge that the PPP/C administration delivered an economy that was not only diversified but weathered the global economic and financial crises. Indeed, the economy was so strong that the APNU/AFC Government was able to award its Ministers a 50% increase in salary, finance the D'Urban Park Jubilee project, pay out billions to several companies to settle legal matters, rent a bond for storing medical supplies when there was no need for such a facility and double the number of contract employees in the first year in government.

The very Hon. Vice-President Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan vowed at one time in this House to cut contract employment. In the first year of Government, the APNU/AFC has doubled the number of contract employees in Government service, removed limitation on overseas travel to cover expenses for Ministers and their spouses and presented the Hamilton Green Pension Bill that will cost the country more than \$20 million annually. Since we have a “caring” Government, one would not expect it to go on such a ‘spending spree’ when the economy is in such a weak state.

My intention today is not to dedicate all my time to debate the Hon. Minister over issues that are

not worthy of any debate since every Guyanese is aware of the facts, instead I would like to focus my attention to the measures in the national Budget 2017 that is titled “*Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*”. After carefully reviewing the budget over the past few days, I am challenged to find measures that will green and diversify the economy as well as deliver the “good life”.

Let me start with the measures in support of the Government's green agenda. It is unfortunate that after expending so much resources and time in developing one of the most comprehensive development strategy aimed at placing Guyana on a sustainable and low carbon pathway, the APNU/AFC Government plans to reinvent the wheel by crafting a new green strategy. It is indeed sad that the Government will abandon the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), which emerged out of extensive consultations with key stakeholders and obtained approval from our international partners.

*10.43 a.m.*

What are we replacing this strategy with? It is a new programme that the Minister described as a green State development plan. This move by the Government is akin to *giving up a bird in the hand for two in the bush*.

While we await this plan, we are told that the measures presented in the 2017 Budget capture the essence of the green agenda or, as the Minister puts it, an articulation of the APNU/AFC green agenda. Based on the proposed measures, it is obvious that the Government is unclear about what it means to “green an economy”.

Greening an economy is not restricted to the elimination of our dependence on fossil fuel, but also involves shifting to economic activities that are environmentally friendly and economically feasible. In the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) that was crafted by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration, we specifically highlighted all the new growth sectors that are capable of greening the economy, while diversifying our economic base. We also identified a project that would help Guyana achieve the target of 100% renewable energy supply in the shortest possible time.

The PPP/C Government did not stop at identifying these new growth areas, but developed

programmes to encourage businesses to green their revenue stream. Two such programmes are the Micro and Small Enterprise Development (MSED) Project and the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) Project. The former provides collateral guarantees, interest subsidy and technical support in the form of small grants for medium and small-scale enterprises interested in low-carbon economic activities. The latter, on the other hand, provided grants not exceeding \$5 million to help the village economies of Amerindian communities.

In an effort to shift from fossil fuel to 100% renewable sources, the PPP/C Government was able to source funds under the LCDS to develop the Amaila Falls Hydro Project. This project would have allowed Guyana to satisfy approximately 90% of its energy needs from renewable sources. Other off-spin benefits of the Project included reducing the cost of electricity to spur value-added activities, stimulating economic growth and creating jobs during the implementation and construction phases.

In the 2017 national Budget, there are only measures to green the expenditure of businesses but nothing to encourage our businesses to green their income. In particular, the Government is offering tax incentives to businesses to invest in solar energy, electric vehicle and charging station.

While these incentives may sound appealing on paper, they appear impractical and remind me of the story of *Alice in Wonderland*. The practicality of the measures can be answered if we ask the following rhetorical questions: one, who would buy electric vehicles when charging stations are absent? Two, who will fix these vehicles if they require repair? Three, do we have mechanics to service these vehicles? Four, how many Guyanese have the financial capacity to purchase these vehicles when they are struggling to buy new tyres and could hardly afford the relatively cheaper traditional models? Five, how many businesses will realistically invest in charging stations when the average Guyanese will most likely continue to use traditional vehicles which are less expensive to acquire and maintain? This is like the common *chicken and egg* scenario.

The Average cost of an electric vehicle is close to US\$21,000. We have seen the importation of vehicles drop significantly last year because many found it difficult to purchase vehicles under eight years old, from the date of manufacture to the date of importation.

Instead of learning from our past mistakes, we are now jumping ahead by proposing another measure that will not reach the average Guyanese.

It should be noted that, apart from the decline in vehicle import, the country lost significant revenue because of this measure last year. Based on the estimates provided, the revenue from vehicle imports is expected to fall by more than \$1.8 billion. The revenue from vehicles which was projected to be more than \$9 billion during 2016 fell to \$7.1 billion. In other words, everyone lost from the measure to restrict used vehicles last year. We do not seek to correct this. We will bring another measure that is even worse than that in the 2016 Budget.

Like the measure to restrict the importation of vehicles, I am certain that none will enjoy the benefits from the proposed measures to encourage the importation of electric vehicles. In my humble view, this measure sounds like a *pie in the sky*.

Strangely, while the theme of the 2017 Budget speaks about diversifying the economy, there are no specific measures to encourage businesses to venture into new sectors. All the Hon. Minister did in his presentation was to mention that the Government will continue to diversify the economy - full stop, nothing else. The measures that the Government has instituted to intensify and diversify the economy will take root. That is all the budget speaks about when the Minister spoke about diversifying the economy.

The million dollar question is: what are the measures to stimulate the non-traditional sectors and diversify the economy? There is none in the Budget.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) forecast for 2017 also questions the claim made by the Minister that the initiatives undertaken by the Government to diversify the economy will soon take root.

I will now use the Minister's numbers to show how the numbers do not support his argument that the non-traditional sector would grow and the economy diversified. When one analyses the GDP forecast for next year, it is clear that the traditional sectors are projected to dominate by maintaining their large sectoral contribution. The traditional sectors are also expected to post faster growth when compared to the non-traditional sectors.

Based on the forecast for GDP in 2017, sugar, forestry and gold are expected to grow by 11%,

6% and 8% respectively when compared with a growth rate of 5% for non-traditional activities. It is also important to note that sectoral contribution of non-traditional activities is projected to increase only marginally from 12.9% to 13%. Meanwhile, the sectoral contributions of the services, manufacturing and rice sectors are projected to decline. These numbers contradict the notion that the economy will witness expansion in non-traditional economic activities. It is either that the forecasts in Appendix II on page 91 are incorrect or the Minister's claims about diversifying the economy should be *taken with a few pounds of salt*.

The fact of the matter is that there are no measures to diversify our economy or viable measures to green the economy, as evidenced in the GDP forecast of 2017. On the contrary, the measures in the Budget can only achieve the reverse.

As noted earlier, the 2017 National Budget is saturated with taxes and will suffocate both traditional and non-traditional businesses next year. In this regard, the Hon. Minister is proposing punitive measures such as Value-Added Tax (VAT) on water; VAT on electricity; VAT exemption on previously zero-rated goods; and environmental taxes. While some residential consumers would be able to avoid VAT on water and electricity, this may not be possible for businesses and most of the consumers who will have the pass-on effects.

Value-Added Tax on water consumption: Approximately 21,789 customers will be directly affected - mostly businesses and residential consumers in Georgetown. The cost of this measure conservatively is approximately \$97.1 million per month. This is more than \$1 billion per year. Next year, this will be taken out of the disposal income of ordinary Guyanese citizens. From this one measure, more than \$1 billion would be taken out of the pockets of the ordinary people of this country; it will be removed from the hands, from the pockets, from the bank accounts of the ordinary people of this country.

VAT on electricity: The measure is likely to affect as much as 15,398 commercial and industrial customers directly. The Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) is estimated to gain about \$2.7 billion annually. The potential cost of this for the 15,000 customers alone directly is more than \$4 billion. This, in addition to VAT on water, will be taken out of the ordinary people's pockets - more than \$5 billion of disposable income. Who will suffer? The ordinary man will suffer; businesses will suffer; private sector will suffer; the people of this country will

suffer. **[Hon. Member:** Since when does that worry you?] The response is: since when does that worry us? It always worries us when the ordinary people of this country are affected, when the ordinary people of this country are deprived of economic gains and economic development.

Budget 2017 is depriving the ordinary people of economic development and economic growth. Look at the issue of tax exemption on zero-rated items. This measure would disallow businesses from applying for tax credit for the VAT they paid on the inputs? The manufacturing sector will be hit the hardest with the initiative. This very Government that spoke about expanding the manufacturing sector, expanding the base of the economy, has introduced a measure that would hit the manufacturing sector the hardest in decades. The only person who hit them harder was maybe the former Minister of Finance, the Hon. Member, Mr. Carl Greenidge.

Some members from the private sector have already provided estimates of the impact of this measure. For example, Mr. Ramesh Dookhoo, former Private Sector Commission (PSC) Chairman, said that he was informed that the measure will cost one company – the National Milling Company of Guyana (NAMILCO) - more than \$200 million per annum. Who will pay this? It is the consumer, again, who will have to absorb this \$200 million.

In the first three measures, the cost to the people of Guyana, the ordinary consumers, is in excess of \$7 billion. It therefore stands to reason that the local manufacturing sector will have to find a few more hundred million dollars to operate locally.

Since businesses have signalled their unwillingness to absorb the additional expenses, the cost would definitely be passed on to the consumers. Further, the measure will make our local manufacturers less competitive and they will suffer lower sales in the domestic market.

*10.58 a.m.*

The implementation of an environmental levy of \$10: This very issue came before this House and speakers from this side would eloquently quote from the Hon. First Vice-President and the Hon. Joseph Harmon when they very effectively argued on behalf of the local manufacturers and local businesses. They said that they had consulted the private sector and the ordinary man and that

they cannot afford the five dollars. But now, the very two men are leading the assault on the people of Guyana by giving them \$10 per bottle; it is not \$5 but \$10.

To fully understand the impact of this measure, let us utilise the published statistics in the Annual Report of the Bank of Guyana in 2014. We found that, for two items alone, the Government can generate as much as \$900 million: soft drinks \$571 million and water – more taxes in addition to the VAT on water – an additional \$300 million.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

**Mr. Ali:** Thank you.

And this is only from the local manufacturing company. So, again, another billion dollars from the local manufacturing company will be passed on to the consumer. In the first four measures I have outlined, more than \$8 billion will be plucked out of the pockets of the ordinary man with Budget 2017. More than \$8 billion of disposable income will be removed from the ordinary people of Guyana.

The Minister is also proposing to penalise businesses for failing to maintain and present proper records. The Government is not willing to offer a training programme for small, and medium-sized businesses, minibus operators and conductors. Instead, we see the heavy hand of the Government penalising these people for a one-day late submission or for not keeping the books right. It is a penalty of \$200,000. Why is it that, in this harsh measure, the Government could not balance it with a training programme for small and medium-sized businesses and the minibus operators? Small miners will also be dealt a severe blow in this 2017 Budget.

Given the proposed measures in the 2017 national Budget, we have to ask ourselves how serious the Government is with respect to greening the economy or diversifying the economic base of our country. While the adjustment to the corporation tax rate will provide minimal benefit, the overall impact will be double. The \$13.1 billion projected increases in tax revenues tell a story. It tells a story that this Government aims only at taxing the people of Guyana in expanding its revenue base. The Government is sterile in its ability to bring economic measures to create the dynamism in the economy that will grow and expand our economic base.

Since budgetary measures will squeeze the bottom line of firms, the last thing we should do is to compete with businesses that will be looking to the local financial sector for funds.

Selling short-term bonds is another measure that would affect the private sector severely because the Government is now going to compete with the local private sector for financial resources. How can a caring Government extract more funds from the private sector then deny our businesses affordable finance by mopping up the liquidity in the system?

I am also worried that the garnishment of funds may also be bad for the economy. Given the proposal to garnish funds from the bank accounts held by taxpayers, we may not even have the liquidity to mop up since some taxpayers may choose to withdraw their savings and it will trigger a run on the banking system. The Government is not only proposing to accelerate the decline of our economy, but seems to be interested in creating a credit crunch and, possibly, a financial crisis.

In closing, based on my observation and analysis, the 2017 National Budget lacks practical measures to green and diversify the economy. In fact, there are no measures to grow new sectors. I, therefore, in the interest of the ordinary people of Guyana, the businesses, the private sector, the miners, the sugar workers and the rice farmers, the women and children, the youths, our Amerindian brothers and sisters, we have presented enough evidence to persuade the Government to withdraw this Budget and to sit with the Opposition to draft a Budget that will reflect the needs of people of our country.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Business [Mr. Gaskin]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the interest of the Guyanese people, I rise to lend my support to Budget 2017. I wish to, first of all, acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the Hon. Minister of Finance and his Budget team which has allowed us to be having this debate not in the second quarter of the year for which the Budget is being planned but before the year actually begins.

It scares me to think of how easy it is to get accustomed to something that is inherited flawed and dysfunctional simply because it happens regularly. Our Constitution allows for the presentation of these Estimates before us within 90 days after the commencement of each financial year. And

the fact that the previous Government routinely presented its Estimates at the latest possible opportunity speaks volumes of that Government's understanding of the actual purpose of a budget. Our Government will not skylark with such an important tool for the planning of this country's business. We will not keep this nation guessing while we fiddle around with different ways of avoiding the early commitments that responsible governments need to make in order for the people to plan for the year ahead. The Guyanese people are now able to plan for the full year of 2017 instead of having to wait until April or May for the passing of a budget. So, this is not something to be dismissive about and I am proud to be part of a Government that is demonstrating to the people of this country that slackness does not have to be a way of life and that it can be dismantled as long as there is sufficient will. So, Financial Year 2017 will start on a sound footing and our businesses now have one month to make final adjustments to their 2017 plans.

I have listened to the over amplified concerns of the Hon. Member, Irfaan Ali, who spoke before me, and I wish to assure him that he is disturbing himself unnecessarily. He spoke of death and taxes but he is very much alive, I am pleased to say. He spoke of when the PPP/C demitted office that it left one of the fastest growing economies in the region. What PPP/C did not leave was sustainable growth. Had we a sustainably growing economy, the decline that started before they demitted office would not have continued into our term of office. He also spoke of the PPP/C economy being so strong that it weathered the global financial crisis in 2008 and 2009. This was precisely because there was no diversity; there was nothing to decline. Our economy, at the time, was relying solely on rice and gold. Therefore, with a decline in the financial sectors in most of the developed countries, most of the investments went into the gold sector. Therefore, the price of gold went up – skyrocketed – and Guyana was able, thankfully, to benefit from that. There was no astute management of the economy that caused us to *weather the storm*.

He has challenged, as he said, to see how the green economy will be stimulated. Over \$1 billion has been invested by our Government in 2017 to support green energy projects around Guyana; plus tax concessions and tax holidays have been given to support green investments. He spoke about the LCDS. I cannot recall too many successful projects being undertaken with the payments that we received from the Norwegians. There was a small handful of projects, if I remember correctly, were undertaken during those five years. He spoke glowingly of Amaila

Falls Hydropower Project. All I could remember is a very expensive road to nowhere. And then he speaks of electric vehicles and rubbishes our Government's attempt to encourage the importation of hybrid vehicles by incentivising the investments in charging stations. A green economy has to start somewhere and we are looking at the initial stages of the development of such an economy.

He spoke about the ordinary people being deprived of economic gain and development and I wish to remind him that it is his Government that, for nearly two decades, charged taxes on our workers' National Insurance Scheme (NIS) by deducting it from their gross salaries before computing the income tax owed. He also decried the absence of training programmes for record keeping. Under the Small Business Bureau's current project, there are numerous training programmes that are offered to small businesses, including minibus drivers and the other categories that he has spoken about in the areas of record-keeping and development of business plans, *et cetera*.

He also mentioned PetroCaribe and our Government abandoning the PetroCaribe deal. Well, I would like him to know that that is completely false. Our Government did not abandon anything. In fact, what our Government met was a lack of money in the programme to pay the rice millers.

*11.13 a.m.*

It is, indeed, a flawed approach to what could have been a good programme when the previous Government took long-term debts and converted them into short-term payments to a sector that was in trouble.

I wish to speak about the Ministry of Business. I cannot respond to everything the Hon. Member has said. **[Mr. Williams:** He would like that.] Perhaps he would, but, then, I would not be able to present the work of the Ministry of Business.

As far as it relates to Agency 25, the Ministry of Business, I think it would be a good idea for me to give some context to the Estimates of Expenditure for this Agency for 2017 by first describing the work of the Ministry and what it is designed to achieve. I believe this would create a better appreciation of the value-for-money the people of Guyana are getting out of the relatively small budget that our Ministry actually requires. I have to say that we are not a top-heavy or bottom-

heavy Ministry. I think I should thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Irfaan Ali, who, under the previous Government, was the Minister responsible for most of the sectors which make up the Ministry of Business, for leaving me with such a lean Ministry. Our total budget of \$1,701,070 provides the financial resources for an impressive contribution to Guyana's long-term economic wellbeing, worth well in excess of that investment.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will agree with me that the combination of clear vision and strategic direction will put any organisation on the right path to achieving its objectives. This is the approach that the Ministry of Business seeks to use to address its mandate. With your permission, I would like to share with you and the Hon. Members of this House the vision of the Ministry of Business which reads as follows:

“Increased living standards for all Guyanese in a diverse and green economy.”

Let me just say that this is, indeed, a simple vision but reflects the real picture of what we, in the Ministry of Business, are focusing on developing. It contains the key elements of quality, inclusivity, diversity and responsibility, and it aligns well with the priorities identified by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition in our campaign Manifesto last year, as well as with the policies articulated during the time our Government has been in Office. It is also well aligned with the theme of Budget 2017, *Building a Diversified and Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to all Guyanese*. There can be no doubt that the work of our Government is informed by a clear sense of direction and purpose. To the furtherance of this vision, we, in the Ministry of Business, are working with a five-year strategic plan to deliver on our mission. Volume II of the Estimates of Expenditure outlines the strategies that will be employed in 2017 to deliver the performance targets we have set ourselves.

Our Ministry will carry out its mission through four programmes, each divided into a number of sub-programmes. Programme 251, Policy Development and Administration, will provide strategic direction and management and the administrative support for the work of the Ministry. The establishment and coordination of a structured public-private dialogue mechanism, as well as the coordination of the *Doing Business Action Plan*, and the Ministry's Strategic Plan will also be carried out within this Programme, in which the Minister will be closely involved.

Programme 252, Business Development, Support and Promotion, will be the implementing programme through which most of our business related targets will be met. This Programme comprises the activities of the Department of Industry, the Small Business Bureau, the Guyana National Bureau of Standards, the Guyana Office for Investment and the Department of Commerce.

Programme 253 is the Programme which addresses competition and consumer protection through the Department of Consumer Protection within the Ministry and the semiautonomous Competition and Consumer Affairs Commission.

Finally, Programme 254 is the Programme under which the Ministry of Business will promote the growth and development of Guyana's tourism sector. The Department of Tourism within the Ministry is responsible for strategic direction and public policy of the sector while the semiautonomous Guyana Tourism Authority will implement Government's policies regarding the development, marketing and regulation of the tourism industry. This is all neatly captured in Volume II of the Estimates of Expenditure under the rubric of Programme Performance Statements on pages 110 to 113 of this Volume.

The environment in which we expect Guyana's businesses to operate is of critical importance and must be an enabling one. To that end, in 2016, the Ministry of Business made a commitment to improve that environment so that private businesses operating in Guyana could do so in an efficient and cost effective manner, thereby making them more profitable and more competitive.

Our Ministry initiated collaboration with the World Bank to address, directly, the indicators Guyana ranked badly on in the *2016 Doing Business Index*. I must tell this House that that Report which reflected the period ending 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2016 was fairly unflattering and did not present Guyana in a way that was attractive to investors. So, there is, and will be over the next few years, a lot of work to be done in correcting the deficiencies which placed us at a disadvantage in attracting investors, and placed our businesses at a disadvantage when operating in Guyana.

One area of intervention that is expected to transform trade transactions in Guyana is the single window processing system which will automate the processes of a number of Government agencies involved in trade facilitation and make them more efficient and less prone to

interference. The Hon. Minister of Finance alluded to it in his Budget presentation and an Inter-agency Steering Committee is in place to see this transformational initiative become a reality in 2018, following the deployment of the Guyana Revenue Authority's Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) system with which it will have to be integrated. Through collaboration with the World Bank's team, information and communication technology (ICT) assessments and legal assessments have already been done in the areas of starting a business, registering property and training across borders.

With technical assistance from the Government of the United Kingdom (UK), the Ministry of Business is also examining the processing of construction permits, an area in which Guyana ranked badly in the last few years, as well as the area of getting electricity, in which slight gains were made in the last Report. Guyana has already improved its World Bank ranking by 16 places in the last Report.

In 2017, the Ministry will provide support for and facilitate the execution of critical reforms in areas identified in the various reports and assessments in order to significantly improve the ease of doing business in Guyana, as well as to improve Guyana's ranking in the *Doing Business Index*. It is expected that these reforms will last well into the year 2018 and, thereafter, will have to be constantly reviewed in order to maintain the gains we will have achieved.

Business expositions and trade fairs are important ways of showcasing and promoting the various products and services offered in a particular country, region or business sector. These can take many forms but, ultimately, they are intended to connect businesses with the relevant partners, clients, suppliers, *et cetera*. The National Exhibition Centre in Sophia successfully hosted Guyana's Exposition (GuyExpo) 2016 in May of this year to coincide with the National Jubilee Celebrations. Guyana's premier trade fair and exposition was held for four days under the theme, *50 Years: Guyana means Business – Promoting Enterprise, Driving Productivity*. Hundreds of exhibitors, local and foreign, thousands of patrons, many sponsors and other key stakeholders came together to ensure the successful hosting of this event as part of our National Independence Celebrations. Guyana's National Exhibition Centre is still the logical first choice for any large-scale activities of this nature. But, as we found out on the eve of GuyExpo, it is very much a dry weather venue. We live with heavy rains and blazing sunshine and our national

facilities must be outfitted for these conditions. Unfortunately, the National Exhibition Centre, as we inherited it, has not been regularly upgraded to meet the demands of a modern exposition site.

Over the last 50 years, Guyana's economy has not become sufficiently diversified to sustain growth and development over the long term and this is reflected in our business expositions. The National Exhibition Centre aims to provide entrepreneurs and existing businesses with an opportunity to engage meaningfully with relevant stakeholders in a setting which is conducive to doing business. The Jubilee Anniversary Celebrations have come and gone and it is now time for GuyExpo to become a catalyst for business development in Guyana and to be able to attract regional businesses on a serious level. In 2017, we will begin the general upgrade of this facility so that it can assume a prominent role in the growth and development of local businesses. The rebuilding of the Annex, which has traditionally housed companies and small businesses, from agro processing and the arts and craft sectors during GuyExpo, will be a priority. The physical structure had to be demolished in 2015 due to its dilapidated state and the hazard it presented to the businesses occupying it. The rehabilitation of this structure will provide a modern exhibition space that will enhance the experiences of both exhibitors and investors while saving on the cost of renting tents every time there is an event. A total of \$70 million is allocated for this in Budget 2017 and these developments will continue into 2018.

Youth unemployment continues to be a great concern of the APNU/AFC Coalition Government, and the Ministry of Business will pursue the expansion of private enterprise on many fronts in order to increase employment opportunities for young Guyanese. The Small Business Bureau will be scaling up its activities in 2017 and will actively promote youth entrepreneurship as a means of channelling innovation towards economic activity. One hundred students from educational institutions will be exposed to entrepreneurial initiatives which will include practicums and competitions aimed at introducing entrepreneurship as a viable career option. Subsequently, a minimum of 10 students with innovative business ideas, which meet the prescribed criteria for funding, will be awarded grants towards the implementation of the ventures outlined in their business proposals.

Enhanced outreach activities in every region will be carried out. These will be done through individual agency initiatives of the Small Business Bureau as well as through collaborative efforts with other public sector agencies. Budget 2017 provides for the procurement of a suitable

vehicle to support these efforts since the Bureau's single, aging vehicle cannot support its transportation demands. Small businesses contribute significantly to employment and national income; yet they face many constraints to growth and development. In order to provide more formal opportunities to incentivise capacity building within the sector, the Small Business Bureau, in collaboration with the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board, will be implementing the Small Business Procurement Programme, in 2017, which will finally see small businesses being able to access Government procurement under a formal framework aimed at guaranteeing small businesses a piece of the action where public contracts are concerned. The Bureau will continue to work with small businesses, in 2017, to build capacity and prepare them for access to the Programme.

Further, in 2017, the Small Business Bureau, in partnership with other entities, will offer business incubation services to provide targeted support to small business with high growth potential by ensuring that they can access equipment as well as support services required to propel their development. Such facilities will allow for enhanced competitiveness and provide a boost, which is clearly needed, for these early small enterprises. The Bureau will also continue to offer training in both business management and technical skills as well provided access to finance through the Micro and Small Enterprise Development Programme.

The Guyana National Bureau of Standards will continue to advance the use of standards by businesses across Guyana during the coming year, which will see the Bureau marketing its services in all 10 Administrative Regions of Guyana.

*11.28 a.m.*

It will focus on increasing awareness of the benefits of standardisation and also on increasing its clientele for the various services that the bureau offers. The Guyana National Bureau of Statistics (GNBS) will be focussing on the agriculture, agro-processing, energy, mining and services sectors of our economy in 2017. This will require a number of visits and consultation sessions to promote the services of the GNBS. The bureau, in 2017, will begin the process of replacing its ageing fleet of passenger vehicles, since all but one of its vehicles are in excess of 10 years old. The bureau has also doubled its budget for training and education in 2017, as compared to 2016, in recognition of the need to maintain staff competence, as well as to upgrade the skills of its

officers to be able to extend its services to the emerging sectors of our economy, such as the oil and gas and the renewable energy sectors. Critical training will be identified and facilitated.

I cannot over emphasise the work of the Guyana National Bureau of Standards in developing the kinds of industries that Guyana needs if it is to become a more diversified exporter of value added products. Industry standards exist for almost anything under the sun and are demanded by the international markets. It is, therefore, in Guyana's interest that we adopt these standards if we wish to do business with the rest of the world. Without credible certification processes, based on analysis and reports from accredited testing facilities, Guyanese businesses would not be able to provide the assurances required to access international supply chains for their products and services. With the help of a US\$9 million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Guyana's national quality infrastructure will be upgraded to allow for increased testing and certification to be carried out in Guyana. The project will entail a new laboratory being constructed as well as upgrades to several existing laboratories.

In addition, the project will see the development of a national export promotion strategy and a complimentary national investment promotion strategy. This project will place Guyana's economy on a sustainable development pathway by supporting our value added exporting industries in a serious way.

The Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) continues to make invaluable contributions to Guyana's economic growth by promoting and facilitating local and foreign investments, while also promoting the exports of local goods. Between January and October of 2016, Go-Invest facilitated approximately 83 projects, including 16 foreign direct investments across eight economic sectors, namely agriculture, light manufacturing, tourism, forestry, information and communications technology (ICT), mining energy and the services sector. The potential value of investments facilitated within this period amounted to approximately \$114 billion, with approximately 6000 jobs estimated to be created as a result.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

**Mr. Gaskin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will proceed to wrap up.

Progress will continue in 2017 with Go-Invest developing its own strategic plan that will see the use of policy advocacy and sector profiles to promote investments in strategic sectors. Go-Invest will also continue to liaise with the diaspora and Guyana's business opportunities and to ensure that Guyanese abroad are informed and engaged, when it comes to doing business in Guyana.

Our industrial estates remain a priority for our business development and support agenda. In 2016, nearly \$30 million was awarded for works at the Coldingen Industrial Estate, while \$43 million was awarded for the commencement of Phase Two of the works to the new Lethem Industrial Estate.

The Lethem Industrial Estate is expected to be completed in 2018 and will cater for approximately 70 businesses, plus a business incubator for small businesses. The project has been redesigned to incorporate more modern concepts in the layout and construction of the estate. A total of \$287 million will be spent in 2017 on industrial estates and a new policy on the use and management of industrial estates will be implemented.

The Ministry of Business, through its Department of Commerce, is currently completing work on a Trusted-Trader Programme, which will allow eligible businesses, with good track records, to conduct transactions and clear goods unhindered by red tapes and other bureaucratic hurdles. After consultations and close examinations of the internal procedures of several public entities, the concept of the Trusted-Trader Programme has advanced to the final stages of its development. A number of relevant agencies have been engaged and have communicated their endorsement of this programme. The Department of Commerce, in order to further support businesses, has also established a helpdesk which is fully functional and capable of offering clear and concise advice on matters relating to the conduct of business in Guyana.

I wish to jump to the tourism sector [Mr. Hamilton: You have been jumping all of the time.] Yes, jumping is not a bad thing. One of our most precious natural resources is our vast unspoiled hinterland, which never fails to impress those visiting Guyana for the first time. The recent visit of His Royal Highness Prince Harry is testament to that. The tourist destination that Guyana can become needs to be deliberately developed with an understanding of how the international tourism industry works. By now, Guyana would have learnt that simply having something of value does not, necessarily, guarantee that that value would be realised. Tourism

must be recognised by all Guyanese as a value added export that can add diversity to our economy and contribute significantly to Guyana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. A national Tourism Policy has been drafted and is receiving the benefit of consultations, prior to its final adoption. [Ms. Teixeira: Thirty minutes.] We have two timekeepers in the House? These consultations will be used to raise awareness, nationally, of the value of the industry and the opportunities it can create. The sum of \$329 million, allocated for the sector in Budget 2017, is intended to fund the implementation of the national Tourism Policy through the work of the Department of Tourism, as well as the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA).

The Guyana Tourism Authority will continue to expand its marketing and product development initiatives to include development of new *niche* products experiences, such as photography tours, responsible tourism and green tourism initiatives, as well as increased training and capacity building, the creation of a new destination Digital Versatile Disk (DVD), digital marketing campaigns, market representation, increased participation at key travel trade shows and the hosting of travel guides and media familiarisation tours to expand Guyana's distribution channels and gain international exposure.

In closing, it is with great confidence that I wish to communicate to the business community the expectation of improved growth in 2017 based on current projections. The targeted 3.8% growth rate demands confidence in our economy at all levels and we should avoid the temptation to talk ourselves out of the good life. Budget 2017 depicts a good life for all Guyanese and this is what we must work to achieve.

Having outlined the Ministry's work, during the current year, and its plans for the year 2017, I wish to, once again, congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance and his budget team for a job well done and for an excellent pro-business and pro-worker budget.

I commend this budget to this National Assembly.

Thank you. [Applause]

**Mr. Hamilton:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the Budget 2017 debate. From the outset, let me point out that the budget presented by the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) coalition Government is a budget laced with poisonous

measures, measures that will cause *pressuration, sufferation* and, in some instances, *murderation* to the Guyanese people.

The Hon. Minister Winston DaCosta Jordan, when presenting the Government's budget, spoke to the many firsts of the budget. He neglected to mention a first that is very relevant to the Guyanese people, that is, it is the first death announcement budget read on national television. Minister Greenidge, during his tenure as Minister of Finance, in the former days, read many death announcement budgets, but they were communicated to the Guyanese people *via* radio.

The budget measures outlined by the Minister of Finance are a recipe for the escalation of crime and criminality. Less jobs and less opportunities for young people equals, as the Minister of Public Security would know, more crime and criminality. More pressure on households is likely to exacerbate spousal abuse and suicides. Since the budget presentation on Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2016, the Guyanese people and their representatives have made their views known and the overwhelming majority views are that the budget is bad. It is bad for businesses; it is bad for the miners; it is bad for the sick and the aged; it is bad for young people; it is bad for single parents; it is bad for self-employed persons; it is bad for public servants and teachers; yes is bad for all Guyanese, except the Government Ministers and their cronies.

The budget will do nothing to stimulate the economy, as indicated, earlier, by my Colleague, Mr. Irfaan Ali. It has nothing to create jobs and to put money in the people's pockets. What it will do is the opposite. It will take money out of people's pockets, it will wreak havoc on the economy, take away jobs and it will rob citizens of moneys that are already in their pockets, their purses and in their bank accounts.

The daily newspapers reported that my good Friend, the Hon. Minister Trotman, speaking at the Georgetown Chambers of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) dinner, rebuked and admonished us, the citizens of Guyana, to stop complaining about the budget measures and get busy. What he was actually saying to us was to drink from the poisonous chalice and do not complain. Mr. Trotman could say that to the people of this country because his electricity and water bills are paid for by the State. Therefore, the single mothers, the elderly and the poor across Regions 1 to 10 are not that fortunate like him and his Colleagues in Government. Therefore, they have to

complain. If you are taking money out of my pocket, I will complain and I will continue to complain.

Minister Jordan, on page 81, paragraphs (iii) and (iv), when he was speaking about the 14% Value Added Tax (VAT) on water and electricity, was speaking about taxation measures. Twenty-four hours after he presented his budget, when he was confronted by the citizens about the imposition, he stated that it was a conservation measure and not a taxation measure. Oh, what a tangled web he and his Government are trying to weave. I also saw a news report of Minister Bulkan parroting the same nonsense.

*11.43 p.m.*

Nowhere in the Minister's budget presentation did the Minister made mention of the 14% VAT on water and electricity being a conservation measure. Why do you believe that you and your Government can make fools of the Guyanese people? All of us know that it is not a conservation measure.

The Minister of Finance, on page 76, paragraph (iv), made the most ludicrous and laughable statement in the budget, which is this one. The Minister said that he would allow for people to bring in electrical charging stations. But the fact is that, his Colleague, Minister Patterson, can hardly keep the lights on and give us current to ensure our fish and chicken do not spoil. Now, the Minister is talking about electrical charging stations. The power that we are receiving at the moment, we cannot even keep our lights on so that our children could study, keep our fridges working, cannot even ensure that, for those who are so fortunate to have air conditioners, that we could keep them running. We have to go and sit in our patios to get some natural wind. Therefore, in my humble opinion, Sir, the measure about electrical charging stations is what I consider to be a rum shop *gaff*. It could not be any serious measure that was being put forward to the Guyanese or the business people to ensure that this economy rebounds. It is a rum shop *gaff*; it is just something that one throws in there.

On page 77, the Minister spoke about measures to reduce inequality and measures to increase disposal income. If one would turn to page 77, there is a table outlining the disposable income that is likely to go into people's pockets. Let me read what the Minister has stated here, on page 77 of his budget presentation, and then I will respond to that.

“These measures will allow for an annual increase in take home pay to persons earning under \$720,000 of \$18,000, and for persons earning \$2,160,000 to benefit from an additional annual take home pay of \$46,800”.

My take home pay is \$18,000 a year. That is \$1500 per month. Right away, I have to deal with 14% VAT on the lights and the water. Right away, I have to deal with taxes on disposal diapers and baby food for my children; I have to deal with taxes on cheese, eggs and all the essential items. So the fact is that, with \$18000 per annum to take home, I would have to, at least, find \$80,000 to deal with my new expenses to buy basic food items. [*Interruption*]

The Leader of the Opposition and my Chief Whip have done me an injustice since the commencement of this Eleventh Parliament. They have assigned me to shadow an invisible Minister. Yes, Sir, they have asked me to shadow *the flash*. Secondly, I propose that we rename the Minister of Business from Dominic to Willy. This is because, in all his budget presentations, he has never said “We have”, it has always been “We will”. In 2015, “We will”; in 2016, “We will” and today, again, “We will”. He is yet to say to the Guyanese people “We have done this” or “I have done this”. In nearly two years, this Minister is yet to point us to a tangible accomplishment of his Ministry. Under his watch, the next year, he will report on what he has done. If he say, “We will” in 2016, then in 2017, he cannot say “We will” on the same item. [*Interruption*]

*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, please take your seat. Hon. Members, on both sides of the aisle, we cannot continue in this way. [*Interruption*]

Members, who are cross talking, are free to leave the room and discuss their business outside, but if we are going to have a debate, then let us have it. The cross-talk is interrupting the flow of ideas from the speaker. Let us, at least, be respectful. Hon. Member, please continue.

**Mr. Hamilton:** Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, it is easy to comprehend what I was saying. If, in 2015, as a Minister you came to the National Assembly and said, “I will” or “my Ministry will do this in 2016”, our expectation is that, when you come back in 2017, you would have said that

“We have” on the specific item or measure. You cannot, for three years, on the same items, say “We will”. That is not an accomplishment.

As I was saying, the Minister is yet to point to a tangible accomplishment of this new Ministry under his watch. Investments have declined, substantially, as I heard the Minister of Business and the Minister Finance just say. If one look at the 2016 Budget, the Government had indicated that there would have been a substantial decline of investments from \$89 billion to \$11 billion in 2016. Now, the Government comes to the House, presenting the 2017 Budget and states that there was an investment inflow of \$114 billion. If that is factual, the Government would have been jumping for joy that it was able to pass its projection target by \$103 billion and yet, the economy is wrecked. Something does not add up because the Government cannot project \$11 billion and then come to the House and say that it has surpassed the \$11 billion target by \$103 billion and the country and the economy is in the state it is in. Less jobs and economic activity and yet, the Government comes to the House to say that investment inflow for businesses is \$114 billion.

The Minister of Business, who I shadow, speaks glibly every time about job creation, but is yet to inform the Guyanese people about the specifics of the jobs created by his Government. **[Bishop Edghill: Name the sectors.]** Name the sectors and how many persons. Everything is just, “We have created jobs; we will create 3600 jobs, we have created 6000 jobs.” but tell us where are the jobs. For the Government to reach a number of 6000 jobs, it would have had to add a set of numbers, unless it is pulling the 6000 jobs out of the air. What I would have expected, is that the Minister of Business would have said to us that, in the ICT sector so many jobs were created or in the agro-processing sector so many jobs were created, but every time there is a blanket number. What we are sure about is that people are losing their jobs and investors like the Barama Company Limited, the Bai Shan Lin Forest Development Inc. and the Demerara Timbers could give the numbers of the amount of persons they have let go and who are on the breadline.

In the housing sector, the contractors could give a number of the amount of persons they have had to let go because they are unable to be involved in the housing drive that they were accustomed to. I would expect that when the Minister of Business comes to the National Assembly that he would outline strategic objectives and the type of businesses that he is seeking

to bring to Guyana. For example, that he has travelled to South East Asia, Central and North America and that this was the estimated business in US dollars that his initiative had ensured happen.

But what did we hear not so long ago? Not so long ago, the Minister spoke to us and he did two things in his presentation. He gave us an outline of the strategic plan for his Ministry, but we could have a time for that. We could debate the strategic plan. He regaled us about the construction of the Sophia Exhibition Centre, about some new vehicle that he has to purchase and about some tents that he has to rent. This is the Minister of Business who is speaking to the National Assembly and to the nation.

*11.58 p.m.*

The Minister needs to speak to us, Sir, about employment for young people... [Ms. Lawrence: He spoke about that.] He spoke about it? Tell me how many young people your measures were able to employ in 2016? That is what I want to hear. How did the measures of his 2016 Budget empower women?

The important issue, regarding operationalising the provisions in the Procurement Act to allow for and to ensure that small businesses participate in 20% of the national procurement, this again, the Hon. Minister and his Government has failed in that regard miserably. Again, the Minister comes, and for the year 2017, he says “We will”; in 2015, “We will”. The small businessmen and women cannot continue to just hear Mr. Minister that “You will”. They want to know how they would be able to participate now in the procurement activities. That is what they want to know, so that they could start planning. You have told them in 2015 and 2016 that “You will” and it did not happen. How do you expect them to believe you when you say “You will” in 2017?

The fact is, since this budget came out, the people of Guyana have been speaking and their voices have been heard. I am yet to hear any citizen objectively say that this is a good budget.

This is one Mr. G H K Lall, who I would consider an apologist from the Government, stated that:

“Two per cent is so negligible as to be meaningless”

That is the 2% decrease from the Value Added Tax (VAT).

The phone company, the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company, stated:

“Phone company forced to pass on VAT to consumers”

The Private Sector Commission (PSC) stated:

“Budget confirms sluggish economy”

The Private Sector Commission stated:

“New VAT regime to drive up price, inflation rate”

Ram & McRae stated:

“...budget measures, if implemented as they are proposed, will have a negative impact on the economy and growth.”

That was the analysis of Ram & McRae.

“The \$10 on environmental tax will pressure local manufacturers”

One Mr. Sase Narine Singh, who is a prodigy of Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, went further to say that the Minister should be fired. He said that the Minister did not even know what he is doing.

The Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA) and the Guyana Women Miners Organisation (GWMO) warned that:

“Budget spells doom for miners”

My good Friend, the Hon. Member, Ms. Simona Charles-Broomes will speak some time. They are looking to see whether you represent miners or whether you represent the Government. Your claim to fame is that you are a champion for the mining industry. The Budget 2017 Debate is a test for my good Friend, Ms. Simona Broomes. Your *compadre* in the mining sector, the Guyana Women Miners Organisation, your sisters in arms, are hoping to hear you speak and hoping to hear that you say to the Government, to not implement these measures to put them out of business; to withdraw these measures. That is what they are hoping.

This budget is so damning and so desolate that yesterday, a Pastor had to go into the spiritual realm to speak to the budget, one Apostle Vanrick Beresford. Listen to what he said, and beg you he is no friend of the PPP:

“All over this dear land of ours, there is a cry that is similar to the cry of the Hebrew slaves in the days of the Pharaohs and the time of Moses. The people were oppressed and were subjected to hardships that sought to decimate their numbers. Then again, more pronounced, my mind goes to the time of Jesus’s coming within the Roman Empire [time of the Caesars] a new tax system was introduced that was suppress and offensive [Time and space would not allow me to dwell long on this system of taxation].”

What Apostle Vanrick...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

**Mr. Hamilton:** Thank you very much. The speaker is seeking to say that the Hon. Minister of Finance and his Government is likened to Caesar, in the days of taxation pressure. He says here:

“Here, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we as Guyanese are faced with a budget (2017) that will see more people on the bread line. Business will certainly be on the decline, families will be decimated, hardships will increase, homes will be in want, students will find it difficult to pursue their studies, income and salaries would be disproportionate, the lower class of wage earners will never get an opportunity to go on a holiday, and general discontent will prevail over the nation.”

This is not the PPP; this is a supporter of the Alliance For Change (AFC), who has worked for them. **[Hon. Member: Who is that?]** A supporter of the Government. You were sleeping.

“...there is undoubtedly in the air a feeling that is permeating the regions that this budget is not good for the average Guyanese, especially the self-employed and middle income earners. I am certain that the vibes I am having are a foreboding/premonition of a daunting and discouraging period in the history of Guyanese taxation that has not been since the early days of the eighties here in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.”

It is not the PPP that is stating this.

“The logistical dynamics of this budget do not indicate/forecast a good life for us Guyanese.”

So, your good life speech is a “Pie in the sky...”

“Therefore, I use my authority says an Apostle of Christ Jesus to beseech civil society, the business community, religious bodies, the man in the street, the street vendors, mothers and fathers, teachers and nurses, learned professionals, pensioners, right-thinking Guyanese, the hungry and the dispossessed, the diaspora, and more importantly the Parliament of Guyana, to raise their voices wherever they are and let the soundness and balance be sought and delivered to this national budget.”

That is how we do it. That is why we are asking for you to withdraw this budget. This is because what it will do, as I had said earlier it is *pressuration*, *sufferation* and *murderation* in some instances.

He went on to say:

“If you don’t, you will have to ask yourself this pertinent question: Is the 2017 Budget malignant?”

This is a cancerous tumour you have let loose on the Guyanese people.

“If it is, then you must give the next generation of Guyanese the reason why you allowed it to pass. And may God help Guyanese out of the clutches of the Pharaohs and the stronghold of the Caesars.”

He is likening this Government to those of Pharaohs and the tax man to Caesar.

“Further, I implore the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, to reconsider reversing some of the measures laid out in this particular budget.”

And then he says finally:

“...if my pension were rounded, I would be able to put some cheese and chicken on the table.”

[**Mr. Williams:** What about plantain chip?] That would be difficult to purchase with this budget, even though it is cheap.

So, people have sounded their voices. One of the important things to note is that very few Ministers of Government have gone into the public domain to speak on their budget. They are very absent. It means that they have difficulty with the budget and its measures or they have difficulty representing this budget that was presented.

So, in closing, let me say that, as indicated by all and sundry, this budget is not a good budget for the Guyanese people. As I said earlier, it gives little or nothing at all and it takes away from the Guyanese people.

Therefore, I would say to the Minister to consider withdrawing this poisonous budget which he has brought. Again, if one notes the Minister of Finance, he is notorious for just putting feel good items in the budget document and the next time one hears about it, is the next budget. He spoke the last time about village development projects. We are yet to hear whether any canals were dug in Ithaca, Beterverwagting and wherever.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you must wrap up now.

**Mr. Hamilton:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. So, as I said earlier, the budget is bad for everyone except the Government's side. We would hope that, in consideration of the arguments by the Guyanese people and in consideration of the arguments by the Opposition over the next five days, the Government would see it fit to withdraw this Budget and let us come again.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members according to our timings we should now take the suspension for lunch, but there is a delay in the arrival of the lunch, so we will take another speaker, the Hon. Mr. Michael Carrington.

**Mr. Carrington:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Minister of Finance, the Hon. Mr. Winston D. Jordan, presented his budget for 2017 on the 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 stating what he could afford

and the systems he has to put in place to achieve: *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to all Guyanese.*

This budget is the people's budget to expand the development progress which we are seeing at present. Hundreds of miles of road repairs and all-weather roads are under construction, drains and canals are being cleaned to prevent flooding, schools are being built, and many also are repaired.

*12.13 p.m.*

Budget 2017 is \$250 billion. This is progress which the Opposition is condemning. Our people are crying out for development, better education system, schools, health, road, wages and other things in which we make life better for them. This can only be achieved with a bigger budget. The reality is if we would like to have progress in our country we have to find the funds to implement a system to achieve better governance for a better life.

I would like to go back in time. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take you back in time so our people can get a better understanding how we get to this stage of proposing a \$250 billion budget. In 1992, before the People's Progressive Party (PPP) took office, the budget was around 27 billion at that time. The US dollar was GY\$125 to US\$1. The total budget in US dollars was US\$216 million. Budget 2017 is \$250 billion. From 1992 to 2016 the Guyana dollar had devalued by 65% to GY\$206 to US\$1. This will give us a total for budget US\$1,213,992,233. This means that our present proposal is 925% more than the budget for 1992.

Budget 2017 will account for a 10% increase in budgetary allocation since we took Government which is a fraction of the 925% increase in budgetary allocation from 1992 to now. We have some problems, but Guyana has made great progress over the years and continues to do so. Moving a budget from US\$216 million to US\$1.2 billion, Guyana has to be making progress. The Opposition, at the present moment, is trying to demonise this budget and painting a doomsday for the people of Guyana. There is no doomsday for the people of Guyana. We will only achieve betterment. Whilst the political Opposition will try to share its propaganda, as we speak, to discredit the budget to gain political mileage for the 2020 Election, the reality is that by then this country will be in the mode of progressive drive on all aspects of development, in which Budget 2017 is preparing the ground work for.

The reality is the APNU/AFC Government takes this country with a debt of \$1.5 billion. The debt is now a new debt. The old debt, which the PPP Government met when it came into office, had been written off by countries and some was paid off by it. It had done a good job in this regard, but created nearly the same amount which were written off and paid off although it was collecting billions of dollars more than the Government which it took office from.

I would like to say to that the Ministry of Finance has a policy of increasing the budget every year by about 5%. We did change this policy when we took office. It is designed to collect an increase spending to stimulate growth which the PPP is afraid of. The PPP would continue to paint a doomsday for Guyana by using opportunity it has but it will backfire on it when the people see the progress on development. We may not be perfect, but we are trying to get there where better governance will prevail.

Since we are in Government we increase the public service wages by almost 40%. In less than two years old age pension moved from \$13,000 to \$19,000 in 2017. The public service is the heart and system of governance. It is responsible for collecting and spending the money after a budget is approved to ensure all systems and policy implemented, but it had declined in its standard as a result of poor education system, economic frustration and some develop a culture of bad attitude towards work. We will fix that by re-educating our public servants. Money is provided for that. We will have a better public service in the future.

We are well aware that our public servants need better wages, but the reality is every time the Government raised the wages between 5 and 10% goods and services are raised by 10 to 30% because of none control price mechanism in the free market enterprise. The devaluation of the Guyana dollar reduces the purchase value of it. This would cause our workers to feel as if they did not get a raise in pay. Some of them may react in the workplace in a negative way, disrupting the smooth governance of our country. As we progress with the re-education programme of the public service, better management will be in place. There will be able to understand if they fail in their duty, the country will fail and everyone will suffer.

The investment of \$43.1 billion in the education sector in 2017 is a remarkable achievement. I am happy to read that the Ministry of Education would be spending in 2017 \$2.2 billion on technical and vocational education training in secondary schools. Our major problem over the

years is skilled training in school. Our country has vast amount of raw materials because of the failure of the PPP Government in the past to educate our children, to utilise the raw materials to create jobs for themselves. We went into a problem with less job creation. Come 2017, all the secondary schools will have systems in place and have the money to carry out training programme to make Guyana a better place.

Guyana could only be developed by the people. We sit in the National Assembly, we argue, we talk but we have to educate the people to move forward. If we do not educate the people, we cannot have production. We cannot have the industries to be developed without an educated nation. In terms of small development, it will be developed because after we educate our people we will be able to create jobs for them because without education you cannot create jobs, and without skills you cannot create jobs. There are thousands of self-employed jobs available, but our major problem is skill. If you do not have a skill you cannot have a job. The PPP is complaining that we did not create jobs but it did not educate the people to do the jobs. Two years we are in Government. It took it years to educate the children so they could understand the responsible. They could understand that if they cannot find a job they must create one for themselves.

Guyana is beautiful. Recently I have decided that I will not condemn my country. I would not pull my country down, as the Opposition Members are trying to do, to paint a dark day for this country. That is the only thing they are doing. This Guyana will develop. The amount of cry they will cry, Guyana will develop. We weathered the storm before. We had harder times than this. We come through those storms and we are successful now. I am telling you that we will development Guyana. APNU/AFC Government will make it better. I am asking our people to have patience with us. Do not allow the PPP to demonise them, because at the present moment it tries to demonise the mind to play with the psyche of the people; to make the people feel upset, worried and stressed out.

My brothers and sisters, Guyana, as I said - I am very emotional - I love my country. I would not run from my country. I would not seek out the country permanently as many do seek from time to time. I will stay in Guyana and work to develop it. I could tell you that Guyana could only have development when we start to educate our people to utilise our raw material. Thousands of

raw materials, you name it, for 23 years, and they could not educate the people to utilise those materials.

We are planting 600 tons of rice every year and we do not produce any value added product from rice. Why? It is because we did not educate the people to utilise the rice. We produce sugar. We have estate which we are forced to close. The PPP Government never educate the people to utilise the sugar to produce products such as sweets, jam, jellies and wine. It had never educated the people. If it had educated the people to utilise the sugar, rice and other items, Guyana would have been a far better place. People would have jobs in their community. [Mr. Dharamlall:

What about marijuana?] I would not worry with you now. We would talk later.

I would like to say that the PPP Government won many local government authorities. It was in control in Government right across Guyana and it had not come up with any economic development programme in the community, in terms to create jobs for the people. It was the Government for seven regions and has not come up with any plan to create jobs for the people. The Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, dealing with local government authority allows the government for a particular area to come up with development programme for its areas. Up to now, seven regions it won, about 48 or 49 National Democratic Council (NDC) areas and it is not coming up with any programme to create jobs for the people who elected them, but it comes now to cuss down our budget and tear it down because we have an increase to help our the people.

The budget is only increased because we want to pay better wages; because we want to pay better pension, and because we want to have better education for our people. What they do not want us to do is not to increase the budget and do not provide the service the people need for their development.

I am very down to earth. I am not going to speak about jumbie, dead and all of those types of things. I would not go that way at all. All I want to see in Guyana is that the people could be able to live and look after themselves. We want to see the children, who are in their home, who do not have jobs, have jobs. We have to begin somewhere and the beginning is now, because after 2017, I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, all of the children, who are coming out of school, will come out with a skill where they could do something to create a job for themselves.

12.28 p.m.

I always remember an old man told me, “Michael, if you cannot find a job, create a job for yourself, and if you are educated and you cannot create a job for yourself, something is definitely wrong with you.”

My brother is worried about legalising, and all of that. I do not have time with him, because I would deal with that at another forum and not at this one because what we are talking about and are dealing with here is a budget. They would not destroy it. They cannot destroy this budget. This budget would pass, and as time goes on, by 2017 to 2018 the people of Guyana would realise that they are liars. When they realise that they would deal with them accordingly because by 2020 we would have everything fix and the country would be better and they would stay right where they are, in the Opposition.

I do not want to go long. I know my time might be up, my throat is dry, but my colleague asks me to go along.

There were some major problems over the years, especially in terms of family, because of the system of hardship, the overtaxation from 1992 until to now, that caused the people to create a lot of punishment and *sufferation* within our country. It creates a lot of problems in the homes and we would fix that some time, in terms of having a different life. In some home there are only three or four persons in a home not working. I keep explaining to young people from time to time, as I met them, that if one person in the home is working for \$600,000 for a year and three persons are not working, the house would be in problem. I will say that that the job may not be able to pay them, but it is to take the job for that \$600,000 for a year and more money would come into the house. If four persons are working in the home there will \$2.4 million coming into the home, as to one person working in that home where there is only \$600,000 coming into the home.

A lot of problems we are having, in terms of homes. There are some situations where some young people are telling their parents that they cannot work for that little money, but they parents are working for it and cooking in the home for them. We need to change that culture where our young people must be able to help within the home, go out and do something. When

they go out there, even if the money is little, they will learn something. It will educate them; it will take them forward. If they stay at home, they would do nothing. They will gain nothing.

I would ask the Opposition to cool the demonization. We do not want a demonised Opposition; we want an Opposition who would like to fix and to help us with governance, so be very responsible.

If the Opposition was in this seat, the Members would have been doing the same thing that we are doing here today, because the system was in place that every year it raised the budget by 5%. I remember from year to year the budget was raised by 5%.

I would like to close here and I would like to congratulate Mr. Winston D. Jordan for doing a wonderful job. We would try our best to see what we could do for the people of Guyana; Guyana would be a better place.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we were having a huddle up here to see if we could solve a problem which is outside of our control. That problem is the arrival of the meal. It has not yet reached this building. My thinking was that we capitalise on the time and have another speaker, there is not an agreement on that, and it is felt that we should have a break now. I thought that we could take advantage of the time available and continue with one other speaker, by which time hopefully the meal would be here. That has not been agreed.

Hon. Members, it is not a matter for cheering, it is a matter of agreeing on. If there is not an agreement on one side, then we cannot proceed in that way. However, what is agreed is that we would have only one hour and at the end of that time we would reassemble here. It has been agreed and that one hour would be maintained. We would take the suspension now and we would return here at 1.40 p.m., which would be 20 minutes to 2 o'clock.

*Sitting suspend at 12.40 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 1.48 p.m.*

**Ms. Manickchand:** Budget 2017 is shocking; it is unconscionable. It has caused distress, worry and fear across this nation, in every single sector. Your Honour, I cannot recall another budget in

the history of our nation, and the history of my time - I should not say in the nation - that receives this much criticism and worry, that receives this much pushback from as many citizens and sectors as we have seen with this present budget. The reaction has raged from anger and outrage to bemusement and to outright fear about what is going to happen.

My learned friend, the speaker before me, the Hon. Member Michael Carrington, said that the PPP should not demonise this budget and should not make it doom. Sir, let me read for you some of the reaction from the societies and organisations that we have become used to. The Private Sector Commission said that Guyana's economy lacks, in relation to the budget, clear direction. It went on to say that the Government should consider reversing its position as it, speaking of the budget, would be a horrible impact on the poor. This policy, it said, referring to value added tax (VAT), would contribute to inflation and would inhibit growth in the economy.

The Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association and the Guyana Woman Miners Association together warned that the budget spells doom for miners. Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company (GTT), on the December 2, said that it was stunned. Quoting from its Chief Executive Officer (CEO), a young bright Guyanese:

“We were stunned by the Government's proposals regarding VAT. Noting that if implemented, as interpreted, “we see the harmful impact it would cause to the consumer and this is what I would consider a 180 degree inconsistency with the goal of bridging that digital divide... and modernising the sector.”

Ram and McRae, who always does budget analysis, said the budget measure could have a negative impact on the economy. It said that when it tested the proposals it found them to cause an increase in prices, including on a basic food item, bread, which would go up. Private citizens, today's newspaper...I did not have time, but front page of one of our national newspaper states:

“Budget spells bleak Christmas for 2016. Double Taxation on businesses will hurt our economy

New Vat regime was not recommended – Ram and McRae

Cut VAT from water and electricity – Central Corentyne Chamber of Berbice”

The people of this country have spoken in a newspaper. They were not afraid to put their names or their faces to their opinions on the Budget 2017. Yashoda Sukhdeo, from the Essequibo Coast:

“I personally feel that the budget could have been a better one. Yes, there has been an increase in the various sectors, but then we have seen a tremendous increase on most items...”

Regan Martin from Linden.

“I think the present Government is more like in a tax collection mode, but they’re not in a mode whereby they are projecting and creating industries to provide tax revenue base. The people who are in the Government they don’t know anything about business...”

Alisha Medas, West Coast Demerara:

“This budget is one of the worst I’ve ever seen; this Government doesn’t even seem to know what they are doing...”

These are not the views only of the PPP/C or the Members of this House. I cannot read them all, but I commend this newspaper and these voices to this House. We stand here and we speak for the people of this country. When we say that this budget is a useless budget, in terms of our development path, we speak on behalf of the people of this country.

Why? The new Government tells us that it did not rig the elections. Everybody loves them and put them in there. Why all of a sudden all of these citizens now have all these awful things to say about you? Is it that people just want to embarrass you, as the Hon. Member Khemraj Ramjattan had said, in relation to crime, and as the President said also? Could it possibly be, Sir, that this is a budget that was ill thought out, senseless, going to cause us harsh living condition that would bring down our quality of life? Is this a budget that would take away from the “good life” that the people already have and certainly do not give the “good life”? Could it be that reason that people are complaining about the Budget 2017, wide and far, from Essequibo to Berbice?

When this coalition Government enters into office, people were upset, many people cried and wailed. There were people who were glad; people were disappointed. If the Government refuses to accept that people were upset, then it speaks to their view of democracy and their view of

paying attention to those who may not always agree with what it has to say. That is not a good statement it is making. Unlike the America elections that we just saw, presidential election, people were disappointed that the party that they wanted, the PPP/C, did not win the election. I, myself, was disappointed, but I felt like it fell upon me to comfort people by saying to them what I thought, at the time, was true. I said, "Listen, your party might not have won; you are disappointed, but Guyana would prevail, our beautiful Guyana would prevail."

After all, this is the coalition Government that has gone into Government saying all these wonderful things. This is a coalition Government that has made all these promises. It is young, fresh; it would be idealistic. It would want to do it all right and you would benefit from that. You public servants do not cry, you would get 20%. You rice farmers do not hang your head, it does not matter that the PPP did not win, you would get \$9,000 per bag for your paddy.

*1.56 p.m.*

You sugar workers, no estate will be closed. Do not worry. You parents of school aged children; do not fret. The schools will get better; the teachers will be better trained. The \$10,000 voucher will increase and now even schoolchildren, who are going to private schools, will get it because Ms. Anna Ally is on record, as the Shadow Minister of Education, as saying that they deserve it. You rape victim, you will get speedy justice. These are the promises that were made. I was not lying to the people; I was trying to comfort them. I was telling them what the coalition party has led us to believe that it would do.

What did we see instead? We saw first the appointment of 26 Ministers; four are Vice-Presidents, now become 27. We heard a very viable rumour that there was going to be an increase in salaries and then that rumour was publicly denied by Ministers. Then we found out that an Order was slipped in that doubled their salaries, not only from the date that it was slipped in, but retroactively. Then we were told that it was because Ministers were hard workers and that they were earning so much before. I am not sure if their tax returns would show that. The PPP/C called on all the Members of this House, Government and Opposition, by way of motion, to disclose what they have and the Government side of this House voted that motion down. They refused to do that.

Then we were told that the public servants could not really get the 20% that had been promised. We cannot afford that right now; we could double ours; we can take more overseas trips; we can take our families and friends on those trips, but you public servants cannot really get that.

Then we told that rice farmers could not get the \$9,000. In fact, what the Hon. Minister of Finance referred to as the lucrative Venezuelan market, that the rice farmers were benefiting from before, was lost due to what, I believe, was careless handling of relations with the country that we were enjoying those benefits from. Punishing was that to rice farmers, that there was a 40% drop in production last year. That means that people planted 40% less, and they would have earned 40% less. Then we were told that persons had made political investments and those investments have to get returns.

Then we saw the firing of several persons who were politically affiliated with the PPP/C or deemed by the colour of their skin to be politically affiliated with the PPP/C.

Then we heard that a house was being rented as a bond that would cost this nation close to \$500 million over the contractual period. The purchase price of the house was advanced by the Government and by the people of Guyana.

Through the papers, I believe, the nation learned that not only were the sugar workers not going to get their Annual Production Incentive (API), but that the Wales Sugar Estate was going to close. No consultation, not even a notice to the people, the Government just took a decision that it was going to close the Wales Sugar Estate.

Then we heard that a person was complaining of the rape of a child and that person was told that it was a family matter. Why did you go to the police? Why did you make this public?

Then we were told that no child could get the \$10,000 voucher, not even the schoolchildren in the public schools. It was that nobody would be able to get it. More would come, but that 'more stuff' never got realised, and it not realised in this budget.

In effect, all the promises made by the coalition Government, which I relied on to comfort people after it rode into office, became lies. All of those promises are lies. This budget here does exactly that. It promises the nation prosperity on the backs of the citizens; it promises the nation prosperity by taxation, and that is a big fat lie. It is not going to work.

We heard from the Minister of Finance quite a bit, quite a lot of time was spent on it is his third budget, and how historical it is, and so on. I would be very happy to congratulate the Minister, if I thought the content of the budget in some way represented what the people of Guyana need.

I want to pause here to say to the staff, the professionals and ordinary workers, cleaners included, of the Ministry of Finance that we are very grateful. The nation is grateful for the effort that you have put into this budget. We know that you had to spend long hours; we know that you had to give up weekends and holidays, and we are very thankful. We know that you are as disappointed, as we are, that the budget falls so short of what this nation need, what the people of Guyana need. What does this budget do? This budget is a short-term spending plan. It is a one-year plan; it does not define where Guyana will be in five or ten or 15 years. There is no development plan. Where are we going to be if we do these things now? This is a stopgap budget.

We realised that we cannot make it. One Member earlier, the Hon. Dominic Gaskin, said that we left them a growth rate that they could not sustain. We have sustained it for ten years. The only thing that changed is the people who are managing the sustaining. That is the only thing that has changed. It cannot sustain it. We would have been able to sustain it. This is a budget that lacks innovation. It is a budget that lacks any plan that will take us anywhere, in terms of a long-term development plan for this nation. The housing sector is collapsing, forget about that - tax the nation. More or less cars are coming in, less revenue will be earned – tax the nation. The economy is slowing down – tax the life out of the people. No brain matter is applied to how we can be innovative.

If we want to see growth in a country, such as ours, when there are these dismal growth figures, which this Government has exposed, to tackle the constraints that are faced by the private sector. The speaker before me, who called the Guyanese people lazy and uneducated and unable to make plantain chips because ... [*Interruption from the Government Members.*] Sir, would I get my time back? Apparently there might have been a ....

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand, the time is running, I do not know why you are sitting.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, it is because someone else was standing.

**Mr. Carrington:** Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40 (a). I had never said that the Guyanese people are lazy or uneducated. I had never said. She must withdraw it.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Member.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, he said they need a lot of education and the reason they were not growing... I will withdraw the word “lazy”, but what the Hon. Member said, in his words, was that the Guyanese people need to be educated and that when they are educated that they will be able to make their own product. I am saying that it is not a lack of education that is causing...[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not think... In fact, they are not the same, and you know that they are not the same. “Uneducated” is different from saying that a person needs to be educated. It is not the same thing. If you use the same language that he has, there is no problem. If not, you need to withdraw it.

**Ms. Manickchand:** The *Hansard* is there I am going to move on. The Hon. Member said, and I heard him to say that, that when people get education they will then be able to grow and manufacture, and so on, a very skewed view of how our country will grow.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, if you use the language which the Member used there can be no difficulty. If you paraphrase what he said and you give it a different slant, there will be difficulty. Now, what I would suggest, with the greatest of reservation, is that you use the language that the Hon. Member used, then he has nothing to complain about.

**Ms. Manickchand:** I was not taking notes, Sir, but we do have the *Hansard*. Sir, I would say this...

**Mr. Speaker:** I beg your pardon.

**Ms. Manickchand:** I was not taking notes so I cannot use the direct language, but I can say this, Your Honour, that we do have a Hansard Division and if on review of that the Hon. Member did not suggest that people needed to be educated before this county could grow, before we can manufacture products, I will get up and withdraw that without reservation. In the meanwhile, Sir, I intend to continue.

There are no innovative plans in this budget. There are no bright ideas in this budget. For us to have and encourage growth promotion policies, we have to tackle the constraints the private sector has. Some of those are high energy cost, poor infrastructure and high shipping cost, high cost of finance, lack of human capital. It was this Government, when in Opposition, which swore and did everything that it could do to block the Amaila Falls Hydroelectric Project, the project that would have given us cheap renewable and reliable energy. It has done nothing to replace it except to reward one of the political investors we heard about earlier.

If this Government was really serious about talking to us about growth, it would have talked to us about the possibility of a deep water harbour. How can we create an environment where bigger ships could dock, where imports could cost less and where exports could cost less? If this budget was really serious about growth, it would have talked about in its structure of growth, investing in University of Guyana (UG), so that we can attract foreign students who will pay foreign fees and who will spend daily in our country.

For human capital, this is a Government that is bloated with security experts, yet we cannot get a solution to crime. We have a blame game going. We have people fiddling with figures. The Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan one day is saying that the crime statistics are down and the next day he is saying that they are up because more reports are coming in. He has to make up his mind.

There is nothing new in this budget, just an attempt to tax the nation. I will quote from Winston Churchill, or paraphrase from him, because Your Honour might want me to bring the book he said it in. He said this:

“A nation attempting to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up”.

It is a waste of time. This is me saying that now. It is useless, an exercise in futility. This budget is a waste of time, in terms of developing and growing in this country. This budget is useless. This budget is an exercise in futility, as far as our long-term growth goes. While it is a waste of time and it is downright lazy to sit down and just fiddle with some numbers so next year you can come and show some growth, what it will do is to have some very harsh effects on the people of this country. That is why this is an unconscionable budget.

The Government promised that it is going to impose a 14% VAT on water and electricity and it threatened us that it was going to remove all zero-rated items and expand the VAT exempt list. Even the list of VAT exempt, which is attached to the back of the Minister's budget speech as a table, does not cater for the items that were zero-rated before. When we introduced VAT as a nation, and that was supported even from the Opposition benches, there was a section 17 that stated that certain items will be zero-rated. The thinking behind that, the ideology behind that was that the citizens of Guyana need certain necessities to live and we took all kinds of things into consideration. If you live in Mahaicony, your necessity is not a car, it is a boat. If you are a sports enthusiast, your necessity is your sporting gear. We took all kinds of things into consideration. We had a schedule that listed out the things that we thought, at the time, were necessities, and that list grew over the years – we expanded that list.

Now we are being threatened that that list is going to be completely deleted, repealed, removed and what we have now, the Minister did not verbalise when he spoke, is what will actually be removed. People did not know at the time that they were actually going to be in difficulty. Now people are beginning to understand that. People are now going to have to pay VAT on medical services, on medicine, on a plaster if your child's knee bruises. You cannot even afford to get a headache now because then Panadol is going to be 14% more. That is what we have coming on. Persons who need a wheelchair will now have to pay VAT on that wheelchair. Do you not think that the lives of disabled people are hard enough without taxing them for the very things they need as a specific community? Wheelchairs were zero-rated under the PPP/C Government.

*2.11 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, address your remarks to the Chair.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, I always address my remarks to the Chair. I do both at the same time. I look this way and I address you. I am always addressing you and nobody else.

Your Honour, in the same year that we, as a National Assembly, could have boasted that we had a Sign Language Interpreter interpreting the national Budget, the Minister slaps VAT on hearing aids. The Interpreter did not interpret that because he did not say it. He did not say that hearing aids would now attract VAT.

Our students who are asked to seek private education will now have to pay VAT; our three-year old babies to 18-year old young people will have to... Has the Government even thought of what this means? There are about 15,000 private schools students in Georgetown. If they were to come out of those private schools, can you accommodate them in the already overcrowded public schools? Have you even thought of what this means? Things that children colour with, like markers, are now going to attract VAT. Play dough, a staple in the development of every child, will now attract VAT. How heartless is that? How could you sit at a Cabinet as Ministers, as parents, as grandparents, and make play dough attract VAT? [Mr. Nandlall: And they laugh.] And you find it funny.

In the same speech, the Minister speaks of our children being globally competitive. Internet services - mobile data - will all now attract VAT. These items that I am listing are far from exhaustive but they never attracted VAT before. They were zero-rated.

Concrete blocks, sand, stones, lumber and plywood are now taken off the zero-rated list. Supply of animal medication, including animal vitamins, used to be zero-rated. Are you taxing our pets? Are you taxing the animals?

Sports gears and sports equipment qualifying for exemption from Customs duties under the PPP/C were zero-rated. These will now be taken off the zero-rated list. In the same speech that the Minister talked about our nation becoming innovative and creative, he took off mouse, keyboards and internal components of central processing units (CPUs) off the zero-rated list. He is not encouraging people to build things here. Router switches, hubs for networking computers, toners, ink cartridges and computer printers are all off the zero-rated list and will now all attract VAT.

A supply of outboard motors not exceeding 75 horse power (HP) was zero-rated. It is now going to attract VAT. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, simply appears not to understand. Mr. Ramjattan, where he made an eloquent speech under the Customs (Amendment) Act when the House had a debate, said that tax is a tax. His hands were flailing. Has that changed? Has your view changed? He said, in that speech, too, what other people have been saying regarding this Budget. He said, "The manufacturers have told me." [Interruption]

*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we must allow the Member to continue her statement. We cannot continue interrupting. Please proceed, Ms. Manickchand.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, in that speech, Mr. Ramjattan said:

“The Manufacturers have told me that they are not going to assume this cost”.

When you have to pay on the 75 HP that you bring in, it will be passed on to the customer. When you have to pay VAT on the play dough, we will pass it on to the baby. When you have to pay VAT on the Panadol and the cough syrup, we will pass it on to the parents. Everything will go up. That is what it means. When Ram and McRae and the private sector speak of the inflationary, it means all the prices will inflate; they will go up. That is what our people are facing. That is why this can be termed a “brace yourself budget”. Brace yourself, Guyana, for what is about to come.

The baker who bakes bread will have an increased electricity cost and an increased water cost. Everything will go up for him. Do you think that he will assume that? He will pass it on to the mom who has to buy bread to prepare her baby’s breakfast tomorrow and put in his or her lunch kit the next day. The person who stores chicken in the freezer will have to raise the price on chicken. Basic food items will go up. The movie goer will have to pay more. The person who goes to the salon or the barber shop will have to pay more because air conditioners (A/Cs) are running and water is used all the time. The quality of life that we have become attached to, that we have become accustomed to, will change significantly because you are unimaginative and are unable to come up with innovation that could take our country forward. You decided to take it back from the people.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

**Ms. Manickchand:** I want to just be very clear that the Private Sector Commission has said very clearly, through Mr. Ramesh Persaud, that these measures will cause a strain on businesses and that strain may, in many cases, be passed on to the customers. Mr. Justin Nedd, Chief Executive Officer of the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company (GTT), said, “We want the media and customers to understand what this really means. Customers can brace themselves for a possible increase.”

The Minister also threatened to impose VAT on goods and services that are going to be used by the Government. What this means - and I heard the Hon. Member who spoke before me outlining that we will now be spending more on education... That is a big, fat lie; it is a blatant fallacy. Let me tell you why, Sir. This also means that, when the Hon. Minister boasted...and I do not blame Hon. Minister Jordan. This is a Cabinet that sat and, as a matter of policy and ideology, came up with this Budget. This is the APNU/AFC Government that did this. When the Minister boasted of education moving from 6.6% in 2016 to a proposed 17.2 % in 2017, that is untrue. It is untrue because goods and services will now be taken back by the Government.

Let me give you a practical example of what that means. In 2016, the Ministry spent \$11,193,885,000. In 2017, the Cabinet has budgeted to spend \$12,124,620,000 under recurrent expenses. When they deduct the 14%, we will actually be spending \$766,711,000 less than last year. That is in the recurrent budget. Under Capital, we will actually be spending \$382,800,000 less. Do you know what that means? It is more than a \$1 billion only in the Ministry of Education. I did not calculate Culture, Youth and Sport. Over \$1 billion will be stolen from our children. The same way you took away the \$1.6 billion in cash grants, you are now taking away more than a \$1 billion from them. That means less schools, less services, less training for teachers, less education, less access... What is the point? We need one more Secondary school in Region 7 to bring that region to the standard of having universal secondary education. This \$1 billion that you are taking back from this Budget could have done it. Your Honour, what is the point?

I conclude, Sir, by asking you, what is the point of building a fancy school if our children cannot access it? What is the point of aiming to improve Mathematics grades if a mother cannot put lunch in her child's lunch kit? What is the point of saying that we will make our children better educated if a mother has to worry about whether she should iron her daughter's uniform or a father has to worry that his son is brushing his teeth for too long and using too much water?

What is the point of giving a family, which earns \$180,000, \$3,000 more disposable income, as you say, when you are asking them not to save that, but to dispose of that and much more because of the measures of this Budget? The reaction by the Ministers of this Government to this Budget to say, "Stop complaining; get busy," as though this nation is a lazy nation... They were there sitting on their hands; they were not busy before; you should learn to conserve. That

reaction is disrespectful; it is arrogant; it is insensitive; and it is being a bully. The Government is being a bully.

I have one recommendation for this Budget and that recommendation is: withdraw this Budget and do as the Constitution mandates you to do. Listen to the people; hear them and come back with a budget that is good for the people of Guyana, that will give them the good life that you have promised them, and we will support that budget.

I want to put one last thing on record. Politics and political parties win hearts and minds by their policies. Political parties spend almost all of their time in office attempting to win power again and attempting to win hearts and minds. If we can have Ministers in this House heckle, as one did this morning, “Alyo go stay over deh; watch it happen,” and they refuse to listen to the people, then this nation must question, if they want to stay in power, how do they plan to do that? We must be vigilant against any fowl means that they will use to keep them in power.  
*[Applause]*

**Mr. C. Persaud:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I rise to join with my Colleagues in commending the Hon. Minister of Finance for having presented this honourable House with Budget 2017, a budget that I would describe as far-reaching. It must be noted and with a sense of appreciation that this is the second Budget being presented to this honourable House for this year. That is no simple task. I feel that the Hon. Minister and his team should be highly commended for that.

This Budget is a bold and daring one. It is full of challenges which, once met, would give the people of this beautiful country a sense of appreciation for things that we have been taking for granted for the longest while. It may, on the face of it, seem harsh and my Hon. Colleagues on the other side of the House may feel that, because they are the Opposition, they must raise certain objections, perhaps to let their constituents get a sense or feeling of being represented or to give themselves a sense of purpose in Parliament. I am convinced that they certainly appreciate this Budget and what it represents. They are probably wondering why they did not put some of these measures in place during their 23 years.

When Budget 2016 was presented to this House, Members of the Opposition objected to the increase in pension to the old people which was, by any stretch of the imagination, the largest

increase ever. That was contended to be *against the grain* of what was described then as a GPL and water subsidy when, in fact, the increase in pension was more on an annual basis than the total of the two subsidies combined.

2.26 p.m.

Yet, the Members of the Opposition canvassed heavily on this taking away of the pension subsidy and ignored, as they are ignoring right now, the VAT on water and electricity.

I will look very briefly at the presentation by my Friend and Colleague, the Hon. Priya Manickchand. To say that one says that people need to be educated in certain areas does not mean that the people are uneducated. I will say that I am uneducated or I need to be educated in gold mining; it does not mean that I am uneducated. And so, I will say briefly that the presentation given by my Friend, the Hon. Priya Manickchand, has given me the impression that she is not very smart.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, personal references are not allowed. You will withdraw that and find another way to express it.

**Mr. C. Persaud:** I withdraw that statement.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mr. C. Persaud:** I was trying to make a point here, Sir. I will withdraw the statement and look at what was presented. I did not mean to say that she is stupid, Sir.

When the Hon. Member spoke of the \$10,000 contribution that was given to school children and that it was taken away by this Government, it was quite obvious that that \$10,000 in 23 years was a one-time thing. That was the only time they made it available to school children and it was the Election year. They were hustling votes, hoping to buy the votes. There was so much that was said that I am wondering where I should continue.

The Hon. Member also spoke of promises that the now Government made while we were campaigning and that she relied on those promises. I do not know how that is possible but that is

what we heard, for whatever reason. The Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand, referred to investing in the University of Guyana (UG). Well, UG has been there for the 23 years that they were in power. And I do not know, as Minister of Education then, that any investment was made in the University of Guyana to improve the teaching standards. In a discussion I had with the Vice-Chancellor just about a week ago, the gentleman deemed that the teachers at the University are themselves people who need to be taught because, right now, the salary that they are paid can only pay people with first graduate teaching at the University. But that has been an ongoing thing during the 23 years of the PPP/C in Government. I do not know that they tried to fix that.

I will look very briefly at the presentation of the Hon. Mr. Hamilton. In his first or perhaps his second sentence, I heard him speak of the Budget that can cause *murderation*. I am wondering, if my legal mind goes to work, perhaps that speech should have been sanctioned by Mr. Nandlall. Is that a threat or is it the intention of the Hon. Member? I do not know. But what does that mean?

He spoke of conservation and, towards that end, I will draw attention to three countries. The first is England. London imposed, in 2003, something called the congestion tax. That was simply because too many cars were moving into London and causing more congestion than ever. The tax apparently did not go well with the people but, eventually, it stayed, and so that has brought in millions of pounds that are used to develop other areas and has caused people to car pool. ‘Conservation’ is the word; they have decided to conserve on their travelling into London.

It is the same with Stockholm. Right now, as we speak, Mr. Tory, the Mayor of Toronto, a city that so many of us would love to go and visit, has decided to implement taxes on two access roads: one is called the Don Valley Parkway and the other is the Gardiner Express. Both of them lead into Toronto. Again, it is to conserve on the flow of traffic in and out of Toronto and to bring much needed revenue which the Mayor is saying he will put aside in a fund to build the roads and improve traffic conditions and the other infrastructure that would be needed to make travelling better. The word is ‘conserve’.

And while we are on conserving, I will look at the VAT that will be applied to... All I heard is VAT on water and VAT on electricity. What is missing again? It is VAT on water if you use over \$1,500 per month; only then will you pay VAT on water. And VAT on electricity is if it

goes over \$10,000 per month. That does not come out from the Opposition; they are only saying VAT on water and electricity. I did not go down Regent Street to talk to people; I went in my village. Out of seven houses with at least four people in each home, two of them were paying somewhere between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per month on electricity. And none of the seven homes paid in excess of \$9,000 per year for water. They will therefore not be affected by the VAT. So, what my Friends are haggling about and getting seemingly restless about is something I cannot understand.

‘Conservation’ is the word my Friend, the Learned Hon. Hamilton, referred to. As I am brushing my teeth, the sink pipe is running; that is water being used. If one conserves knowing that he or she will pay tax on that water that he or she is wasting, it will be avoided. The learned Hon. Mr. Hamilton did not hear of ‘conservation’ in the Budget. I am giving him ‘conservation’. When we go to have a shower, we soap and scrub our skin and whatever else and the water is running. If we realise that we are going to pay taxes on that water we are wasting, we will not do that; we will conserve. These are the things that they need to look at and tell their people or the people they claim to be representing; do not tell them that they have to pay VAT on water and electricity.

We are hearing of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) being run-down. What could this Government have done in one and a half years to cause GuySuCo to be run-down? GuySuCo was receiving subsidies since the time of the former President when he was Chairman of GuySuCo, the Hon. Donald Ramotar. And I do not know that the then Government, sitting for 23 years, did anything to improve the conditions of GuySuCo. What we are getting now, during the time of the PPP/C I do not know... I am saying I do not know that the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers’ Union (GAWU) called a strike to have sugar workers benefit from anything. But, just recently, workers were working and, if you do like six good days per week, in two weeks, he or she is entitled to one extra day’s pay. Now, they are going and they want ‘wildcat strike’ – striking here and there. Why? It is because they want to teach the Government a lesson. Well, the workers are losing the days that they go on strike and, because of that, they are not getting the extra day’s pay and the two weeks that they would have made it. And they wonder why the workers are not making money. That is what they are doing now - calling strikes - and

the people seem to believe that what they are doing may benefit them. Some of them are learning the hard way.

We heard of rice and the promise to pay \$9,000 per bag. I wish to again draw the attention of this House to the Hon. Mayor of Toronto, Mr. John Tory. Mr. John Tory was entirely against toll on the highways into Toronto. Circumstances, situations and needs have changed and so he is now advocating for taxes, the very tax that he objected to. If, at the time, rice prices were up there somewhere, we were looking at say about \$8,000 to \$9,000 per bag once things changed. We did not kill the market; the PetroCaribe deal died before we took office; we inherited that. One can look clearly at something that is so glaring.

The price of gold a few years ago was about \$320,000 an ounce. Now, it is about \$220,000; did this Government cause that drop in gold prices? [Hon. Members: Yes.] This is the ridiculous behaviour that we get from people who feel that they must oppose because they are in the Opposition. That is what we are getting. The price of gold fluctuates because of all kinds of factors. Freedom House economics might teach them differently but that is another story.

Comments have been offered against this Government or against the vote to support the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. We heard earlier there is a road that is built into somewhere; it is supposed to be Amaila. Some man who did all kinds of business before is supposed to be the contractor building this hydroelectric plant at Amaila; we do not know what is happening. But, in its present state, given what we have, Amaila Falls Hydropower Project cannot be a viable project. We have to look at that. Nobody is saying to dump the Project. I am sure this Government is not looking to dump it. We are looking to see whether there are areas that it can be put into place to make it something viable, to make it something doable.

It is the same with the Airport, the speciality hospital and all those things. If at one time it did not seem right, for whatever reason, times have changed and so have circumstances. It does not mean that people who said so long ago did not know what they were talking about.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 15 minutes.

**Mr. C. Persaud:** Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I wish, at this stage, to conclude by saying that this Budget has good intentions and the Budget... When I was speaking about the water being wasted away, I saw Members of the Opposition nodding their heads; they agree that they are wasting water.

I will talk about looking at the electricity bill: if I am sitting upstairs and watching television, I have the fan on and I decide to go downstairs to make a cup of tea, go into the kitchen or go to use the bathroom before the movie is over and I do not turn the television nor the fan off, that is a waste of electricity, Hon. Member Hamilton. To conserve, you turn it off and so that is how electricity is saved. We all have microwaves, - well most of us anyways. When we leave home, the microwave is plugged in. There is a beacon light on it; electricity causes that to light up. Why do we not unplug that microwave in an effort to conserve?

*2.41 p.m.*

We need to conserve electricity. For those of us whose electricity bill would run to about \$12,000, if we conserve, we would not have to worry about VAT because we could easily wipe off \$2,000. It is the same for the water; if we go beyond \$1,500 and we conserve the water, we could easily save on the VAT. Again, the word I wish to offer to my Friends is 'conserve'. Conserve and it will work; it does not have to be as ugly as they are making it seem.

One of the things mentioned was electric cars. Many Members have travelled to various countries and should know that all the Lexus cars being manufactured now are going to be hybrid cars, half electricity and half fuel. Honda is doing the same thing. It is quite a market. Why are we talking about electricity? Why are we looking at who is going to conserve? Things are changing.

In 1987, I had one of two automatic cars in the country. Then, the comment was about who drives automatic. Now everything is automatic. Circumstances have changed; times have changed and we need to adjust our lifestyles.

I will conclude and say this: when I look around, I see that some of my young friends have very short hairs, not like I have. Long ago, when you had short hair, you were asked, who died for you? Now it is a style; times have changed, circumstances have changed. We have adjusted to change. In the political arena, it is for us to introduce changes which will obviously benefit us,

benefit the country. Why is it now being looked at as something that is deathly, as was described, as something which could cause *murderation*?

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

**Mr. Mustapha:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my presentation on Budget 2017. I rise to make my presentation when all of Guyana is in sadness and hopes have been dashed, except for Members on that side of this House because they know very well that this Budget will not affect them. They know very well that they have a regular income. They know very well that the majority of their expenses are being taken care of by the Government so they do not care what happens to the poor and ordinary people of this country.

Guyanese were looking for and expecting to find something which would inspire renewed hope and confidence in 2017. Those hopes and confidence were shattered with the presentation of a budget with draconian measures. This Government has been in office for 19 months but it is yet to develop any strategy to alleviate the fears of rising crime, to create jobs and to improve the lives of Guyanese. Much more is needed than words; words without action are absolutely hopeless and useless. This Government is too 'throw-back'; they must get up and get busy. They must get out there and do the work, meet with the people out there and listen to the cries and agonies of the poor and downtrodden in this country. They are 'throw-back' because they have guaranteed the good life for themselves and not for the people. They took monumental increases at the inception of their tenure. They hoaxed the people to get into power and now they are deserting the people of our country. It is probably the first time in the history of our country that so many new taxes have been imposed in a budget. The 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 will be recorded as a dark day in our country, a day when the brightness of the present and the future have been dimmed. Budget 2017 defies rational explanation and begs the question: why would a government deliberately want to derail progress and bring hardship to its people, including its supporters? Much has been said about the Budget but the reality is that the cost of living will escalate. This is the general sentiment across the country. It was expressed out there this morning when people came from different parts of the country in protest against this draconian Budget. It is an inhumane Budget and it further demonstrates the Government's betrayal of its promises.

Every year, public servants looked forward to and received a bonus at Christmas time under the PPP/Civic Government. It appears that the Grinch is now wreaking havoc and has not only taken away this bonus from the hardworking Guyanese, but has given them gifts of taxes, including VAT on water and electricity, all gift-wrapped in Budget 2017. All categories of Guyanese workers, including single parent mothers, teachers, nurses, policemen and women will be unnecessarily burdened to pay more for basic commodities, including water which is considered as life in our country.

The small reduction in the income tax threshold and VAT cannot insulate the harsh burden VAT will have on water and electricity, which will bring more burden to the struggling Guyanese. This imposition is confirmation that this Government is returning us to the dark days when it imposed economic hardship on the Guyanese through wanton mismanagement of the economy with the clear lack of vision. This lack of vision is evident in this Budget.

The Hon. Member, who just spoke, exposed that the people in his street do not have water metres. Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) is taking note because he said that those people are paying less than \$1,500 a month on their water bill. How many persons pay less than \$1,500 a month? I want to tell you that I have walked Region 6, unlike the Hon. Member, Mr. Charrandass Persaud. I have related to the ordinary people in Region 6 and I can tell you that they are upset with this Budget; they are upset with this Government. The people are not only supporters of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, but their own supporters as well. If you go to places like Manchester, neighbouring village to Whim, where the Hon. Prime Minister came from, and listen to the cries of the people in Manchester, Lancaster and Liverpool, they will tell you. Only Saturday I spoke to some of them and they were telling us that scooter days are coming back. They have to build their scooters again to pull water on the road because they will not be able to afford to sustain the water bills that GWI will send to them. I am imploring the Hon. Prime Minister not to forget his roots. He must go back and listen to the cries of the people; listen to their plea and come back and represent the people at the Cabinet level.

With the new taxes, the price for soda will be increased. Now, mothers will find it harder, especially single parents, to put a soft drink in their child's lunch kit to go to school, as the Hon. Member Manickchand was saying. I do not think the Members of this Government are living in this country because they are out of touch with present day reality. Let them go and speak to

pensioners. They boast about \$800 increase to old age pension. I have spoken to a number of pensioners. Last Friday, I was coming out of the pay office at Port Mourant and met some pensioners at the NIS Office and they were so upset with the Government. The pensioners were not only PPP/C supporters. Every single person in this country, except those on the Government side, is upset with this Budget and with the Government. If a poll should be taken tomorrow, they would be out of Government and we will go back into Government and rebuild this country once again.

With VAT on water and electricity and the removal of subsidies... Of course, we were giving subsidies to the pensioners for electricity and water and the pensioners were happy with that. They looked forward to it. If you go and take a poll across the country today and you listen to the pensioners, they will tell you that the PPP/C Government was giving them a subsidy and they were not paying electricity and water bill in this country. The APNU/AFC Government took away that subsidy and said that they are giving an across-the-board increase. How unfair is that to the poor and vulnerable people of our country, people who have made tremendous contributions to our country?

There is no money to pay Christmas bonuses in our country but there is enough money to sustain the 50% increase in Ministers' salaries. That is what they are doing. With such burden on the backs of Guyanese, do not be surprised if there is an increase in the numbers of those who access electricity and water services differently in our country.

Cheap electricity is vital to the manufacturing sector in an effort to keep production cost low. This was why the PPP/C embarked on the visionary Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. With VAT now on electricity, the cost for locally manufactured goods will skyrocket. How is the ordinary man supposed to survive? This Budget will not only see the cost of living rising, but unhappiness will continue to rise.

I want to touch a bit on local government. In my last Budget speech, I mentioned that this Government is usurping the functions and roles of elected bodies and officials, especially in those regions which the PPP/C controls. They are using their appointed REOs and other Government officials to usurp the function of the elected bodies.

*2.56 p.m.*

When they were in Opposition, they were very vocal in calling on the Government to set up the Local Government Commission. They have changed course today. Do you know why they have changed course? They have changed course because they were slaughtered in the last Local Government Elections (LGE). They want to control the local government bodies with authoritarianism and with the Minister giving instructions to the local government bodies. Let them allow these bodies to function. They were the messiah of local democracy; they were the people who were propagating local government elections. Local government election was held; now allow the local government bodies to function. Do not usurp the functions of these elected bodies. I want to call on them to immediately re-establish the Local Government Commission so that the body could do its work.

Two very important sectors in this country are rice and sugar. I will now speak a little about agriculture. The agricultural sector has always been the backbone of Guyana's economy, especially rice and sugar. Rice and sugar account for more than 80% of the jobs in Region 6, where I came from. Today, we are seeing contractions in these industries. First, I will deal with the rice sector. Over the last three budgets that this Government has presented in the National Assembly, there was no plan to deal with these two important sectors. Probably, the Government is counting the chick before it hatches; they are looking at oil, while neglecting the agricultural sector, resources like sugar and rice, which are the backbone of Guyana's economy.

The rice industry is facing a grim future and this Government will further destroy the industry. I went to Black Bush Polder, I went to Number 52 and 74 Villages, I went to the Front Lands and Whim to Number 51 Village, and the common cry of the rice farmers is that they cannot produce; that they cannot go back to the land. Why? Only two years ago, Guyana had record rice production and just about 18 to 19 months of this Government being in office it has caused contraction in the rice industry. When we were in Government, we found markets for rice. To date, we are still waiting on the market in Mexico, for rough rice.

It was profoundly shocking to hear the Hon. Minister of Finance stating, in his budget speech, that growth in the rice industry will decline further this year. That is a blow to the hard working rice farmers of our country. It shows that the Government is not concerned with what is taking place in these important sectors. This, in itself, is an indictment on this Government. During the 2015 elections campaign, I was looking at the television one night and saw the Hon. Prime

Minister and Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Ramjattan saying that, when there was the rice market in Venezuela, that the PPP/C was robbing the citizens and that he would find markets for paddy at \$9000 per bag. Today, the rice industry is contracting. As I said, this was a blooming industry. This was an industry which had made tremendous contributions to the development of our country. Today, we see it going down.

When we took Government in 1992, the rice sector was down and we brought it up and this Government is taking it down again. This is the type of record this Government is setting; records to destroy our country and not records of progress.

Sugar - I heard my good Friend, the Hon. Mr. Charrandass Persaud speak about sugar. Probably he is not living in Canje, Berbice because he does not listen to the cry and plea of the people. I was in Canje at Cane Field, over the past week, with the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I am challenging the Hon. Member for us to walk the streets in Canje, Berbice and hear the views of the people there.

While in Opposition, this Government made clear its desire to deemphasise sugar with threats of closure and privatisation. Remember the famous the quote, while they were in Opposition, about throwing money down a black hole. Now, they are in Government and we are hearing that money injected into sugar is money wasted. What disdain they are showing to the sugar workers in this country. Sugar workers are the hardest workers in our country. Sugar work is a back breaking job. It is not sitting in an office with an air conditioning unit and taking 50% or 60% increases on salaries. Let us give the sugar workers increases. No matter how low it was, the PPP/C Government is on record for giving sugar workers increases every single year.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 16 minutes.

**Mr. Mustapha:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. As I said, that shows disdain for our sugar workers. Last year, sugar workers did not receive an increase in wages and salaries. We heard again this year that the sugar workers will not receive increases in wages and salaries. Then to compound the situation, the Guyana Agriculture and General Workers Union (GAWU) reported that they were told by the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) that there will be no Annual Productive Incentive (API), another record is set. For the first time in 31 years they did not give sugar workers an increase last year. This time, it will be for the first time in 64 years that the

Government will not pay API to the sugar workers. What a shame. Are we so ungrateful to the sugar workers? Almost all of the modernisation and all of the development of our country came from sugar. Remember, moneys from sugar used to pay a levy from 1976 to 1996. The money that sugar gave this economy, we as a nation cannot repay it. Is this Government so heartless that it cannot pay an increase to sugar workers?

I remember a Hon. Gentlemen in this House, whilst in Opposition, he went from estate to estate, telling the sugar workers that, under the PPP/C Government, he wanted to light a candle for them. Probably that candle has burned out a long time. That candle was burned out on 11<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. The sugar workers are waiting to hear from the Hon. Prime Minister. He made commitments that he would increase the sugar workers' salaries. Two consecutive years this Government has not seen it fit to increase a dime for the sugar workers. Comrade, is that how we treat our sugar workers? Are the sugar workers the step-children of this Administration? I think that this Government has not shown any respect for sugar workers.

Now, there is talk about closure. I went to the Rose Hall Estate and the workers are living in fear, with insecurities. They want to know whether their estate will be closed next. Imagine for one moment, the Rose Hall Estate being closed, with all the economic activities that goes on there on a Friday afternoon, for example, the markets. Imagine how Rose Hall Town and Canje would become like a ghost town.

Mr. Speaker, I know that I am programmed to time, but let me say that this budget is unacceptable. I think that the sentiments of the Guyanese people were expressed by the Leader of the Opposition, when he said that the Government should withdraw the budget. We are calling on this Government to withdraw this budget and come afresh with better measures, so that we can give our support.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Ms. Garrido-Lowe]:** I rise to offer my support for the 2017 national budget under the theme: *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. I would like to thank the Hon. Mr. Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance, and his hard working team for delivering the third budget of the coalition Government in just 18 months.

Before I continue, I would like to point out that we are in modern times. Change is inevitable. In any business, the messenger has changed to become an Office Assistant and they do not really ride bicycles anymore, the Ministry provides transportation for them. I am saying that, in the sugar industry, we should strive to modernise it and not to get rid of it. Together, we can think about it and come up with a plan. Though, I am no expert on sugar, I know that in 2015 and 2016 this Government gave sugar workers \$21 billion in bailouts. So, it is not true that this Government pays no attention to the sugar workers.

This Budget 2017 is an early budget which gives us the chance to hit the ground running at the start of 2017. Against the backdrop of a global growth slowdown, it was created, which will serve Guyana well, since it is critically important for us to pursue policies that will boost economic growth and improve the lives of ordinary Guyanese. I am pleased to say that this budget of \$250 billion caters for everyone, evenly distributing responsibility and benefits, while remaining focussed in the pursuit of a green economy. With my 30 minutes speaking time, I will proceed to highlight a few of the interventions that will create major and positive changes in our lives.

Beginning with the public servants, I ask, when last they were blessed with a 10% increase to their earnings, other than when they received the \$50,000 bonus across the board under this Government. With the 10% increase across the board, public servants benefitted from an increase to their minimum basic salary from \$50,000 to \$55,000. Added to that, the income tax threshold went up to \$60,000. These are ordinary Guyanese who will benefit.

Fulfilling the coalition's promise of a reduction of VAT to 14% is nothing less than an act of compassion. This alone will have a significant effect across the entire country and bring great relief to the ordinary people of this country who had to fetch the burden of VAT since its inception.

*3.11 p.m.*

To the residents of the hinterland regions, this is like the fairy godfather waving his wand.

It is of note that, while many of the essential items like onion and garlic, soap powder and laundry soap are zero-rated, one still has to pay VAT for the transportation of these items.

Hence, with the VAT decreasing to 14%, residents of Paramakatoi, Kato and Kamana in Region 8, Kamarang and Paruima in Region 7, Kokerite and Kariako in Region 1 and Aishalton and Achiwuib in Region 9, and all other Indigenous communities, will be paying less for much needed basic items, including shoes and clothing.

I am happy to see the increase of the Old Age Pension to \$19,000. This is not a liveable sum of money, nor is it intended to be, but our senior citizens look forward to this monthly assistance. I am sure that, with some of the proceeds in the not too distant future from our oil and gas sector, every senior citizens and every special needs child or person will receive a liveable monthly allowance. This increase in public assistance is also welcomed.

Guyana is pursuing a green economy. There are huge billboards at intersections of the city that everyone can see and read whether they are walking or driving. It is a major part of President David Granger's vision for the development Guyana. Our economy is going to transition towards renewable, clean and cheaper source of energy. To this effect, \$264 million is budgeted for the first ever large-scale solar farm in the hinterland town of Mabaruma where 3000 residents will benefit from an additional 17 hours of electricity. The hinterland towns of Lethem, Mahdia and Bartica will also benefit from 800 kilowatts, 400 kilowatts and 1.5 megawatts, respectively.

In the pursuit of a green economy, renewable energy, along with smart energy efficient interventions, in 2017, will see an annual cost saving to the tune of \$193 million and the avoidance carbon dioxide emissions of 1,674 tonnes per year.

In the hinterland, the residents of Lethem, in Region 9, will also benefit from the refurbishing of the Moco-Moco Hydropower Development Project which will feed power into the Lethem Power Company Grid, thus bringing more reliable electricity support to the growing town.

IT training in the hinterland - with the establishment of the Ministry of Public Telecommunications and the passing of legislation to liberalise the telecommunications sector, this Government is demonstrating how serious we are about development in this modern world. We recognise that we have to be tech-smart to keep abreast with the rest of the world; hence, Smart Guyana will touch every major sector of our economy and, indeed, every facet of our daily lives, as Minister Jordan stated in his budget speech.

This is revolutionary for the hinterland. The internet will absolutely transform the lives and livelihoods of our Indigenous and hinterland brothers and sisters. I would like the Minister of Finance to know that I am extremely happy about this. Added to the 150 individuals targeted for training in graphic design, programming, office tools, *et cetera*, I will be offering, free of charge, graphic design and office tools tutoring to some hinterland villages, as my time permits. This would be in preparation for the Government's certification course.

The pictures that come to mind are exciting. Just bring to mind indigenous and hinterland young men and women in their villages' computer hubs, designing posters, banners, magazines, newspapers and typing manuscripts for businesses overseas; and with a click, the beautifully created finished product is off to Germany, London or in the Caribbean. Picture them building their own websites to market their products and designing their own labels. Many, including myself, spoke about this several years ago. I am excited that, at last, this is becoming a reality and I am especially pleased that it is happening under this Government. Needless to say, jobs will be created as never before for the hinterland people.

Indigenous and hinterland residents in four more locations will also be kept up to date with the activities of the National Assembly and be able to enjoy their favourite programmes with the establishment of four more radio stations to the tune of \$150 million. The APNU/AFC Government will do what it takes to bridge the information gap between the hinterland and the coast.

Just to remind my Hon. Colleagues on the opposite side of the House, for this year 2016, two radio stations were established, Radio Lethem and Radio Mabaruma in the two newly established hinterland towns. This is simply remarkable, when suddenly, after only 18 months in office this Government is delivering the dreams of our hinterland brothers and sisters. Adding to dreams, the Santa Rosa Santa Rosa Village now has street lights.

With the expansion of the tourism sector, Guyanese in the service sector and those developing market-ready products, will be challenged to step up to sustained quality and innovation. More jobs will be created and this goes for the hinterland as well, where eco and community tourism will be one of the main earners of revenue in the hinterland.

Roads are always of great concern to residents of the hinterland, as well as those who do business with/in the hinterland. It is music to the ears to hear that \$2.3 billion is earmarked for capital projects in the hinterland with interventions for the Port Kaituma Road, from the airstrip to Fitzburg Housing Scheme in Region 1; Issano Road and Karrau to Buckhall Roads in Region 7; Karasabai to Monkey Mountain in Region 8; and Aishalton Junction to Shea in Region 9. Very important is a further \$262 million, which will be allocated for maintenance to the existing road network. This is necessary because of the inclement rainy weather which continuously wreaks havoc to most hinterland roads.

In 2016, I am pleased to inform this honourable House, that if one travels along the Linden/Lethem road, its condition has never been better. Guyanese are already beginning to experience the good life.

This budget has many good and reasonable plans and strategies that will touch Guyanese in a positive way, but my Colleagues on this side of the House will speak about them.

Education - In 2017, the Hinterland Scholarship Programme will be expanded to provide for 530 students, moving up from the present 510 students. This will allow for more students to progress to tertiary institutions, thus affording more indigenous and hinterland residents the opportunity to vie for public and private sector jobs.

Seventy eight students wrote the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) examination and secured a pass rate of 83.3%, while 9 students wrote the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) and secured a pass rate of 90%.

Our hinterland students, presently housed at the Liliendaal Dormitory, are learning to sing, play chess and scrabble. The Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Sukhai, should be pleased about this. The intention is to keep the children gainfully occupied and it is also hoped that chess will help them to do better in Math, and scrabble will be able to help with the English language. They are being trained by the renowned Circle of Love singer, Mr. Parks. The aim is to establish a successful hinterland students' choir. Chess is being taught by an experienced chess coach.

This year, 2016, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs tendered the consultancy for the design of a dormitory to house hinterland students from 18 years and above, attending

Government Technical Institute (GTI), the University of Guyana (UG) and Carnegie School of Home Economics. In 2017, a new dormitory will be built to house these students.

The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs supported two hinterland women's groups in 2016 – the Marigold Women's Group in Santa Rosa, Region 1 and the Kanapang Women's Group in Region 8. The chickens are alive and well and I am proud to say that the Marigold Group will have eggs for the New Year. This is empowerment of women.

A study of Indigenous Women and Children is also being done by the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs in collaboration with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This is the first time such a study is ever being undertaken and it will serve to inform and guide organisations and agencies on suitable programme designs for our Indigenous women and children.

For the first time ever too, Indigenous designers were highlighted at the Guyana Fashion Week, an international event held at the Pegasus Hotel. Three Indigenous designers from Region 9 made their successful *debut*.

At long last, this budget provides for consultancy services and designed bill of quantities for the construction of a new hostel. Our Indigenous patients and their families deserve to be comfortable in a nice-looking building during their stay for treatment. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs continues to serve our Indigenous patients by way of financial contributions towards surgeries, Computerised Tomography (CT) scans, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRIs) and assistance towards funerals.

This Government continues to support youth empowerment in a big way. To continue the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service programme in skills training, agriculture, eco-tourism and hospitality and entrepreneurship, the generous sum of \$991 million was allocated in this 2017 budget.

The Sun-Dried Organic Tomato Project, which I spoke about in the 2016 Budget, is being implemented. The residents of Paramakatoi, Region 8, will soon be supplying the facility with fresh organic tomatoes and the solar dryer, being built in the community, will extract the water from the tomatoes. The youths, women and men from Paramakatoi and the surrounding villages

will be trained by staff of the Institute of Applied Science and Technology (IAST) in food processing in the laboratory and will be certified. This is a sustainable business that will benefit the entire North Pakaraimas, and is in sync with the 2030 Sustainable Goals. Our Indigenous and hinterland brothers and sisters can look forward to a better standard of life with Budget 2017.

Our only challenge will be the implementation of projects and programmes which depend heavily on the whims and fancies of public servants. Training is necessary for our public servants because they are key to the success of any Government's mandate. We have inherited all the public servants. According to Minister Jordan's budget speech, all across the public sector we are faced with issues of sluggishness in implementation, poor interagency coordination and cooperation and a deficit of strategic planning and management. Therefore, training which we will do in 2017 will ensure that our Government's mandate is carried out.

Mr. Speaker, I support this Budget and I congratulate Minister Jordan and his team.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

3.26 p.m.

**Ms. Pearson-Fredericks:** As I rise to make my contribution to the debate of the 2017 Budget, the national budget, under the caption: *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese.*

I wish to step back a little. In 2015, the budget caption was: *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*; 2016: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*; 2017, again, we are talking this time around about delivering the good life to all Guyanese. However, I wish to say, like my Colleagues who spoke before me, this is not delivering the good life to all Guyanese. This is delivering a severe blow and more stress than what we already have. This is putting us in more problems or in *shambles*, as we would say in local terms. I need not go over what was said, but I would just like to say that with the increase of so many measures to ensure VAT, other revenue licences, and all the things that go with them, have to be paid. What is scary is that even the very small businesses, like the local person in the street and the man walking and selling, even he has to have his books right. What we understand is that there would be a penalty if there is a failure to pay one's taxes. If one does not pay this penalty, then one

could be jailed. What I would like to say and what the ordinary people are already thinking out there is that, many of us might very well end up in jail. So, perhaps, the Government is already thinking of building bigger jails.

We have seen the removal of the subsidy from the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) bills for the Old Age Pensioners. Although we have heard of *the Good Life for All Guyanese*, we have also seen the removal of the subsidy on the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) water rates for the Old Age Pensioners. Still, we are talking about a good life. We have seen the discontinuance of the \$10,000 grant for the students and we are still talking about *the Good Life for All Guyanese*. We have seen so many increases and here we are still talking about *the Good Life for All Guyanese*. Today, we are debating under the caption as I said before, *Diversified Green Economy, Delivering*, again. Now this time we are going to deliver the good life to all Guyanese.

I wish to make some comments on the speaker who spoke before me, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Garrido-Lowe. Minister Garrido-Lowe mentioned a lot of things, while other Guyanese will *feel the heat* and *feel the squeeze*, as we would say, I wish to focus my attention, particularly, on the Indigenous peoples of this country. So, I have listened to the Hon. Minister and, yet, I have not heard what the Government's policy is on addressing the Indigenous peoples with regards to economic opportunities. I have heard about chess playing, singing, having a choir, playing scrabble, helping two women's group. Yes, that is good, but do we have a piecemeal approach or a national policy to deal with the issues of economic venture for Indigenous peoples? I think that is missing in the Hon. Minister's presentation. Why am I saying this, Mr. Speaker? I wish to draw the attention of this House to something that is called the Government's new 10-Point Plan of Action and this is no secret. This was discussed and presented to the Toshaos at the National Toshaos Conference (NTC) in August 2015. Here is what the 10 points state:

“Hinterland Education Support Programme...”

I am just going to read the caption:

“Hinterland Employment Youth Service; Hinterland Property Reduction Programme; Hinterland Happy Household Programme; Hinterland and Indigenous Peoples' Lands

Commission; Hinterland Public Service Provision Scheme; Hinterland Language, Culture And Sport Service; Hinterland Tourism Service.”

This brings me to the point of asking the question, was the Hinterland and Indigenous Peoples’ Lands Commission established? Before I go there, I wish to say that, in Budget 2017, I have not seen any funds allocated anywhere and I have not seen any of these 10-Point Plans in the budget. I am quite sure that the Hon. Minister, Ms. Garrido-Lowe, and the Hon. Minister, Mr. Allicock, are well aware of what I am reading from. This is because this is public knowledge and this was discussed at the National Toshias Conference in August 2015. So, therefore, where are we heading if there is no budgetary allocation to address this 10-Point Plan? Why am I saying this too? When we talk about development, of course, development has a cost and this is the time when we address it, in the budget.

I have noticed it in the presentation by the Hon. Minister Mr. Jordan and it is stated here, that on page 70...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, do you rise on a Point of Order?

**Ms. Garrido-Lowe:** The Hon. Member is saying...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, do you wish the floor?

**Ms. Lowe:** Just a clarification. The Hon. Member mentioned that there is no allocation under the President’s 10-Point Plan, but the HEYS is a part of the 10-Point Plan and \$991 million was allocated for that. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Member. You have explained or elucidated what the Hon. Member said. Please proceed Hon. Member. Thank you.

**Ms. Pearson:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member mentioned a HEYS project. Yes, I think that I should elaborate a little. Maybe it missed my attention in the 2017 Budget, but in the 2016 Budget, allocations were made for the HEYS project. Yet, presently, as I speak here now, in this honourable House, the students and the facilitators in many villages are still waiting to be paid after six months. I am well aware that, in September, they were being paid one month and a half of their stipend. Perhaps, the Hon. Minister knows that it would have been raised in this

House, so, again they are hustling and bustling to some villages to, again, make some small payments. I was reliably informed that, as late as Friday or Saturday, in Region 2, students and facilitators received only two months' payment, when we all know in this House that an allocation has been made in 2016 to cover the cost of training and to supply materials for those training sessions. The people are still waiting. Six months have gone and they have received three and a half month's pay in Regions 1, 2 and in many other regions. Presently, some of those villages, with other regions, are still waiting to be paid.

As we are speaking about the HEYS and HEYS is an outcome of what was called or what was deemed by the Members on the Government's side as the Community Support Officers (CSO) programme and the entrepreneurship programme. That programme was wiped out or thrown away when the Government took office and deemed it as not good enough. It was replaced with this present programme, after we had objected, and after many of our young people had raised their voices. It is being touted as so successful. I did not intend to talk about it in details, but as I am here, let me say it was touted to be so successful and what is happening in many villages is that, even the material and equipment, in order to have successful programmes, they are not there. They are still lacking and missing, and a huge budget and allocations are there.

So, I am hoping now that, in 2017, since the Hon. Minister stood up and said that there is allocation, that things will really happen as it is supposed to and that before 23<sup>rd</sup> December, the people will be paid. I hope so.

I wish to also mention that, in the presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance, on page 49, where he talked about water, I would really like to read a section of page 49, paragraph 4.98. It states:

“In addition, new wells will be constructed at Section ‘B’ Sophia, Vergenoegen, Pouderoyen, Westminster and New Amsterdam and water supply systems will be installed at hinterland locations, including Chenapau, Tassarene, Matthew's Ridge, and Yarakita.”

*3.41 p.m.*

The point I would like to make is that the water supply system, which would be installed in hinterland locations and here, is a list of few in the areas. We are beginning to wonder, because when we talk about water we might be talking about VAT and more taxes. The question: What system would be put into place for wells and water supply in the hinterland area? Sometimes when people use the word “hinterland” they include Lethem, Mahdia, Mathews Ridge, but I am talking about the Amerindian villages and communities. I am not talking about Mahdia, Lethem, and elsewhere. I am talking about Amerindians villages and communities.

I have seen, as I said before, lacking in the Budget 2017... Where are the economic projects that would create jobs for our people in our various villages and communities? I have not seen it. It is not there. Again, I wish to draw attention to Budget 2016 debate when it was said by a Member of the Government side of the House... I am reading from the *Hansard*, let me give the date and time probably. The Hon. Member Mr. Allen was referring to the said training, which I spoke about, the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS):

“This is not a training that is just for a selective few in our outlying regions. It is not a salary that is given to persons over a period and at the end of the period they have no skills or they are not marketable. After this training, that this Government is giving to our youths, they will be marketable. They would be coming out of those trainings with certificate.”

Of course they might be coming out with a certificate but presently in Guyana we have many of our young people who have certificate and who cannot be employed or who cannot get a job as we stand here. When our youths come out and they would be marketable I am wondering, where we would market them? As I said before, I have not seen the economic opportunities that are needed in our villages and communities. I have not seen it anywhere in this budget.

I wish to remind the Hon. Minister Garrido-Lowe, while maybe there is a little project talking about tomato paste or whatever, that in her budget debate last year, spoke about the many precious stones that could be found particularly Regions 8 and 9. I am reading from the *Hansard*. The Hon. Minister said:

“In Monkey Mountain, Kato, Tuseneng, and several other villages in Region 8, there is an abundance of semi-precious stones - jasper, amethyst and quartz. When one stumps

one's toe on a rock, more often than not, it is because of a semi-precious stone. The Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs will work along with these villages to establish an industry to cut and polish these stones, produce jewellery, coffee table tops, clocks, and so forth. A lapidary will be set up and an expert, who already visited the area, is standing by to do the training."

I would like to order my table top from the Minister.

Many of the time many things have been said in this House and elsewhere and there is no follow-up. It can be deemed as lip service. As Indigenous people, we no longer want lip service. We want things to happen - action. That is what we are looking for now. We want money in our pocket, as any other Guyanese, and we can only do that by having economic opportunity as any other Guyanese.

I have been in this House since August 2015 and I am quite sure that I have heard more than a thousand times that we have been there for 23 years and we have not done anything. Everything that we have done has been disregarded and it is not good. To continue to hear 23 years, it is no. I would wish to say that the Government of the day is the Government of the day and it has a responsibility towards the people of Guyana. More so, it has a responsibility to our Indigenous people. Do not let me hear about 23 years or 28 years.

In conclusion, I wish to say, as you know, that the children of Israel wandered for 40 years in the jungle before they saw the promise land. Are we, as Guyanese, going to wonder and wait? How long are we going to wait for a better life for all Guyanese?

In closing, Mr. Speaker, permit me to remind the Government, on the other side of the House of its manifesto's, "Foundation for development," number 14 of that foundation, that speaks specifically to Indigenous peoples. I join with my colleagues in asking the Government, on that side of the House, and most particularly the Minister of Finance, to withdraw this Budget 2017. There is time to look at it, review it, and come up with something that is acceptable to the Guyanese people.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Allen:** I rise to give my support for Budget 2017. This is the second budget that was presented to this House in this year 2016 by the Minister of Finance and his team. I would like to take this opportunity at this time to congratulate the Minister of Finance and his hard-working team to have done such a great job to produce two budgets within one year. Mr. Speaker, please permit me at this time also to thank Hon. Minister Mr. Felix and his team who have been working very hard out in the regions.

When His Excellency President David Granger, when he was the Opposition Leader, walked this country and when into the regions, citizens complained heavily to him of a very important matter. While they had no birth certificate and those senior citizens, who I am hearing that the people are talking about, that our colleagues are talking about here, that we took away subsidies, what have you found? They never seek to give those people no birth certificate that they could have got their identification card (ID) to get what belongs to them. The hundreds of birth certificates, which we have issued to persons, are just as a one-inch cube of ice in a five-gallon bucket of water. According to previous speaker, what you found missing and it is wrong, fix it. Yes, we are going to fix it, Hon. Member. What President Granger said to the residents then is that the birth certificate issue will be a thing of the past when we take office. We are working very strong on that. It is going to be a thing of the past indeed.

I was fortunate to see residents shed tears after trying years to receive an important document such as a birth certificate. Many persons were denied to have the opportunity to receive that. There would be persons who are saying I can now... [Mr. Nandlall: We are talking about Budget 2017.] Your colleagues were talking about it too... get marry; I can now get my children to get a good education because they have a birth certificate in their hand.

This important piece of document, which citizens would have received, may I say, it is only one part of the life where this Government prepare to give a good life to all Guyanese. All pensioners across this country have seen an increase in their old age pension and those who have collected public assistance are well satisfied with what is happening.

While we hear our Opposition colleagues, Members of Parliament, are saying this budget does not have anything for the ordinary citizens across the country. I do not think that they have read for themselves this budget document.

Under the theme *'Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering The Good Life To All Guyanese,'* not some, all Guyanese, this budget sets out to improve the life of every community in our country.

3.56 p.m.

Opportunities are there, within this budget... [An Hon. Member (Opposition): I hear nothing about training.] You read it for yourself, and you could see it. You did not hear anything about training. Yes, there are moneys there allocated for training. The economy and small-scale villages, Hon. Member of Parliament, yes, the village economy, would be strengthened. This budget has given that.

This budget set out to build on basic services for our economy and our communities, education, water and roads. Millions of dollars, this budget is prepared to give to our communities. Regional infrastructure, public works, this budget sets out to spend over \$50 million, in public works. Education Delivery, it is shown clearly, it is over a \$100 million and it all across the regions. Health care, this budget has clearly shown.

Under public infrastructure, moneys are there for the improvements of the lives and conditions of residents, the people from across the region and, more so, in the Mabaruma subregion. Public infrastructure sets out here to spend some money in our region, first by building capacity, by generating and transmitting and distribution of electricity. Coming out of this budget, we would see the first solar farm in the Mabaruma subregion of Region 1. The word "first" clearly tells us that there are more to come and this Government is committed to give all Guyanese a "good life". In Region 1 we would see that. This is in keeping with the Government programme of a green economy. This Government will improve on the quality and energy that the residents would have access to. This Government is prepared to set standards. We have also seen in this budget proposal of the completion of the hydropower station at Hosororo. I do not know how my colleagues are saying that they are not seeing anything in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, please permit me to quote a scripture. It is taken from Proverbs 22 verse seven and eight, 17, 18 and 19;

"7. The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

8. He that soweth iniquity will reap vanity: and the rod of his anger shall fail.
17. Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge.
18. For *it is* a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.
19. That thy trust may be in the LORD, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.”

This coalition Government would not oppress the Guyanese people. We, the people, in our region, stand to benefit from this budget, better access to road and drains. While roads play a very important part in community development, it would save finances; it will save and time. Out of Budget 2017, we would see completion of work. We would see work established in the Baramita community; we would see Yarowkabra receiving out of this budget; Barabina and the Port Kaituma in the Matarkai subregion. All of this are in Budget 2017. We would also benefit from this budget by having the rehabilitation to the stelling at Morawhanna, a stelling which was neglected for a number of years. Morawhanna is a port of entry. Rehabilitation work to this stelling is going to benefit us and we are going to save lives, money and operation effectiveness would be a thing of the past.

Telecommunication, it is there in this budget for us. We would see e-Governance and information communications technology (ICT) services to our regions. I would like to say a word of caution to my fellow Members of Parliament. Do not be an opposer for just opposing sake. Residents of Region 1 have a lot to benefit out of this budget.

I commend this budget to this honourable House for a free passage. [*Applause*]

**Ms. Veerasammy:** I have been told many times in my life, more than I can remember, that I think and feel too much. Ever since the 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 after listening to the Hon. Minister presenting the Budget 2017, a feeling of helplessness and disappointment gripped me. Sir, I cannot believe that I could have actually witnessed such heartlessness expressed through measures that increased hardships on our people. Since May 2015, to impose 130 tax measures, it is not a trivial matter. The day I was sworn in as a Member of this Parliament, I felt a great

sense of pride, but that was soon eclipsed because, on that very day, 11 taxes were imposed on this nation. It was 11 of a 130 taxes, which has nothing to do with what is being unfolded in front of us.

A Government that promised a “good life” for all in the 2015 Elections campaign reduced corporate tax from 30% to 28.5% in 2016 to stimulate economic growth. I am all for that. I am all for a good life for the people of my country. This is a good measure, but this same Government found it palatable to unleashed tax burdens on low income earners, single parents, the vulnerable and pensioners, driving them deeper into the abyss of poverty. I am not an economist, but I am not ignorant of the frivolous and insincere statements made in this august House that are wreacked with rhetoric.

After presenting its third budget, I would assume that the saying, “you were there for 23 years, why did not you do it?” This should have become an old scratched record. I am not one of those who cannot take criticism. On the contrary, the late, great Dr. Cheddi Jagan, former President of Guyana, taught me, one of his students, how to stand tall while criticisms flow towards me. For constructive criticisms make me develop and grow. It made me into the person I am today, but certainly not criticisms that are filled with ambiguities, misinformation and lies.

I have been asked in this House by many of my colleagues, how do you like it here? I said I hate the lies; I hate the innuendoes and I hate the fabrications. That statement reminds me of a marriage that gone bad, where one of the spouse continues to play the victim to generate sympathy. I must say people get tired of whining and griping, because they are not stupid, and we must not hold this nation as stupid people. I have walked the Caribbean and many countries in the world. I have found, particularly so, Guyanese are the most politically educated people in the entire Caribbean. I could vouch for that anytime. People watch, they observe and listen through these mediums and they formulate opinions.

The PPP/C Government of 23 years did it. It inherited a broken economy, malnourished people, citizenry whose life expectancy was in the fifties, and a medical system that killed people rather than save them, dilapidated infrastructures and worse, than all the above, a wage freeze. My God, I do not want to remember the foreign debt that took away almost 94 cents of every dollar and left little to buy food for our people. In the face of all of this, a sound macroeconomic framework

with prudent fiscal and monetary policies resulted in better wages, stable exchange rates, reduced inflation and continuous economic growth for 23 years.

*4.11 p.m.*

Poverty, I lived it. I lived the first 28 years of my life under the People's National Congress (PNC) Government. We are not going to hide the PNC in the APNU/AFC coalition. I am not going to do that. All around, one could have seen disempowerment, depression due to high levels of unemployment and low income. The Integrated Household Income and Expenditure Survey with Living Standards to determine poverty in 1992 assisted by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank showed that the PPP/C Government inherited a country where almost 80% of our people lived in poverty, with 43% living below the poverty line and 29% living in extreme poverty. This was a survey that was done in 2000 that showed this reality in 1992. When APNU/AFC coalition inherited the economy from the PPP/C Government in 2015, Guyana was earning a gross domestic product (GDP) of 6,895.476 US dollar, almost three times larger than that of 1992.

Allow me to address what the 14% VAT imposition on water and electricity, and other items, including food and other basic amenities, will do to our people living in poverty and especially those living below the poverty line. Reducing VAT by 2% is one of APNU's campaign promises, but the way the Minister of Finance expects to recoup that 2% tax from the VAT is amazing. This imposition of 14% VAT on electricity and water is not a tax measure to be taken lightly. This tax measure is draconian. It intends to suck the blood out of poor people and it will only contribute to furthering their impoverishment. This 14% is not only limited to water and electricity, but as the weeks progress in front of us, we will hear about all the food items that the PPP/C Government put as zero-rated. We will hear about them that the same poor people would have to pay that 14% VAT.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) 2000 stated that approximately 50,000 families in Guyana are single parent families, most of whom are in the female single parent households. Most single parent women are unskilled low income earners who work as security guards, domestics or street corner sellers to take care of their families. The Hon. Minister proudly claimed in his budget presentation that low income workers' salary in the Guyana public service

increased to \$50,000 in 2015 and to \$55,000 in 2016 with a tax ceiling of \$60,000 dollars. Yes, I do give him credit for that. I do. How does he take this away back from the ordinary people? This is what is hurting, the feeling. If we are people with a heart, with a soul that actually, feel for the people out there who we claim to represent in here, then we will surely understand what they are going through.

Without VAT, people were complaining all the time about the high rates of electricity. They complained all the time. What will become of the mother who has five children and sells at the 'street corner' to make a living, when she does not have an accounting book or declare her earnings? What will become of her if she has no money in the bank for the Government through the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to siphon off? Is she going to go to jail?

This budget did not tell the woman who is a single mother how her impoverished state will improve. This budget did not tell her how she will be able to feed her children. This budget did not tell her how she will send her children to school, how she will pay her rent, but this budget told her that 14% will be imposed on her utility bills and the food items she will have to buy to feed her children. She is already subsidising Guyana Power and Light (GPL) by buying candles and kerosene oil for her lamps because of the never ending blackouts. She is already subsidising Guyana Water Inc. (GWI) by buying purified water for her family to drink. How is she going to survive, Sir? This is what I would have like the Hon. Minister to explain to this nation.

I have too much respect for women and for myself to ask the Hon. Minister what does he expect a woman to do to increase her income to support her family and pay her bills. I can ask him to find out from his executive why it increased the tax burdens on poor people. I can implore him to appeal to his executive to revisit these measures that impose financial burdens on the poor and unprivileged, and to revise these measures or remove them.

My life's work in politics is dedicated to the struggles for women's empowerment and I am not one for rhetoric. I am speaking to the fact that women accounts for more than 50% of this population. Where poverty exists, women are always the poorest. That means, that since poverty exists in Guyana, women and girls are the poorest, women and girls are the most vulnerable. How come, this Budget 2017 makes me feel so disgusted? Where has the women's element gone from the budget? The struggle for gender equality and gender equity has been a long difficult

one, and the day it takes a top place in the national agenda, it will be a dream comes through for me and all women's advocates beginning with the late great Janet Jagan, the late President of Guyana, and the woman who introduced Guyanese women to politics.

This budget is utopian and we are all aware that utopia is a dream that is not reality. While we all want the utopia, this budget lacks what it takes to fulfil people's dreams. I am working with the Hon. Volda Lawrence and I do respect what she aims to do for underprivileged people, troubled children, the elderly, especially women, but this budget puts her in a predicament. How will she be able to empower women economically and bring them out of poverty? How, when this budget is an economic disaster? I pray that God grant her a magic wand to appease the woes this budget has unleashed on our people.

Where is the funding to increase the knowledge and the skills of single parent women and vulnerable girls? Where is the funding to build the capacity of women and girls for political participation in governance? How does the Minister intend to ensure that the leadership capacity of women is built so that they can influence decisions that affect their lives so that they can change the power dynamics in their family, at their workplace, in the community in their favour? I ask the Minister of Finance, how will he provide the answer to this? If this Government really wants to provide a good life for all, why is it bent on pushing this grouping over the margin of society into deeper poverty? Can this be explained?

The people of Guyana are so scared, so insecure and so frustrated. They feel the contraction of the economy; they feel the brunt of the economic depression this country is going through. They are living it. They are not getting jobs, the construction industry has collapsed, sugar workers are living under the daily threat that the sugar industry will be shut down and tens of thousands of them will be out of jobs. The rice industry is struggling as it has not in over 20 years. A "good life", for whom? I personally want a "good life".

Since Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2016 this nation is gripped in fear - fear of economic doom; fear of going back to the 1980s. Well, I lived the 1980s and I will not sit idly by and allow myself to go back there – not at all. I was there with my parents. This time I have children and I will never allow them to go where I was and where I have emerged from. I struggled for the restoration of democracy in 1992, so that our people would not have to go through such hardships ever again. I

sacrificed to ensure that economic policies had a human face and people would be given the opportunity to improve their lives. If you mean that you really want a good life for all, Mr. Minister, then this budget has to include people in it. It must include people in it.

The coalition made many promises on its campaign trail. His Excellency said that sugar was too big to fail, yet the Hon. Minister said eight days ago that investing in sugar is a waste of time. If he had empathy in his heart he probably would have found a better language to tell the sugar workers that statement. I was saddened because sugar grew me up, sugar educated me. The executive found only \$9 billion to invest in the sugar industry, but it has been giving tax write-offs and promising tax free holidays to investors. Do not forget financial settlements and tax write-offs during 2016. Sugar, is part of Guyana's soul.

Rice farmers were promised \$9,000 for a bag of paddy, now they are getting less than \$2,000 a bag. There are no new markets in sight to give hope to the rice industry. This has already resulted in rice production dropping by thousands of acres.

Free education was promised from nursery to university, now there is the threat of increased tuition fees hang over the head of students as a dark cloud at the University of Guyana. Yes, attempt was already made earlier this year to impose increased fees without consultation.

This trend of imposition is not a new one; it's an old trend in a new era.

The school grant was not a gimmick. It was not bribery either. Giving a \$10,000 dollars one-off grant per child to parents assisted them to purchase the much needed school items for their children to go to school. Giving the grants encouraged parents to keep their children in school. This is how the PPP/C Government encouraged people to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Strategic policy on education allowed Guyana to achieve universal primary education and Guyana was working towards achieving universal secondary education.

This is not a Government for all of Guyana. A government that is for all Guyana will never impose financial burdens on people and make them feel helpless. I therefore call on the coalition to fulfil its elaborate promises made at the 2015 Elections, because this budget is a slap in their face and it vindicated the PPP/C campaign of 2015 when we said to the people this is what is going to happen to you.

I cannot support this budget in its present form. This budget was openly condemned by every class, gender, age, ethnic group and the private sector. How can I support this budget when trade unions that represent the workers of this country, condemned it? How can I support this budget with the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) condemned it. I represent a constituency or more than 200,000 voting population and their families across Guyana.

This is the most financially burdensome, anti-developmental and anti-people budget that I have witnessed in present day democratic Guyana. I now have to focus on the ideological policies that charter such steep economic hardships on Guyanese.

*4.26 p.m.*

I am, once again, calling on the Hon. Minister of Finance to hear the cries of every sector of the Guyanese people and represent their objections to the Executive so that they can withdraw this Budget, revise it or remove the financial burdens imposed on our people. The coalition made a promise and they should fulfil it by making this Budget a people-oriented one. Give this Budget a human face. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

**Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection [Mr. Scott]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Comrades all, I begin by saying congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance and his team for the production of a wonderful Budget.

This is truly a Christmas Budget. It has brought a spirit of joy and happiness to the poor, the young, the old, the rich and to the business class. There can be no doubt that each person at each stratum of our society has been able to say and express satisfaction in the Budget after listening to the Minister of Finance. They were all able to see something good in the Budget for themselves. It has offered a gift to all sectors and has left the traditional prophets of doom with no ammunition to attack us but to resort to lies and distortions.

This is the greatest and largest Budget ever presented to this House since we became an independent nation. Its measures build on the previous two Budgets which were presented within the past 18 months, itself a record, and that record will not be easily surpassed. In fact, it places the nation on the road to financial and economic prosperity in a clearly measurable and immediate way that you can see exactly the benefits that are available; more so, the impact will

last for quite a long time into the future. It is a Budget that will sustain us as we feel reinvigorated and inspired to make our contributions to creating the good life for ourselves and future generations.

Let us look at the poor. When we won power, where were they? They were forgotten, uninvolved in the future of this country and made to feel that they were useless geriatrics to be discarded and treated with no respect. They received meagre handouts as economic relief and \$13,125 as old age pension, which, as you know, did not go a far way. In addition, our senior citizens were made to pay for transportation and other utilities. Upon assuming office, this APNU/AFC Government immediately set about correcting those inequalities. We gave them back their dignity; we honoured them. We involved them and allowed them a chance to play the role of elders to our youths. Today, they work with a renewed pride in Guyana and happily participate in national events.

We cannot afford to minimise our focus on our Budget's theme which, by now, is well known, that is: *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. To fulfil this agenda, a number of measures are outlined in the Budget. Prominent among these measures is the long awaited and highly anticipated tax reform which is very necessary to underpin the growth and expansion of the entire economy.

The extent to which the well-known tax avoidance and tax evasion have impacted on the economic growth in this country cannot be easily pinpointed but the harm which it contains and continues to inflict on the economy can no longer be tolerated.

The deliberately concocted schemes and programmes initiated by some sectors of our economy have not been helpful in the employment creation, particularly among the youths. We are conscious that full employment is an ideal which most nations have difficulty in achieving. We are not comfortable with our level of employment so far realised, hence the need for a tax reform system which will strengthen the tax base. It is uppermost in our minds. Unemployment is a function of underperformance, which is being carefully evaluated as we speak. We are committed to sound economic planning which must be driven by accurate and reliable data emanating from our statistical department which, in conjunction with the Bureau of Statistics, has submitted that the unemployment level for the year, thus far, is not comforting. Certainly, we

are not proud of that. More could have been achieved if the mischiefs of tax evasion and tax avoidance had not been so rampant.

As a matter of fact, way back in 2013, it was established by reputable sources that tax evasion was more rampant then than ever, and I would not say that it has eased in any way today. In an article which appeared in the *Kaieteur News* of 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 under the caption of *Tax Evasion more Rampant than ever*, the following heart-breaking point was made:

“The immorality of Guyana is that one set of people pays the taxes while another spends it.”

This Budget sets about meeting this scourge, head-on, by introducing a series of measures that will arrest this trend which will make more dollars available to the economy, thereby causing more jobs to be created for the benefit of all.

I need not remind this House that the level of unemployment which troubles us could have been much lower if there had been a more even distribution of income in the execution of our legal and moral responsibilities in the context of taxation, that is, the payment of the various taxes, including income tax, rates and taxes, company tax, *et cetera*.

At the commencement of this year, we had projected that, at the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency (CRMA) of the Ministry of Social Protection, we would have been able to fill in excess of 3,500 job vacancies, thereby expanding the ranks of the employed. Fortunately, we were able to achieve 89% by placing 3,122 persons in jobs. That is a step in the right direction as we continue to provide a good life for all.

This Budget provides for a reduction in inequalities through a more even tax regime and an increase in disposable income, which allows citizens to spend more and save more. In this regard, there is provision to increase the income tax threshold from \$660,000 to \$720,000 per annum. When we took office in 2015, the threshold was \$600,000 per annum, but, within these 18 months, we have effected a 20% increase. This provision, therefore, has a dual impact that a good life exists and that it will, at the same time, release more income to employees. At the same time, it results in the removal of 7,600 persons from the tax register. In both contexts, this is an

opportunity for the good life. It is also an opportunity for our people to measure the good life that they have been able to achieve.

Further, this Budget provides for a reduction in the personal income tax for another group of employees, those who earn less than \$180,000 per month or \$2.16 million per year. They would be required to pay 28% instead of 30% personal income tax. I am sure that this entire House would agree that these and other tax measures translate not only into a good life, but a much better life than they were accustomed to having before.

The restriction of mortgage interest relief to loans up to \$15 million is another measure which is designed to contribute to the good life for the poor persons. Its application will ensure that only low to middle income earners will benefit, as was initially intended. All of these are within the realm of individual benefits.

I must now direct our attention to the business and commercial sectors. For many years prior to the assumption of Office of the APNU/AFC Government, the manufacturing sector had prayed for a reduction in corporation tax, which they claimed was a disincentive to growth and development. We have become accustomed to hearing them asking for us to remove the tax or reduce the tax. Therefore, it gives me great pleasure to be able to reiterate that the prayers of the manufacturing sector have been answered with a reduction in the corporation tax from 30% to 27.5%. Such a reduction can certainly allow the manufacturers not only to become more competitive, but to even pay better wages to their employees and to facilitate better working conditions.

We have been hearing, for many years, people asking for a relief for manufacturing purposes. At the end of the year, their employees get the same money and then they declare a large profit. This time around, the Government has made efforts of reducing the tax so as to give them that opportunity for them to now pay their workers better.

It is projected that these measures will, in the end, result in the Government sacrificing \$752 million in taxes, but it is the opportunity for a good life to be seen.

*4.41 p.m.*

This country has had a lot of benefits since we have entered Office. We have been hearing all afternoon about the bloom and doom that has been given to this Budget and we have been asked where the big projects are. But, had they read the Budget, and I recommend that they read page 46, they would have seen that there have been a lot of benefits in terms of infrastructure: in terms of bridges that are going to be constructed; in terms of a better Airport and better roads. Each of these new projects - building of bridges and fixing the roads in the interior - represents employment opportunities because people have to be hired to have these projects executed.

The new measures of tender compliance for Government contracts are intended to make the proverbial level playing field more accessible to others in the procurement process. The NIS and the income tax compliance certificates, which are prerequisites for participation in the procurement process, are intended to encourage stakeholders to be more compliant with the relevant laws. There can be no NIS or income tax for working employers who are not conscious of their social responsibilities not only to the State, but to the society and the people. So, having the compliance certificate is a necessary part to make sure that what is already mandated by law is done. We are making sure that, before tender documents are gotten down the line, compliance must be attained. It is also necessary that a Government must be seen to govern. Hence, we may have to ensure that your taxes and NIS are up to date.

The automatic issuance of a temporary income tax and NIS compliance certificate is an indication that the Government is determined to make it easier to do business. During those three months of having the temporary certificates, participating bidders are given the opportunity to *put their houses in order*. This allows persons to bid while bringing themselves up to date. This also allows persons not to lose out. The other compliance certificates, that are inclusive of the trusted trader compliance certificate and the standard income tax and NIS compliance certificates, for nominal fees, are intended to improve transparency and to lead to a more equitable distribution of resources, as well as to make for good corporate citizenship.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to address the question of collective bargaining and wage increases in the public sector. In satisfaction of our promise, and I dare say commitment, as contained in our Manifesto, the APNU/AFC Administration restored collective bargaining in the public sector from the inception of this our first tour in office in 2015. Although the 2016 negotiation process is not yet concluded, we can report with much confidence that significant wage increases have

been awarded to public sector employees during these past 18 months. At the moment the minimum wage in the public sector stands at \$55,000 per month, which is significantly higher than the \$44,703 that we found when we took office – all of this within 18 months. And they did not have to resort to the imposition of an annual 5% increase.

Mr. Speaker, while the increase to the private sector employees is not part of the traditional budget presentation, with your permission, I would like to mention that, through the efforts of Government's involvement with the trade unions and the private sector in a tripartite togetherness, we were able to increase the private sector minimum wage from \$35,000 to \$44,200 per month effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2017.

In the maintenance of our philosophy of being a caring Government, the Budget provides for further assistance to our senior citizens. I think that, irrespective of what may be said by others out of disrespect for our senior citizens, it is time that we start to refer to their benefits as senior citizens pension and not old age pension. Until then, I wish to point out that this Budget enhances the good life of our senior citizens by increasing old age pension from \$13,125 to \$19,000 per month, realising a 45% increase since we took Office. Also, public assistance is being increased to \$7,500 per month. Never before in the history of this country has any pensioner been able to get, within 18 months, a 45% increase on what he was drawing. These direct monetary benefits are in addition to the improvement in the facilities provided by the State for their comfort and accommodation.

I wish to now direct our attention to labour administration, for which I bear direct responsibility. The Labour Department, which is responsible for the development and maintenance of a stable industrial relations climate, has functioned at a satisfactory level. Last year, I reported that a total of 1,833 complaints of unfair labour practices were lodged to our Department. But, as at the 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2016, the number of complaints stood at 1,331. If we were to extrapolate these numbers, the results would yield a reduction of 20.78%. This is due to the increase confidence that the wider society, inclusive of employers and employees, have bestowed on this Department.

It would be observed that, at paragraph 4.151 of the Hon. Minister of Finance's presentation to this House, the point is made that the Board of Industrial Training has expanded its vocational

training to the differently abled persons in an effort to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to realise their full potential and to make a contribution to the State of Guyana.

However, I wish to take this opportunity to highlight some of the achievements of the Board thus far. From a target of 1,500, a total of 1,402 persons are to be trained and certified by the end of this year. This gives a percentage of 93%, which is certainly commendable.

The Heavy Duty Equipment Operation (HDEO) Training Programme, which is managed by the Board of Industrial Training, has been extended to Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10. In collaboration with the Presidential Office on Youth Empowerment, 29 pardoned youths are being trained in Heavy Duty Equipment Operation. Acting in collaboration with the First Lady's Office, 23 persons in the Victoria Youth Development Initiative are being trained in the essentials of Information Technology (IT).

The expansive roles and functions of the Board of Industrial Training are too wide to discuss at this moment. But I am indeed proud to have it recorded that these achievements are all designed to ensure that our young people, youths and future leaders, are better prepared to take their rightful places in society so that we can help them enjoy a better life not only for themselves, but also for all succeeding generations. In this regard, I am compelled to refer to paragraph 4.142 of the Budget Presentation under the rubric of "Our Youth, Our Future". Therein, it is stated that 20% of our population are positioned within this vital demographic group. The Hon. Minister of Finance said:

"With the right knowledge and skills, our youth can become self-dependent, contributing to an expansion in the gross domestic product and household incomes while reducing unemployment."

To adhere to such a noble goal, the Budget outlines four brilliant measures:

"These include:

- i. The Youth Entrepreneur Skills Training (YEST) programme;
- ii. The Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) initiative which has been allocated \$100 million in 2017;

- iii. The Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) which has been allocated \$991 million for 2017; and
- iv. The Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) platform for certified training for out-of-school youth.”

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

**Mr. Scott:** This impact on youths in our Republic will be felt well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I will look now at the Co-operative Department. On the last occasion, I indicated that the Co-operative Department was disgracefully stifled, but, in the new dispensation, we are determined to reverse that shameful situation and place it where it rightfully belongs. That position is now to make sure that it is pivotal in a *trisectoral* economy. We have begun the process by conducting a thorough examination of the function of the status of co-operatives in the country. We have so far revealed 1,268 co-operative societies in the register; about 8% is functioning in a safe manner; 27% is retrievable and can be saved. That is part of our mission. The co-operative has a role to play in helping the GDP. We have gone across the country meeting co-operative societies and people and educating them as to the way forward. In the wider scheme of things, we have established a Task Force which is in the process of developing a white paper which is about to finish. We have many issues with the co-operatives but I can assure you that we have that under control. I wish to point out, however, that the thrift societies and credit unions have an important role to play. They all fall also within the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) regulations. We are aware of the role that co-operatives played in money laundering in the past. This time around, we have people who are being trained to see that this does not happen.

In summary, therefore, I submit that this Budget is really a good one. And we are very proud to say that the vision that Minister Jordan has displayed shall be growing and taking our country further along the way as never before. I commend the Budget and I thank you. [*Applause*]

4.56 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we are at the point where, in five minutes, we could take the suspension. No speaker will speak for five minutes. I suggest that we take the suspension now. This suspension will be from 5.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. We will return here at 6.00 p.m. to continue.

*Sitting suspended at 4.57 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 6.05 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** The sitting is resumed. The next speaker is the Hon. Gillian Burton-Persaud. You have the floor, Madam.

**Ms. Persaud:** Mr. Speaker, as I was preparing my presentation, I could not help but reflect that, over the decades, there have been many Budgets laid in this National Assembly. We have Budgets passed, Budget present and budgets yet to come. In more recent times, we have had the Budgets of the Tenth Parliament tabled under the PPP/C Administration, which were criticised and the allocations cut by this Government while on this side of the House, despite the fact that those Budgets were aimed at affording the nation a better and productive life. Some of those projects that were cut were: the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, the Speciality Hospital and the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) Expansion Programme.

Since coming into Government, this Administration has tabled three Budgets to date in this National Assembly. Budget 2015 was themed, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. Budget 2016 was themed, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. Now, Budget 2017 is themed, *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to all Guyanese*. One will notice that the emphasis is on the good life, something that seems a little farfetched with the tabling of this Budget of 2017.

The Minister of Finance applauded the Coalition Government for having been able to bring three Budgets to the National Assembly in 18 months, and also for this Budget being the earliest over the last four decades, which is 40 years. But, having examined this Budget, I see nothing to smile about. I would rather suspect that, in the interest of making history, very little consideration was given to the Budget's effect on the nation on its passing. In fact, this Budget is reflective of the old Creolese saying, "*It too mekcase, mekcase.*" We are told that, prior to its drafting, consultations were held with various stakeholders, including the trade unions, the elderly and the

private sector. Based on that statement, I would like to know who the representatives of those consulted sectors were. And one must contend that, if this Budget is reflective of the recommendations therein, are we to believe that these agencies sought to self-inflict hardships and poverty on themselves? I would rather not think so.

This Budget is an indictment on the lives of the Guyanese people. It offers nothing of a good life. Instead, it seeks to keep the ordinary person in his or her place. It is saying to the ordinary person, “Know your place; prosperity, success and the good life are not meant for you.”

This Budget is disrespectful to every citizen in this land, especially the workers. It is a known fact that, at budget time, the workers look forward to something tangible in it for them, and they have every right to. After all, they are the ones who keep the wheels of industry turning. They are the ones whose hard labour allows us to look good, feel good, live good and enjoy the good life. They are the ones who provide us with the good life. They are the ones who, by their innovative ideas, will offer the fresh approach to the good life. They are the ones who, by their dedication, will stimulate growth. They are the ones who, by their hard work, will build the diversified green economy. In short, the workers of this country are the ones who will deliver the good life. What do they get for that? They get promises of a 20% salary increase, ridiculed by being called lethargic, and poverty by an imposed high cost of living and heavy taxation. That is the thanks the workers of this country get for their contributions to our country’s development.

The Labour Movement in Guyana and its leaders have been disrespected to the max. In the Budget, it is stated that Government upholds the principles of the collective bargaining process. How could this be when this very Government disregards the Guyana Public Service Union’s rejection of the recent offer for salary increases and went ahead and imposes its offer? This imposition is verified by the statement mentioned in this Budget, that the Government upheld its promise to allow the collective bargaining process to function in setting wage and salary increases for public servants following extensive negotiations with the Union in which no agreement was reached. Somebody missed the memorandum on the process of collective bargaining. You cannot claim to uphold these principles when you have an imposition coming out of an incomplete negotiation. This is ruthless and backward thinking but this is what happens when you disrespect the structure of the tripartite process, which is Government, employer and labour.

Labour is one of the pillars of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Tripartite Mechanism and not social protection. It is labour and anything else after. This Government has stripped labour of its rightful position in its governance by demoting it from a Ministry to a Department within another Ministry, have it managed by a junior Minister and, further, its functions and responsibilities not being listed under a designated Minister in the *Official Gazette*. That is something never heard of before in the history of this country. This is indeed a fresh approach to democracy and inclusiveness.

The issues of the Labour Movement are many. The Department of Labour has boasted of solving 300 cases in 2016. My question is, how many of that 300 have been major issues? They are very few, if any at all. The way the Government treats labour with discontent creates the environment for employers to be disrespectful and unmindful of their actions to both Government and Union when sanctioned. The most recent evidence of this is related to the Bauxite Company of Guyana Incorporated (RUSAL) issue when the Company was a no-show at a recent meeting called by the Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection. This is a typical example of, *do unto others as you would have done unto you*.

The Speaker before me stated that this is a Christmas budget, a gift to all sectors. I hasten to tell the Hon. Member that, instead of Santa Claus with the sweets and goodies, the Grinch of Christmas will leave bricks and stones under the Christmas trees. It is the greatest and largest Budget, as he said; indeed it is, as it relates to untold hardships and suffering to our people.

The sugar industry and its workers continue to bear the brunt of this Government's abuse and disregard. What have they done to deserve this? The most recent attack was made by way of a statement in this Budget to which many of my Colleagues who spoke before me have referred. It was stated that, at this current time, any investment in sugar is a waste of money. This industry that has kept Guyana alive over the decades by being one of the greatest revenue earners is today cast aside like an old boots. Why? It is because it has fallen into the hands of those who lack the vision and are complacent in their attitude to formulate a fresh approach to the continued, productive role this industry can play in building a diversified, green economy.

There are many by-products that can be had from sugar that will contain it as a revenue earner. Ethanol, for one, offers clean affordable and renewable transportation and cooking fuel; bio-

electricity, where the biomass can be converted to electricity; bio-plastic, which is used to manufacture beverage containers and food packages, and other consumer products made from sugarcane using less or no oil compared to standard plastic; bio-hydrocarbons, which is used by scientists to produce fuel that replaces gasoline, diesel and jet fuel without needing petroleum; citric and ascorbic acids and many more. The sugar industry can play a meaningful role in our country's development and sustainability. We have a right, in the interest of preserving jobs and, at the same time, creating new ones, to make this happen. Failure to do so would be counterproductive, put thousands of workers on the breadline, and put families at risk.

We continually hear, in this National Assembly, that the Opposition, when it was in Government, should have done this or that for the sugar industry. I want to say to the Hon. Members on the other side of the House, do not look back at what should have been done. You have the opportunity now to do it; do it and make a difference. If we are talking about greening the economy, GuySuCo is the answer; let us use it and not lose it.

This Budget promises to do the following: encourage and support entrepreneurship; create more job opportunities; increase the focus on innovation so as to increase domestic production and boost export; move towards a smart Guyana that bridges the digital divide; reform business facilitation and expand economic horizons; lift the quality of life; address poverty; improve economic performance; and define a sustainable pathway to the happiness and prosperity of Guyana. Part of that final statement comes out of the National Pledge of Guyana. However, when we view all the various taxes and VAT on products and services, there is no way, in all fairness, that any of these can be realised. All these projections will be affected in one way or the other. What we are assured of is that the cost of living will go up. Life in Guyana will become hard and peoples' lifestyles will change for the worst. This is not trying to sound like a prophet of doom, but it is the reality we face *via* this Budget. Some of these hardships will come through the various taxes and VAT implementation on products and services.

As we continue to speak about the hardships, we are hearing from the other side of the House that we are making up things; we are complaining and we need to stop complaining. But we represent the people of this country who are experiencing the hardships from this Budget. I want to ask Members of the other side of the House, since this Budget 2017 was read last Monday, how many of them went on the road to the shops, to the stores, spoke with the people, sat with

them and asked them how they felt. If you went to the people who told you that they have no problem with the Budget, you were speaking to people who do not live in Guyana and have no business in Guyana. Even the school children are wondering how the Budget will affect them buying sweets, *puri*, chicken foot, snow-cone and their juices.

6.19 p.m.

They are asking those questions and I am not standing here to make up these issues. These are everyday issues that when one goes out there one will hear about it. Get up out of your offices and go and do the analysis; this is seriousness.

As we know the poem that one of our Guyanese students would normally say and the Members on that side of the House are very *au fait* with – *Time for seriousness come*. Stop playing with people's livelihood. I know the feelings and what will happen to those people because I am one of those ordinary citizens who lives out there and expect to have the good life, and the good life is not coming our way.

You on the other side of the House, as Hon. Members, are having the good life. You are enjoying the good life with the increases in your salaries, with the increases in your allowances and with all the added benefits that you have. What are you giving to the workers and the people of this country?

We have heard throughout the day about the increase in the threshold; we have heard about the decrease in the Pay As You Earn (PAYE). But when it is looked at in dollars and cents, you are giving the workers with one hand and you are taking back with the other.

The restriction on used tyres - the importation of used tyres for motor cars, vans, pickups, sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and mini-buses, will be restricted from entering Guyana, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2017. This means that the middle and low income earning citizens and, more so, our youths will no longer be able to own a vehicle. So we can say to the banks and to the "Deal on Wheels" promotion, goodbye. The vehicles described above, which are imported into Guyana after 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2017, will be required to be fitted with new tyres, including the spare. This will have a cost effect on transportation and spare parts, which will be compounded by the cost for the parking meters in Georgetown. What are we saying to the young people in this country? We

are saying to them that they have to have X amount of money before they can own a vehicle. We are saying to them that they have to wait their turns. I could remember hearing in this National Assembly that young people have to learn to wait their turns. So, you are telling them to learn to wait their turn for prosperity, success and the good life.

The imposition of an environmental levy of \$10 per unit on the importers and local manufacturers of products using non-returnable metal, plastic or glass containers of any alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverage, will have a rise in the cost of beverages such as juices, health drinks and supplements, which must be used by children, the sick and the elderly. And then we are hearing about caring for the elderly and allowing them to have the good life. There will be an add-on on all of these products.

In our schools, our education system, our day care centres and in the aftercare, where it is specified that children must be given juices and not aerated drinks and that there are certain beverages and snacks that they have to use. When the takings are cut from the parents' salaries, when they have to pay VAT and taxes on all these things, the add-on on these items will have a cost on the pockets and purses of these parents and many of them are single mothers. Sometimes, when we speak, we hear the snickering on the other side, but who feels it knows it. If you have never lived it then you would not know it.

VAT on electricity consumption - VAT of 14% on electricity consumption in excess of \$10,000 per month will be applied to the full amount, once consumption exceeds \$10,000. This cost will affect those households that have many electrical appliances, which include computers, laptops, printers and other communication devices that are used to assist both adults and youths, in their various assignments.

VAT on water consumption – This will have an effect on those persons who live in areas that require them to use water tanks and those who are involved in manufacturing on a small or medium scale, such as food and local beverages vendors. It will have a cost effect on those athletes and persons who engage in swimming activities at pools. The price to use the pools will be increased.

The cost for Taxpayers Identification Number (TIN) certificates - A fee of \$1,000 for the first TIN certificate and \$5,000 for the reprinting of TIN certificates. The concern here is why a

reprint should cost \$4,000 more than a new one? To my mind, it is the same information, using the same material and method of retrieving the information and printing. This is high class robbery and corruption.

The new tax measures, along with the current ones, will, in no way, encourage entrepreneurship, business expansion and promote an enhanced family life. One may hasten to say that public servants have benefitted from wage and salary increases, the heightening of the income tax threshold and the reduction on PAYE. However, at the end of the day, they are faced with the increases in various costs that will make those increases and decreases melt away. Parents, especially single mothers, will be hard-put to fill the lunch kits of their children with the required nutritional meals and snacks. Families with sick or elderly members will also be hard-put to provide them with items that they may especially require. It is a known fact that increases in commodities has a trickle-down effect.

It is mentioned in the budget that the importance of buying local cannot be over-emphasised, as it is vital for the expansion of our local manufacturing industries. How will these local industries expand, when they are faced with so many taxes, VAT on goods and services, fines and penalties for non-adherence and consumers who no longer have the purchasing power? Who are we fooling? The *Buy Local* theme is reflective of the 70s and 80s when the call to buy local was endorsed with the banning of many imported items. Buying local and producing local is good, but it must be encouraged with the right supportive mechanism, which is not reflected in this budget.

I also hasten to speak to the fact that when my Colleague, the Hon. Mr. Joseph Hamilton, was making his presentation, he spoke of the budget being murderous, and the Hon. Mr. Charrandass Persaud, in his presentation, was wondering what the Hon. Member was implying by murderous. As a woman, let me tell you what the Hon. Member meant by murderous. The Hon. Member was not threatening anyone, he was simply stating a fact that because of the cost of living, persons' tempers would trigger and tempers will flare. It is a known fact that, when the pockets have a decrease, the house has an increase in situations and then they escalate into domestic violence and that is where murderous comes in. Let me explain it to the Hon. Member because I have been there, done that, lived it and know it.

On 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1993, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the late President said:

“We did not come into Government to have glory, big names, to make big money and to live in high style. We came into Government with the help of the working people in this country to see that we have real development to build a new democratic culture, not to have one person live at the expense of others but an ethic based on humanity and high moral content.”

Budget 2017 seeks to focus on ICT and its importance to Guyana. Yes, this is so but, again, how can we achieve these high-end goals, when participation by the ordinary man is hindered, once again, by the cost inflation brought on by heavy tax measures. Whenever ICT is mentioned, collectively, electricity is mentioned. Now, how will we advance the bridging of the digital divide when consumers are saddled with 14% VAT cost on their electricity bills of over \$10,000? This is totally impossible.

The budget mentions the involvement of youths in ICT, forgetting that, for their roles to be meaningful, they must have access to steady and affordable electricity. They are already plagued with long and constant electricity disruption that gets them into a frenzy. It does not only disrupt their work flow, but their active involvement on social media and this is their lives. They live and breathe social media and when they cannot have access to it, it is like taking their breath away, they literally stop breathing. Now, to compound that with increased electricity costs and VAT on data services billings, it is like banishing them to the land that time forgot.

Our intentions and actions must be consistent, if indeed, as it is stated in the budget, we are to consolidate and streamline the gains made to develop and legitimise ICT as a dynamic sector. A sector that can meaningfully contribute to diversified economic growth, labour productivity, employment creation, and an improved quality of life. We cannot speak of Smart Guyana being a revolutionary approach aimed at incorporating ICT into every sector of our economy and into every facet of our daily lives, of it being utilised to connect all sectors of the economy and expand the communication networks, which will include eCommerce, eHealth, eEducation, eAgriculture, and technology for public security, and do not have the back requisites to make it happen. In that case, it will be like putting the horse before the cart and, in this case, if the cart has a name and number printed on it, one has to pay a tax.

The liberalising of the telecommunications sector is great. Indeed, if the right policies are in place it will take its important place in the advancement of ICT. But with a slow 4G system, an inconsistent internet service and now being burdened with taxes, which include that for data services, one is hard-put to imagine how stabilised this sector will be. Telephone services, both land and mobile, have become a way of life for Guyanese but we must...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

**Ms. Persaud:** Hence, it must be accessible and affordable to all whether we live on the coastland, the riverain areas or in the hinterlands. We cannot dismiss the fact that the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) Project was the initiating tool that forged the way for the bridging of the digital divide in Guyana. Let us not forget that it is the now Leader of the Opposition, the then President, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, who made this vision a reality. To him we owe heartfelt thanks and gratitude. When we speak of youths in ICT, the One Laptop Per Family Project led the way by the employment of many skilled professionals and unskilled youths. So it is fitting to say that once again, the PPP Administration led the way for others to follow.

Tourism - Our tourism industry needs an injection of hope, vision and innovation. Budget after budget we hear about investment in enhancing the quality of service, generating increased employment in the sector and improving tourism's contribution to economic growth. What we are not hearing is what will be done to maximise, develop and encourage local tourism. What investment will be made to ensure that locally based Guyanese, our public servants, participate in this adventure?

Charity begins at home, even though it does not end there. Guyanese at home have a right and no pains must be spared to ensure that the chance is made possible for them to experience the majestic and awesome natural beauty of our homeland. It is sad to think that many have visas and have visited other countries, but have never even been to one of our other regions.

I am at my wits' end trying to imagine who the crafters of this budget are. It is wickedness in high places when one comes to think about it.

*6.34 p.m.*

We talk of affording people a fresh approach to the good life that will stimulates, beckons, offer diversity and will be delivered. Yet, in the same vein we take away their ability and the opportunity to participate and enjoy this good life.

The Old Age Pensioners have been given a meagre increase that they are now straddled with, not only the withdrawal of the subsidies on water and electricity, but they too now have to pay 14% VAT on these very utilities. What a shame and, yet, it is stated that the budget measures, that would be put in place, will ensure that elderly persons are respected, treated fairly and with dignity, and that they will live productive lives. Such measures, as no fees for drivers' licences and passports send one message. Get a drivers' licence and go have a merry time amongst the heavy and unruly traffic and the chance of being killed by a mad and speeding motorist or get a passport a *fly out* to another land. Oh, what a tangled web we weave.

It is stated that this budget boldly set out the plans for the future, while simultaneously trying to tackle present day issues and concerns of the population. It also states that Government proposes programmes that seek to advance our people into a digital society, and harness the skills and talents of our youth, men and women for the future. Also, to reignite economic growth, while tackling poverty to create a wider economic space and set the stage for Guyana to present itself to the world as a place to do business.

I would like to know whether any of the Hon. Members on that side of the House have taken the realities of this into consideration.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, one must wrap up now.

**Ms. Persaud:** Yes. I am wrapping up now, Mr. Speaker. If they did go out and do an analysis, they would have come here today, not to debate this budget, but to heed the call of the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw it and to let us, as a conscious and caring team of legislators, sit and fashion a budget that would, in all sincerity, address the needs and concerns of our people. Failure to do so is a signal that we are strapped by a Government who preaches one thing and certainly does another.

Budget 2017 comes like a starving dinosaur after the livelihood of the Guyanese nation. Like it is stated, it is an early budget, one that comes just before the Christmas season. Hence, this Budget

2017 can be seen as the Grinch of Christmas. Like a thief in the night it has come to steal and destroy the existence of our people. Therefore, at midnight, on New Year's Eve we must wish each other a merciful New Year.

With the passing of this budget, come January 2017 and thereafter, may the Lord have mercy on our souls.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Rutherford:** Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I rise to give my support to Budget 2017 as presented in this honourable House on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of November 2016. Let me say from the onset that I recommend its passage and take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Mr. Winston Jordan, and his star-studded team for a job well done.

It is my belief that Budget 2017, under the apt theme: *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*, will build on Budgets 2015 and 2016 and aid in the positive transformation of this our beloved country.

This budget attracted much consultation, as has been the norm with our coalition Government. We lead, govern and execute by consultation. However, as is always the norm with the PPP, the minority Opposition refused to, on behalf of its depleting sprinkle of supporters, to engage the growing coalition majority in budget talks.

What is this saying, Mr. Speaker? It says:

- (i) Dialogue on budget is beyond the PPP;
- (ii) They are irresponsible even in opposition;
- (iii) The good life to all Guyanese is something they are adverse to;
- (iv) If they participate, it will be difficult to paint the gloom and doom picture in the debate;
- (v) The Hon. Members do not support a timely budget presentation;
- (vi) The PPP do not believe in budget presentations with consultation.

We are serious about Guyana's development and thus, the 32 nay sayers will not alter our progress. They will not stymie our efforts at coalition. They will not distract us from transforming our known potential to possibilities.

I pause to comment on two of the Hon. Members' of the Opposition speeches. I have nothing much to say on the previous speaker, since she regaled us with lots of talks, but nothing of substance. However, the Hon. Ms. Priya Manickchand, perhaps, the worst Minister of Education in the history of this country was very emotional in her speech about the plight of parents, worried about whether children were using too much water in brushing their teeth and about the VAT that the water would attract. She has lost the bigger picture. Money on education in this budget has climbed to \$43.1 billion or 17.2%. I would like to refer her to pages 60 and 61, where she could be educated on this development in education.

We have had many challenges since May 2015. The challenges were greater than expected, but we, as a Government, have used Budget 2015 to stabilise our economy as we made good of our 100-day promises.

Fittingly, we use Budget 2016, to retool a false economy and lay the foundation for the 2017 budget, while restoring confidence and pride in our people, that this Republic would be governed in a democratic way.

Our will to have Local Government Elections held and to organise and celebrate the 50th Independence Anniversary with passion, togetherness and patriotism, demonstrated this. We have had some evidence of the corruption and mismanagement, but the proportion surprised us. We saw vessels limping, but never realised that they were about to grind to a halt. We saw political stooges that were neither eligible nor suitable in key positions, but when we assumed office, we realised that they were worse than *square pegs in round holes*. We are serious about the quality of staff in our public service and that is why we have created the Public Service Training College, which will, in due course, feed our public service with a competent work force to drive this country forward.

We inherited sugar dying and rice sleeping, but we are committed to making optimum use of our blessed arable lands by strategic realignment of these sectors, by diversification, improved methods and varieties, among others initiatives.

We inherited a collapsed public infrastructure, embarrassing roads in the city and the East Bank and East Coast Road Projects were managed poorly and more designed to be *milking cows*. Our hinterland roads stymied development and investments, while creating undue hardships for our citizens inland. We have started to address these, since the President's vision is to have our hinterland communities with the same services and opportunities as coast landers. Citizens of Kwakwani, Ituni and the Berbice River, can now boast of reduced travelling time, with loggers and miners having minimum repairs and maintenance costs, due to the much improved *rideability* on the Linden-Ituni/Kwakwani road and the Mahdia/Lethem road.

We understand the low confidence our citizens have in our education, public infrastructure, public health and in the public security sectors. That is why, Budget 2017 has aligned and re-focused our priorities. It should be observed that, education, public health, public infrastructure and public security have all been given increased allocations to match this focus.

Education has moved from 16.65% in 2015 to a proposed 17.2% in 2017; public health has moved from 11.5% in 2015 to a proposed 12.5% in 2017; public infrastructure has moved from 7.6% in 2015 to a proposed whopping 14.9% in 2017; and public security has moved from 11% in 2015 to a proposed 11.6% in 2017.

The spending in these sectors will not only fulfil our green agenda, as advocated by His Excellency, President David Granger, but it will enable sustainable development, provide the good life and achieve many of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

As outlined in the Budget Presentation, on page 19, paragraph 4.10:

“To create an overarching framework to guide the management of our biodiversity and chart a course for national development, the Government will embark on the design of a Green State Development Plan, with support from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The plan will serve as the template to guide the rapid transformation of our economy, reorienting the structure of Guyana's production base and promoting diversification to reduce the reliance on the ailing traditional sectors. These efforts will lay the path to eliminating our dependency on fossil fuels and moving us closer to the target of 100 per cent renewable energy supply by 2025.”

Every citizen with a conscience is proud of the work of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and can expect much more in 2017, with the proposed \$37.2 billion. They will not be disappointed. Permit me to mention a few of those projects for 2017:

- (i) Design and construction of bypass road from Ogle to Diamond which will result in reduced travelling time and congestion;
- (ii) Acquisition of Barge and other vessels which will improve access and operational efficiency;
- (iii) Country wide construction, repairs and rehabilitation of bridges, roads and drains;
- (iv) Pedestrian overhead crossing;
- (v) Improvement of the Highway from Better Hope to Belfield;
- (vi) Rehabilitation of critical sections of the East Bank, West Bank, Canals 1 and 2, and Sosesdyke /Linden Highway;
- (vii) Maintenance of the Linden-Ituni/ Kwakwani fair-weather road;
- (viii) Construction of all-weather road from Linden to Mabura on the Linden to Lethem road;
- (ix) Bridging of the Essequibo River at Kuribiru;
- (x) Design and construction of water front facilities including board walk from Ogle to Kingston to Stabroek and Vreed-en-hoop.

These are just 10 of the countless projects that will serve us without prejudice.

What must be admired is that, in presenting the largest budget of \$250 billion, with an increase revenue allocation, inclusive of a \$12 billion tax revenue increase, from \$150 billion to \$162 billion, key cohorts such as worker and businesses were not adversely affected.

In fact, these two groups benefitted since each and every single worker will take home more. The manufacturing business tax was reduced from 30% to 27.5%. These two measures are likely to have a significant impact on our economy. The first will cause workers to have more disposable

income to plough back into the economy, while the latter is likely to inject new life into our manufacturing sector, which in turn will create employment, reduce imports and increase exports.

A cursory glance at few of the focus areas in the budget will convince anyone that, at the end of 2017, we as a country will be in a better position — we would have progressed. Budget 2017 will cause infrastructural and curriculum improvements at our national university, a much neglected institution under the previous Administration's reign. Budget 2017 will also strengthen the important technical institutions with a dormitory being built in Linden, and the building of a new technical institute, while paying attention to the technical institutes' curriculum.

Importantly, the National Accreditation Council will receive a much needed budget allocation, since it is, particularly, important that our training institutions document what they will deliver, deliver same and be accredited. The attention to our school's science laboratories and refocusing on music and other finer arts is music to the ears.

A study will be done to modernise our complex, but pivotal riverain transportation network. This will be augmented with the purchase of modern water taxis and the procurement of vessels.

I now turn my attention to my region which is Region 10. Significantly, in the 2016 Budget, \$43 million was spent on roads such as Chung Street, Gaskin Street in Kara Kara, the second access road in Amelia's Ward, Linden Foundation Secondary access road and the main access to Richmond Hill in Linden.

Additionally, the barge at Kwakwani was arrested from private ownership which was given by the PPP to the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) of Kwakwani and they are able to realise a total of \$300,000 each month. They recently did repairs to that barge and it is working, effectively, for the citizens of Kwakwani.

*6.49 p.m.*

Additionally, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure would have recently purchased a number of ladders from contractors in the Linden and Kwakwani area that would be used to do revetment work in the Kwakwani area.

My region, which is Region 10, is the mecca of Guyana - the communication hub, the gateway to our nation's wealth. Under this coalition Government, which Region 10 will ensure that it remains in office for a long time, this Government would fuel our economy to allow us to flourish and realise true potential through Budget 2017. We were adequately addressed for a total of \$2.9 billion, the Regional Administration and Finance Budget is \$270,768,000; the education budget \$1.8 billion; the health budget is \$640 million; and the public works budget is \$368 million. My region understands its agricultural potential and looks forward to agriculture being added to the present four programme heads. However, we are pleased that Budget 2017 has allocation for extension to the farms at Ebini and in other areas, construction and rehabilitation of agriculture centres to improve data collection and construction of other climate stations. These and other drainage and irrigation revetment projects, through the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and the region's work budget, will give agriculture in Region 10 the necessary *impetus*.

Despite Guyana being a land of many waters and Region 10 being the main source of the country's aquifers, wide issues with potable water does not escape Region 10. That is why much attention will be placed on a substantive project in 2017. The Ituni water system would be upgraded and Kwakwani, through the Kwakwani Utilities Incorporated, will undertake a massive upgrade in quality, quantity and reliability of its service. Installation and repairs to the transmission distribution networks at the Blueberry Hill, One Mile Extension, Wisroc and Canvas City, will also be done. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure will rehabilitate the dilapidated West Watooka dock. Our long term goal is to have an all-weather road for the Linden, Ituni Kwakwani route, but in the interim emphasis will be placed on continued all-year maintenance.

The Ministry of Public Health will, through the 2017 Budget, rehabilitate the old Linden Hospital Complex to accommodate psychiatric, dialysis and chemotherapy services. The extension to Charles Rosa School of Nursing is most welcomed.

Despite much was done to better the accommodation for our staff at the Regional Office in Linden, we are committed to do more. That is why, out of a total project cost of \$262 million, the final sum of \$50 million is proposed for 2017. We have budgeted to spend \$8.5 million on

vehicles, boats and outboard engines under our Regional Administration and Finance Budget. This is to improve the transportation efficiency in our complex region.

Under public works, to improve access, \$11.39 million of a total project cost \$50.513 million is budgeted to complete the Industrial Area Bridge. Further on public works, \$76.2 million will be used to improve Clemfield Road, One Mile Access Road, Greenheart Street, David Rose Avenue and Daagard Avenue. Also under public works, \$46.5 million will be used to upgrade drainage system structures at Manni Street, Wismar Street, Ball Field and Henderson Road. Further under public works, improve access and drainage and irrigation will be the focus of \$25.3 million to do revetment, structures and the desilting of creeks at Hymara, Cockatara, Silverballi and West Watooka.

Finally, under public works, and with the focus of creating a substantive fleet of equipment and machinery, we will purchase one roller costing \$10.5 million next year.

Region 10 can boast of the best teacher/student ratio overall, despite the challenges in the riverine areas. We also boast of the best school athletics programme and the highest percentage of trained and graduate teachers. These achievements could only be attributed to the strong resolve of our people, coupled with the commitment of our teachers. To further enhance our education output and to improve our pupils, students and teachers accommodation, \$76.733 million of a total project cost of \$124 million is proposed, this year, for the completion of the Christiansburg and Linden Foundation Secondary Schools, and for the construction of nursery and primary schools at Bamia.

We are conscious of the need to better and monitor our education delivery and as such, the programme caters for the purchase of a vehicle for \$7 million. It is envisaged that this vehicle would add to the boat and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) in sub-region 2. A further \$13,600,000 to improve education delivery and education services is proposed to purchase among other items printers, computers and, most importantly, sports gears.

The health of our citizens is of paramount importance. That is why to complement the massive spending on the Ministry of Public Health, the region's health programme will, in 2017, use \$43.947 million of a projected cost of \$90.077 million for the completion of health centres at Wiruni, the construction of living quarters at Hururu, Ituni and Blueberry Hill, and the

construction of a reservoir at Upper Demerara Regional Hospital. We will continue to *beef up* our transportation fleet and health services in Region 10, with \$13.8 million budgeted to purchase motorcycles and an ambulance.

Finally, \$23.4 million is projected for furniture, inclusive of solar systems, trolleys, autoclaves, fire extinguishers, fogging machines, computers and other essential items.

These are about some of the measure associated timely budget allocation for 2017 that will realise our immediate vision of building a diversified green economy, delivering the good life to all Guyanese:

I conclude with a quote from Idowu Koyenikan who said:

“Your pride for your country should not come after your country becomes great; your country becomes great because of your pride in it.”

I urge us all to have pride in our country and be objective and support Budget 2017 as I do.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Gill:** I thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reoccurring theme used by the APNU Administration to promote the national budget since 2015 is *A Good Life*. In 2015, the theme was: *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. In 2016, it was modified to: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. Again, the 2017 national budget promises to deliver the Good Life for all. In 2016, the GDP grew by a mere 2.6%, nowhere close to the 4.4% predicted to stimulate growth. Consumer confidence was not restored. It was shattered because of scandals after scandals and the mismanagement of the economy. This Administration appears to have no economic plan to beckon in the good life now or anytime soon.

Let me now debunk this misconception that the Government calls the good life. Whoever came up with this slogan must have been familiar with the works of Adolf Hitler’s Minister of Propaganda, Dr. Joseph Goebbels. For he believed, that if you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and or military consequences

of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and, thus, by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy to the State. By repeating the good life over and over again, this Administration is cleverly, but deceptively, employing tactics once used, successfully, by Dr. Goebbels, to trick and deceive the nation that the life they live is indeed the good life. The Guyanese people are not so gullible anymore.

The good life is a term used to describe the life that one would like to live, a life abounding in material comforts and luxuries. The majority of Guyanese, unfortunately, are not living anywhere close to the good life. My Colleague, who spoke before me, the Hon. Mr. Rutherford, is from Region 10. Yet, he made no reference to the closure of Barama Company Limited and Bai Shan Lin Forest Development Inc., and the sufferings of the people with the loss of over 600 jobs. Logs are being cut, rotting and lying waste without sale. The recently re-introduced tolls imposed by the Town Council on the Soesdyke Linden Highway are now causing more distress for the people of that region. A good life is having job security and being able to take home a realistic liveable income.

Our youths are now better educated and better prepared to join the work force, yet unemployment is very high and despite promises, this government has repeatedly failed to create employment opportunities for the thousands of high school and university graduates now jobless. There is no relief from the private sector either. The collapse of public confidence in this Government is causing the private sector to get very nervous as many prefer to adopt *a wait and see approach* before investing and expanding their businesses to create employment.

In April 2015, a then APNU/AFC Presidential Candidate, Brigadier David Granger was asked at a forum at the Theatre Guild's Playhouse, "If your party is elected to serve the people of Guyana, what policies will your Administration implement to ensure that teachers, and other key public servants are properly compensated and motivated to perform their services?" Candidate, Brigadier Granger replied that teachers should be the best paid public servants, promising that under an APNU/AFC Government, teachers would be adequately compensated and appreciated for the important role they play in society. Sadly, after one year and several months in office, now President Granger has forgotten the promise made to those teachers, just like the ones he

made to other public servants, rice farmers and sugar workers on the campaign trail. Where is the good life for these hard-working Guyanese, Mr. Speaker?

A good life is having the financial resources to pay one's mortgage, rent or car payments when they become due. But the reality is, many home-owners are in default, and risk foreclosure by lending institutions. Similarly, many car-owners are struggling to prevent the banks from repossessing the vehicles they drive. Some are hustling to raise the money by working private-hire. This is not a good life.

*7.04 p.m.*

A good life is being able to afford to provide for your child with a good education rather than depending on Government's subsidies and handouts. Many single parents and poor families have no disposable income to even afford the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) registration fees that would provide their children with an opportunity for a secondary education, and a chance at a better life. Some are so desperate; children sometimes go to school hungry.

A "good life" is when you can afford to take your family on a vacation and to provide adequately for all their needs. Even the few families that could have afforded this will now find it very difficult to continue.

A new life is when women and young girls are no longer victims of human-trafficking, prostitution, and when prosperity replaces hopelessness to the poor and downtrodden.

A "good life" is when you can afford to leave security lights on at night to discourage bandits from breaking into your home, robbing you of your precious valuables and often your very life.

A "good life" is when young Guyanese no longer risk incarceration for smuggling cocaine and marijuana and can turn away from a career of crime, stealing cell phones and robbing businessmen. With the growing number of presidential pardons handed out to criminals on an annual basis, and with the Government's plan to aggressively target alternative sentences to reduce prison overcrowding, such as probation, community service, restitution and fines, I am afraid Guyanese can expect a further increase in the crime statistics in the new year. Even police officers are now frustrated by the revolving door crime policy of this Government, which

influences the jailed today, bailed tomorrow system now being practised in the courts as reported today in the *Kaieteur News* newspaper.

A “good life” is when policemen and women and civil servants no longer have to supplement their meagre salaries by taking bribes. I say give them the 20% increase that they deserve.

A “good life” is what the APNU/AFC Members of Government now enjoy. When, as a Minister, your salary ranges between \$800,000 and \$1.7 million every month and the struggling taxpayers of this country are burdened to pay for the luxury vehicles you drive and the gas you use; when they pay all your electricity bills, your water bills, your cell phone bills, your landline bills, pay for your security guards, your bodyguards, your maids, your gardeners, your cooks, your entertainment, your first-class travels and vacations, your medical bills and your gigantic pension, you can afford the “good life”.

Even so, it would appear that despite the hefty salaries and perks being given to Ministers of Government, this may not be enough for some. We in the Opposition will have to scrutinise this budget very carefully to ensure slush funds are not being created for illicit purposes. After all, general elections are not too far away.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, do you rise on a Point of Order?

**Minister of Communities [Mr. Bulkan]:** I rise on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40 (a). The Hon. Member is imputing improper motive. He said the salary of a Minister is not sufficient for some and they are seeking other ways to supplement that. I call on the Hon. Member to withdraw that information.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Gill, you may please continue.

**Mr. Gill:** A “good life” is when you can afford to take a shower more than once a day without having to think about the 14 % VAT that will now increase the rate you pay for electricity and water. What is most astonishing is that some of the same Ministers, who are enjoying the “good life”, are brazen enough to tell the Guyanese people that they must conserve on electricity and water to avoid paying the extra 14% VAT on those everyday necessities.

Minister Jordan, during a post budget press conference, explained that the 14% VAT on electricity and water should be seen as a conservation measures. Minister Bulkan, the mathematician, said he worked out the maths that would allow Guyanese to keep their water bills below \$1,500 a month. He said all that is required is that they must use 400 gallons of water every two and a half days to avoid paying the 14% tax. That is brilliant.

Prime Minister Nagamootoo said electricity is a scarce resource and Government is only trying to introduce a mechanism to ensure Guyanese are aware of that. He said, “While GPL may want to make money, it also has a national responsibility to ensure that people use electricity responsibly.” Perhaps the Hon. Prime Minister will want to use this persuasive argument to convince his coalition partners to finally end the \$2.1 billion in electricity subsidies budgeted for the PNC/APNU stronghold of Linden. The administration, I believe, would have been better off and less hypocritical if it had promised to deliver “a better life” as opposed to “good life.” For all they had to achieve was to ensure that, regardless of a person’s financial position and standard of living, Government’s policies and programmes contributed to improving their quality of life from what it was before, but the APNU Government has failed miserably to even accomplish this milestone.

The reality is that people are suffering in this country and supporters of the APNU and AFC are not excluded from being squeezed by the country’s economic woes. I invite my colleagues from the other side of this honourable House to solicit the views of market and roadside vendors, to determine whether they are enjoying the “good life” being touted by the APNU/AFC administration. Let them talk to their supporters in Linden, Buxton and the depressed community of Ithaca. I can assure you those diehard PNC supporters will no longer be fooled by this rhetoric, for they too are suffering because of the administration’s incompetence and mismanagement. That is a fact.

I implore my colleagues from across the aisle to talk to those sugar workers and the rice farmers they fooled during the campaign and it is to listen to how insecure they feel with their livelihood being threatened by the imminent demise of these industries. Long time PNC supporter and Editor in Chief of the *Kaieteur News*, Adam Harris, put it eloquent when he said:

“It is rather sad and unfortunate for some to think that the only thing left for the Government to tax is the air they breathe.”

Sir Winston Churchill once said:

“I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle.”

*Kaieteur News*, November 29:

“Citizens, who thought that the reduction of value added tax would have strengthened their chances of realizing “the good life” promised by the APNU/AFC government, were given a rude awakening after listening to the presentation of Budget 2017.”

“Peeping Tom” believes:

“It is not too late for the controversial budget measures to be dumped. It is not too late for pursuing measures which will save jobs in the forestry sector, restore the Venezuelan rice market, stimulate economic activity and place the sugar corporation woes in proper context.”

Even the Private Sector Commission warns that applying the 14% VAT on water and electricity would hurt the business community by driving up costs and forcing higher prices on consumers for mobile internet, private education, and health services. The Private Sector Commission is adamant that this budget will contribute to inflation. People will have to pay higher prices and it will inhibit growth in several business sectors. The cost of a car wash, bottled water, beverages and other manufactured goods will increase. Commuters will pay more for travelling because of the ban on used tyres. Consumer confidence will further erode and more talented Guyanese will flee these shores for greener pastures.

Budget 2017 is repressive. The VAT on electricity and water restricts the freedom of citizens to improve the quality of their lives. Now, they will have to think twice before turning on an air conditioner, a microwave, an electric iron or a washing machine. It is so much for the “good life.”

The budget itself does not stimulate growth and development; it does not create jobs; it allows the GRA to go into bank accounts of a delinquent taxpayer and garnish his savings without due process from the courts. This is very troubling and may even be unconstitutional. We will soon find out.

This “good life” being touted by the Government will always be just political rhetoric to the struggling working class, a bridge too far.

It seems all is not well in the APNU/AFC camp, as it relates to this budget, but do not expect to hear them admit this publicly.

Minister Broomes has built her reputation fighting for the rights of women in the mining industry. Under her presidency, the Guyana Women Miners Association has grown into a formidable force, empowering women in a sector dominated by men. How can the Hon. Minister not agree with the organisation she once headed that the Budget 2017, in its current form, spells doom for miners? With the added tax and the proposed 3% reduction in the gold-board price for gold, the association is adamant these actions by Government will result in lower declarations that will negatively affect the economy. Minister Broomes must address these concerns raised by the Guyana Women Miners Association and make her position known to them.

*7.19 p.m.*

This budget is much too burdensome on the population. It is a sure sign of a Government in distress. As my colleagues before urged, it must be amended or withdrawn. We need to be more creative in finding ways to grow the economy. Taxation is not the answer. As always, this Government gives with one hand and takes away much more with the next.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Ms. Bancroft:** Good evening to all in this honourable House. I rise in support of the Budget 2017 that was presented by my colleague, Hon. Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance and his hard working staff. Before I go in depth to my constituency please allow me to quote from the budget speech on page 88, under conclusion 7.2;

“Mr. Speaker, in Budget 2017, the Government proposes programmes that seek to expand the physical infrastructure to improve connectivity between the hinterland and the coastland, advance our people into a digital society, and harness the skills and talents of our youth, men and women for the future. This budget gives a high priority to spending on a reformed education system that is able to deliver a successful child and that is responsive to the aspirations of our young people and to the future needs of the economy; improving the health system; improving water quality and delivery; and providing better housing. It reignites economic growth, while tackling poverty. It is a budget that creates a wider economic space and sets the stage for Guyana to present itself to the world as the place to do business. This budget does all these things while, at the same time, maintaining strict fiscal discipline and eliminating wastage and inefficiencies in the use of taxpayers’ money.”

This said it all, but being a Member of Parliament for Region 8, I must now turn my attention to Region 8.

Capital: Under the heading administration - I have three sub headings; capital, recurrent and training - in Kato a staff quarters was constructed to accommodate the Deputy Regional Executive Officer (DREO) and Assistant Regional Executive Officer (AREO) who were in charge of subregion 1. Also equipment and furniture were purchased for the staff quarters and administrative office.

I move to the next heading, recurrent. A number of administrative buildings were rehabilitated at 6211, four Regional Democratic Council (RDC) meetings were held and a Christmas social was held for the council members. Office and field materials and janitorial supplies were purchased for the RDC buildings. Vehicles were repaired.

I now turn to training. The previous budget catered for staff participation in a Public Service Management Workshop, also, an end of year development session and appraisal during last December. This budget seeks to increase productivity within the RDC while promoting the enhancement of the human resource.

Public Works: Under the above mentioned heading, I will discuss capital, bridges, road and electricity. Under capital, two roads were constructed, one at Chenapau and the other joining

Kopinang to Maikwak. In the subregion 1, nine communities benefited from contracts that saw to the overhaul of their roads. In subregion 2 the road leading from Wrong Turn to Seven Miles was thatched of potholes and a concrete road has begun construction from the cenotaph which is located in central Mahdia. This Budget 2017, as we are now here debating in Parliament, stands to maintain the completion and maintenance of the concrete roads, a “good life” for all *Mahdians* and all of Region 8.

Continuing to the next subheading, the bridges, presently there is a bridge under construction at Itabac which is slated to be completed before the end of the year. The bridge at Wrong Turn collapsed and had to be repaired as it is the only bridge linking Mahdia to the rest of Guyana. The Salbora reservoir has been completed under the facilitation of Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) and the regional administration. Also pipelines were laid which supply water for central Mahdia and Campbelltown from the said reservoir.

Electricity: Mahdia Power and Light supplies 18 hours of electricity daily to Mahdia and its environs. The other six hours electricity is supplied by means of generators, each of which uses 48 litres of gasoline. With this budget, it will continue this service mentioned above while allowing for maintenance.

Education: My first subheading under education is capital. A District Education Officer (DEO)’s quarters and sanitary block were constructed and furnished at Paramakatoi. Also, for the first time, laptops were issued to the teachers of Region 8, in both subregions.

The next, dietary: A supplement hot meal programme was implemented where each student of the Kato Primary School is given a daily breakfast. It is to offset the fact that children walk several miles to get to school. At Mahdia Secondary School lunch is provided daily for the students. As per term, children are being shuttled to and from their homes to their respective schools in the Upper Takatu/Upper Essequibo, Region 9. A team of 30 students was sent to the Nationals Sporting Games 2016, a trip in which transportation, accommodation and meals were provided for. It was with the use of aircraft. We did not bring them through the road this time. In this Budget 2017, we seek to increase the number of trained personnel and qualified students produced by the region. Also every student is treated equally and given a fair chance at success.

I come now to health. There are capital, drugs and disease control. Under the subhead capital two

doctor's quarters were constructed, one at Kato and the other at Kurukabaru. The approval for the purchase of an ambulance was granted, but its purchase is being processed. Drug releases were warranted to the Ministry of Public Health for pharmaceuticals that would be distributed to both subregions in Region 8, 1 and 2.

For health, disease control: The Vector Control Department of the Ministry of Public Health has launched a pilot programme to deal with the spread and control of malaria. This is funded by Global Fund with supervision from vector control and technical support from the Pan America Health Organisation (PAHO). There had been an outbreak of chicken pox at the Paramakatoi dorm with the number of affected children being 160. This has since been curtailed with assistance from the Ministry of Public Health and the regional administration of Region 8.

Agriculture, shade houses, rice production and drainage and irrigation: To commence, I have the shade houses. The agriculture programme has built three shade houses, one in Kopinang, one in Kato and the other in Mahdia. These shade houses are producing vegetables such as pak choi, tomatoes and more. In 2017 we will reintroduce Irish potatoes.

Rice production: The rice, which was cultivated at Monkey Mountain, as a pilot project, has a production of 200 bags of paddy from approximately 18 acres of land.

To bring this heading to an end, it is drainage and irrigation. Creeks were cleared by removing mainly fallen trees and branches to facilitate drainage and irrigation in Monkey Mountain and Kopinang to enhance cassava and vegetable production. Equipment such as brush cutters, fogging machines, chainsaws and more were purchased to have during these projects.

Before I commend this budget to this House, I have a comment to make. I think the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordon, had invited our colleagues for consultation, when we were talking about the budget, but no one turned up. Today they are in the National Assembly to condemn this Government, but I want to assure you that the APNU/AFC would never fail, we would go forward.

I now commend this budget *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to all Guyanese* to this noble House for passage. May God bless you all.

Thank you. [Applause]

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this brings to an end our statements for today and I must thank you for your assistance and cooperation that we have been able to complete the list of speakers for today. It seems to me that this is a good time to ask the Prime Minister, First Vice-President, to move the adjournment.

**First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]:** Mr. Speaker, I moved that this House be adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> December, at 10 a.m. and that we end with alacrity long before 10 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the Hon. Prime Minister. The House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> December, at 10 a.m. I see Hon. Members are standing even before the Speaker is finished addressing the House. I thought you would allow the Speaker the courtesy of completing what he is saying and leave the chamber before you leave.

*Adjourned accordingly at 7.34 p.m.*