



OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2025) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN

4TH Sitting

Tuesday, 15TH September, 2020

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.01 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (70)

Speaker (1)

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

(Virtual Participation)

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (35)

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent]

+ Cabinet Member

* Non-Elected Speaker

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

Senior Ministers (16)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
Office of the Presidency,
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+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
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Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
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+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight’s Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
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Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

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

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Minister of Agriculture,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
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+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,
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+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
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Ministry of Labour,
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+ **Cabinet Member**
* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
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Ministry of Natural Resources,
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+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
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Ministry of Housing and Water,
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+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
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+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
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Ministry of the Public Service,
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North Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

[Absent]

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

Junior Ministers (4)

Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,
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Office of the Prime Minister,
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205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.

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

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

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P.,
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East Bank Demerara.
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*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
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MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)
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Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P., <i>Lot 151 Durbana Square, Lamaha Gardens, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, M.P., <i>Lot 202 N, Fourth Street, Alexander Village, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 13 A, New Providence, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>(Virtual Participation)</i>
Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P., <i>Lot 18 Public Road, Johanna Cecilia, (Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).</i>	
Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P., <i>Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field, East Bank Demerara.</i>	
Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P., <i>Lot 1110 Plot ‘B’, Herstelling, East Bank Demerara.</i>	
Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P., <i>Lot 590 Good Hope, East Coast Demerara.</i>	
Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P., <i>Lot 1282 Block EE, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	
Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P., <i>(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo), Shulidnab Village, South Central, Rupununi. (Culvert City Lethem)</i>	
Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P., <i>(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini), Mabaruma Compound.</i>	

Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,
*(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
Lot 55 Henrietta,
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Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P.,
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Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,
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Craig Milne,
Cove & John,
East Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Vincero H. Jordan, M.P.,
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),
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West Coast Berbice.
C/o Christopher Jones*

Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
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Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.*

Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
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Church Street Mahdia.
Lot 4 Public Road,
Stewartville,
West Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Jermaine Figueira, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 136 2nd Street,
Silvertown,
Wismar, Linden.
Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 90, Section C,
Wismar, Linden.

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

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

Officers (2)

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

Hansard Division Officers (20)

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Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter
Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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OATH OF A NEW MEMBER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, by way of an instrument dated this day, 14th September, 2020, I have been informed that Ms. Sarah Browne was declared to be a Member of the National Assembly, as a Parliamentary Secretary, to assist the Minister of Amerindian Affairs in the discharge of her functions. Before Ms. Browne can take part in the proceedings of the National Assembly, she will have to make and subscribe the Oath of Office before the National Assembly, as required by article 167 of the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*. As Ms. Sarah Browne is present, she can now make and subscribe the Oath, which will be administered to her by the Clerk of the National Assembly.

The Oath of Office was administered to and subscribed by the following Member:

Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs.

Mr. Speaker: By way of an instrument dated 14th September, 2020, I have been informed that Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon was declared to be a Member of the National Assembly, as a Parliamentary Secretary, to assist the Minister of Agriculture in the discharge of his functions. Before Mr. Ramkissoon can take part in the proceedings of the National Assembly, he will have to make and subscribe the Oath of Office before the National Assembly, as required by article 167 of the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*. As Mr. Ramkissoon is present, he can now make and subscribe the Oath, which will be administered to him by the Clerk of the National Assembly.

The Oath of Office was administered to and subscribed by the following Member:

Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome to Ms. Sarah Browne and Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like, on behalf of Members of the National Assembly, and on my own behalf, to congratulate Ms. Sarah Browne and Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon on becoming Members of the National Assembly. I welcome them to the Assembly, and I extend good prayers and best wishes to them.

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I did receive a request for an oral question without notice from Ms. Walton-Desir. I wish to say to her that I note her question. Such questions have to have three components: urgency, importance, and thirdly, it should fall against the priority of the business of the day. As such, I humbly request the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, to resubmit this question under Oral Questions on Notice.

Leader of the Opposition [Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon]: Mr. Speaker, I rise because Ms. Walton-Desir is not here this morning. She has been affected by something which the Members of Parliament (MPs) ate here yesterday. Many of them are affected by the quality of the food. It is a matter that we will have to take up later. I will communicate what you have said to the Hon. Member, but I would like to seek some clarity as to what is it that needs to be done to bring this question within the ambit of the three issues which she raised. This is because it is our opinion that the matter qualifies under each of those heads which she did raise.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I would refer you to Standing Order 18 (b), and would also request that you have some communication with the Clerk and myself during the break.

Thank you very much.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Thank you, Sir.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2020

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

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

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: The first speaker today is the Hon. Member, Mr. Vincero Jordan. This is the maiden speech for the Hon. Member. Once again, I urge that we please observe the convention.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in relation to the Budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Public Works on the 9th September, 2020, under the theme: *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation; and, Enhancing Welfare.*

As an elected Member of the National Assembly, representing Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5, it is with a saddened heart that I say that this Budget will not meet the true needs and demands of the people. Hence, it will not maintain the high standards that the Coalition Government, in the not so distant past, provided.

I say to this honourable gathering, in this honourable House, that, instead, this Budget seems to return the people to the sad old days of frustration and depression. Declaring that it is the largest and fastest emergency Budget will not solve the day-to-day problems of the poor and needy and the not-so-fortunate to help them out of the hardships of life.

The budgetary allocations for the Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5, lacks even distribution and has proven to be inadequate in its present form. Hence, the affairs of the region will not be able to be properly administered and same will hinder the development in all sectors. The primary purpose and function of any government is to sustain the welfare, security, and well-being of the people, regardless of their social or economic status, race or religion or political preference or affiliation. They must be looked at as Guyanese and, as such, the Government must govern for all of Guyana. The plans and programmes must be designed to bring hope, which will ensure true happiness and comfort to all.

Coming out of a not-so-recent campaign, and many days and months of toiling with the people of my region, we know and understand their needs and were ready to provide those as a Coalition Government. I am disappointed to see that the true needs of the people are not realised in this budgetary plan. I stand, therefore, to submit that, should this continue as it is, living in Guyana would be one with many challenges and hardships, especially with the deadly pandemic of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) at hand. Albeit, *Budget 2020* is before us, so I will now turn to public health.

The Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5, benefitted tremendously in the area of public health during the tenure of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition Government, of which we saw health posts becoming health centres and emergency services for functioning 24 hours.

10.16 a.m.

It was against this backdrop that we modernised our two hospitals and built two state-of-the-art health centres at Carlton Hall, Mahaicony, and Cotton Tree, which are fully operational.

With the non-cooperation of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C) regional chairperson and councillors, the regional administration still managed to keep its healthcare facilities fully functioning. A proposal for a green state hospital was made, which would have served as the regional hospital, while taking the already cumbersome burden off the Fort Wellington and Mahaicony Cottage Hospitals. To this end, lands were already sought and approved at Onverwagt, West Coast Berbice, through the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA). As if the PPP/C Government has no care in the world, the Hon. Minister of Public Works announced in his budget presentation on page 38, paragraph

4.61, a whopping \$51.7 billion or 15.7% of the total budget for the health sector for 2020, with no mention of any improvement for the healthcare services in the Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5. Is this our plan for prosperity?

The Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5, being the largest agricultural region in Guyana, has successfully stayed the course of time after being neglected by the PPP/C Administration for over two decades. This sector, in rice cultivation, has suffered tremendously from poor drainage, failed irrigation systems, blocked channels, eroded emboldening, *et cetera*, while the self-centred, egotistic beings of the day hurriedly filled their pockets, forgetting the small man in the field of cattle rearing, dairy production, cash crops and poultry. As the sun rose on that faithful day of 15th May, 2015, the Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5 agricultural sector had a fresh breath of life. The region regained consciousness from its battered state, through services offered to the farmers from the MMA-ADA.

The National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) has been revitalised and the research centre is now fulfilling its mandate by providing services to all farmers in the Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5. It is because of this success story, the region remains the highest rice producing region, after harvesting 454,476 metric tonnes of paddy, 295,409 metric rice equivalent at 99% harvesting rate in the year 2019. All these were achieved because of the MMA-ADA being able to gain much needed revenues from outstanding land rates and rental, drainage and irrigation charges and sufficient amount of charges being paid for the services offered.

In this Budget, on page 61, paragraph 4.139, the decision of the reversal of fees for lands under cultivation, land taxes and drainage and irrigation charges are back to their 2014 position, and this was mentioned by the Hon. Minister presenting the Budget. While I may want to commend Government on this, the question is already being asked by many if we are returning to the dark and gloomy days of agriculture in Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5, prior to the days of 2015. I want to put it to the Hon. Minister of Public Works, who presented this Budget, and the Hon. Minister of Agriculture that it is one thing to have a budgetary allocation to subsidise for the much needed work in this sector, but another to actually get the moneys and work done through the agency intended to carry out the function. I say to you that, once again, this sector is heading in a downhill direction and, as such, I said to the residents and farmers of Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5, be strong and holdfast for the APNU/AFC Coalition Government will soon come again to rescue the

agriculture sector from this deadly pitfall. In this budgetary area, I give this Government a ‘D’ for deception.

Permit me to speak about the model farm. The region’s model farm is currently providing permanent employment for over 30 persons, and it is benefitting their families by providing fresh vegetables for the people of the region, the hospitals, the Hugo Chavez Centre and as far as Region 10. It is sad to mention that this Budget has not catered one dollar for the upkeep of this project. Is this the plan for prosperity?

Permit me to look at the education sector. When it comes to education, Guyanese in Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5 and at large smiled and were uncontrollable with great laughter to see a system transformed from no child left behind, poor quality education delivery and, in many cases, unequal levels of education administered to one truly benefitting the journey of the good life, which was, indeed, the theme of our 2018 Budget. It was the Coalition Government and the hard work of the regional administration that helped the teachers and children of Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5 to enjoy two new schools built at Perth and Calcutta, Mahaicony to the tune of over \$56 million. No longer are our nursery schoolchildren seated under a crammed society hall building. There was the construction of information technology (IT) and science laboratories at Woodley Park and Belladrum Secondary Schools to the tune of over \$26 million. There was the rehabilitation and renovation of a number of schools throughout the region, including Bygeval Secondary School, Mora Point Primary School, Karamat Nursery School and Rosignol Secondary School, just to name a few. These schools are not only in the communities of what some may mention as the ‘black’ villages, but we evenly distributed these services to all villages and eliminated the call of ‘black’ and ‘red’ villages in Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5.

Through His Excellency, the then President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, David Arthur Granger, we introduced the Five Bs Initiative: buses, boat s, bicycles, books and breakfast, which eased the burden off of many parents. To date, the residents of Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5 are very much thankful.

The APNU/AFC Government worked tirelessly to ensure that every child stayed in school and was given the best possible start in life, since we know that education paves the way for employment in any country. From this Budget presentation, I see that there is little and, in some cases, no catering for equal quality and delivery of education to our nation’s children. It is in this Budget that I recognise, once again, the vast disparity

between the coastland and hinterland, rich and poor, affiliated and non-affiliated.

Public Infrastructure – infrastructural works, in every region, are of high priority and necessary to enable easy and safe access to transportation, farming, healthcare, education, *et cetera*. It was with those in mind that we named and executed all works in terms and in context of public infrastructure. We were able to upgrade several farm-to-market roads and excavate and clear drainage canals within Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5. No longer are villages such as Onverwagt, Lovely Lass and Golden Grove flooded because of a simple rainfall. Flooding in Berbice-Mahaica, Region 5 is a ‘thing’ of the past. We built several greenheart bridges, footpath bridges and repaired the Ithaca sluice, which was neglected for over two decades, simply because it was termed as a ‘green’ village. We constructed a modern sluice at De Edward Village. We built approximately 18 bus sheds and installed hundreds of streetlights across Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5 to enhance security and enable the elderly and schoolchildren to be properly sheltered during the harsh weather conditions.

In public security, out of the abundance of careful consideration and proper management, the APNU/AFC Government, through the Ministry of Public Security, developed and implemented a new security management system. This is known as the Regional Management System, against what we had, which was the Divisional Management System.

Mr. Speaker: This is your two-minute notice.

Mr. Jordan: It is with this system that we recognise the management of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the safety of the citizenry, as it has proven to be most effective and efficient. In this system, we have seen a reduction in crime and accidents and the ability to have direct supervision and command of each region, just to mention a few.

Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5 was plunged into mourning on 6th September, 2020, after the gruesome murder of the two Henry boys and, later, Haresh Singh. Subsequent to the first two murders, protests erupted throughout West Coast Berbice and Mahaicony. We received reports which suggested that the police were given instructions to shoot pellets at a young woman in a green dress who was standing on her bridge. Hon. Brindley H. R. Benn, how do you explain this to the National Assembly? I guess that it will be that ‘those were never the orders’. I call on the police to be professional in executing their duties, since, we now have a number of persons nursing wounds after being shot at in their yards and

in the streets. For this, I give this Government a ‘M’ and that is for murder.

I now turn to housing.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you look at housing, you will have to get an extension.

I want to remind you about our *Standing Orders* with respect to imputing motive, and your words, with respect to the police. Understand that these things have to be factual. I raise that as a point of caution.

I now take the motion for the extension to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. And for the Hon. Member, it is Standing Order 41, subsection (6). You may conclude, Hon. Member.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In a drive to meet the demands of the populace for housing and land, the Coalition Government, through the Ministry of Communities, distributed over 684 house lots in the space of four months, in Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5, namely in Hope, Experiment and Bath Settlement. Now, the talk of this Government is to take back those lands which are already in existence. Is this the true plan for prosperity?

The water sector has indeed triumphed during the governing of the Coalition. The residents of Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5 now stand to benefit from 24 hours water supply from Ithaca to Mahaica, across 13 well stations and one water treatment plant.

10.31 a.m.

Safe, potable water, with the introduction of water treatment agent, SeaQuest, as a consequence of the astute leadership of the then Managing Director, Dr. Richard Van West-Charles, benefitted over 2,400 residents as first-time recipients in areas such as Onderneeming; Ithaca; Washclothes, Mahaicony; Trafalgar; *et cetera*.

Under sport, culture and youth development, the young people, the middle-aged and senior citizens are ecstatic at the development in the sector of sports. Youths are now engaged

in meaningful activities, thanks to the promise and delivery of the Coalition Government. We have seen several grounds being enhanced, rehabilitated and lit for the first time, namely Paradise, Trafalgar, Hopetown, Cotton Tree, Bath Settlement, Lovely Lass, Central Mahaicony, Calcutta and Rosignol.

As I conclude, the purpose of a budget is to improve the quality of life of the people, not just a few in selected communities. It is the right of every Guyanese to know how moneys are allocated and how to be beneficiaries from every area of service.

This dear land of ours cannot descend to such a low in such a short space of time, where only the rich continue to get richer, the poor poorer and many just frowned upon. It is with all Guyanese in mind that I say we deserve a better budget. It is not just about the amount or the sum of estimates, but rather the equitable delivery of the services and goodies to all Guyanese.

I pray that the good Lord continues to be with all Guyanese. As the songwriter says, “Why worry when you can pray?”. As the *Holy Bible* puts it in Matthew 6: 25-27:

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

That is to the Guyanese.

In closing, I therefore, propose to this Government to give unto every Guyanese what is due to them. Proverbs 29: 1-2 states:

“He, that being often reproved and hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn”.

I submit to you that this Budget stinks, but I find solace in the fact that the Coalition Government will soon be back in Office to govern. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support *Budget 2020*. I would like to congratulate the Hon. Minister and the staff of the Ministry of Finance for a well-crafted budget.

I sat here and listened to the speaker before me, which was a lot of *blow blow*. Obviously, the Hon. Member does not live in the Mahaica-Berbice region or, perhaps, he is deaf, dumb and blind to the needs of the residents of Region 5.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, the language used. The Hon. Member is referring to the Hon. Member as dumb, deaf and blind. That cannot be parliamentary language.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Jaffarally, proceed.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, allow me to join the thousands of Guyanese in expressing our sympathy to the Henry family and the Singh family for the hideous crime that was committed on those youngsters. His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, has made it very clear that we will get to the bottom of this crime and wherever the chip fall, it will fall.

Also, I would like to thank the Hon. Prime Minister and Ministers of Government, who have travelled all the way to visit these families, expressing their sympathy. In the same breath, we would like to see justice for the Henry family and the Singh family. We also need justice for the hundreds of other Guyanese who were beaten and robbed on those same days. What is clear about those robberies? The Opposition’s thieving machinery was in full swing. The Hon. Member himself was part of those protests, encouraging thievery, beatings and the burning of people’s vehicles.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, could the Hon. Member please provide the evidence to substantiate his claims.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, there is enough evidence on social media.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Jaffarally, please, one minute. Hon. Member, who is standing, if you are going to stand on a Point of Order, please, I ask that you cite the Standing Order and state what you are claiming. I do not recognise what you are standing on as a Point of Order.

Hon. Member Mr. Jaffarally, please continue.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, I wish to remind the Hon. Member that I saw it with my own eyes and that is enough evidence. Five lorries were burnt completely at Hopetown and Trafalgar, two filled with paddy. Seven minibuses were burnt completely; two pickups and hundreds of Guyanese were beaten, chopped and bones were broken. The thieving machinery by the Opposition imported people to Region 5 to create havoc upon the residents of Region 5.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Jaffarally, I want to caution you on Contents of Speeches, Standing Order No. 41 and about imputing any negative motive, unless you have the evidence. Thank you. Go ahead, Sir.

Mr. Jaffarally: The Hon. Member spoke about oppression, welfare for all Guyanese and he went on. But what is the reality? He went on to talk about agriculture developing in Region 5. He mentioned the model farm, that a piece of land, 49.2 acres of land, was useful and beneficially occupied by 60 farmers with permission from the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary (MMA) and the Regional Democratic Council (RDC).

When the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change took Office, they bulldozed these farmers out of the land, and they spent \$200 million to develop that farm. This is the reality of the farm – grass and bush. I am certain the Hon. Member knows that very well. I want to pass this picture so that you can have a look at it. That is what they did with the model farm, denying over 60 farmers, cash crop farmers, an opportunity to live a life. Theirs and their families were removed from the farm.

They went further at Number 41 and 42 Villages. Rice farmers, who had legally occupied the land by lease from His Excellency the then President, Donald Ramotar, were taken to court. These farmers included Peter Joyce, and he knows Peter Joyce very well, and Pastor Williams. They sought an audience with the Hon. Leader of the Opposition but to no avail.

Then they went further to the cattle farmers of Rampur Village, who have occupied that land for generations. They went and bulldozed the cattle farmers. Do you know what they did? They took the lands and gave them to their cronies, former Member of Parliament, Jennifer Wade, and others.

We and the farmers of Region 5 would like to thank the Hon. Anil Nandlall, who represented them. Most of the lands were returned to the farmers. The Hon. Member was not paid by the State. He provided a free service to the farmers of Region 5.

The Hon. Member spoke about MMA and rice farmers. Today, under the APNU/AFC Government, rice farmers are in a state of poverty and depression – these rice farmers. Recently, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, the young and dynamic Zulfikar Mustapha, visited a number of communities in Region 5. When he went to Trafalgar and Number 41 Village, the farmers of those communities met with him and,

with tears in their eyes, were worried about what will happen to their crop.

For five years, the canals within the MMA boundary were not desilted. The dams are in an impassable condition. The Minister responded. As I am speaking to you here, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, 13 machines are in the back lands of MMA, desilting 245 canals to bring relief to the farmers. The dams are now being graded so as to allow rice farmers to bring their crop to the factory. That is what a caring government does.

The Hon. Member spoke about housing. What a shame. To take people’s money without providing services is indeed a crime. It is a criminal offence, the Hon. Member said, and I hope the police can intervene. In 2019, the APNU/AFC Government had a circus at Fort Wellington and a number of the *de facto* Ministers sitting here were in attendance then. They distributed thousands of letters for house lots. A mere three weeks before the elections, the Hon. Ferguson went there, and she continued to distribute these house lots. They collected the people’s money – poor people’s money, nurses’ money, teachers’ money, taxi-car drivers’ money and vendors’ money. When the people went to locate their house lots, do you know what the found? They found rice fields.

One teacher took her letter with the house lot number and do you know what she found? The burial ground. The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, is good at that. Another teacher went with the number for his house lot and he went to a church. There was no land available in Region 5.

10.46 a.m.

It was an election sham conducted on the people of Region 5 by the then *de facto* APNU/AFC Administration.

The APNU/AFC Government talked about low income houses and that they were going to build low income houses for the ordinary people. They built 19 units at Experiment in Region 5. Only recently, the Hon. Minister, Susan Rodrigues, and I visited that area. Not a single unit has been sold. Do you know why? They are demanding \$8.5 million for a unit, which is supposed to be a poor man’s house. A nurse met the Hon. Minister at Trafalgar with tears in her eyes. They pocketed the nurse’s money. When we went to the houses, they were all infested.

Under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, when His Excellency the President was the Minister of Housing, we built low-cost houses, but we sold them for less

than \$3 million. This is because we were a caring government. We believe that the poor man has a right in this country. That is what is happening. There was absolutely no housing development in Region 5. They have not developed a single housing unit, much less a housing scheme. We are confident, as we promised, that we will deliver 50,000 house lots during our term in Office. I am happy to report that the Hon. Minister has taken a policy decision that we will refund all those moneys that were collected by the APNU/AFC Administration and we will make those people a priority on the list.

After an election is over and a government is elected, that government must be a government for all the people of this country. When we took Office in 1992 and we started rebuilding this country, every year in our budget presentations we ensured that the resources of this country were spread equally across our country, in all the regions. Region 5 was no different.

The APNU/AFC Government came to Office in 2015 with the help of fake statements of poll. [**An Hon. Member: Inaudible**] Do you want the evidence? The first thing they did was to increase the salaries of the Ministers by hundreds of per cent. Do you know what was the ... [*Interruption*]

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, when he was asked why he increased his Ministers’ salaries by over one hundred per cent, do you know what his response was? He said, that he increased their salaries to prevent them from thieving. He wanted to control corruption amongst the Ministers. Was money the motivation to serve the people of this country? We have demonstrated by our records that we have done things equally. In Region 5, the Hon. Member spoke about sports development. Yes, they did...

Mr. Speaker: This is your two-minute warning.

Mr. Jaffarally: ...but they left out many communities. They did at Belladrum, at Number 5, Hopetown and at Ithaca. What happened to the young people at Bath Settlement, Dundee, Blairmont and at Cotton Tree?

He spoke about streetlights. The people of Region 5 will never forget when you took away the streetlights from Blairmont, Bush Lot, Bath Settlement, Woodley Park and Cotton Tree, but you left those in Ithaca and Hopetown. [**An Hon. Member: Inaudible**] That is a fact, Hon. Member. Are we going to govern this country like that? That is what the APNU/AFC Government has done.

In this brief Budget for 2020, Region 5 will see a number of development projects across the region and not in a particular area. Rehabilitation of the Kingelly/Chester and El Dorado/Foulis Sideline Dam...Do you hear the names, Hon. Members? The rehabilitation of bridges in Yacoob and Number 40 Villages.

Education – rehabilitation of the Carlton Hall Primary and Nursery Schools, Mahaicony and Belladrum Schools and the Bygeval Secondary School. [**An Hon. Member: Inaudible**] Substandard work...

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

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Jaffarally: We are going to build some roads in Region 5. Listen to the areas where the roads will be built. We will build roads at Hope, Number 8 Village, Lovely Lass, among other villages. We will rehabilitate the wards of the Mahaicony Diagnostic Centre and construct incinerators at the Fort Wellington and Mahaicony Hospitals. In this brief Budget, we have demonstrated that we will be a Government for all the people of Guyana, and Region 5 is no exception. We will not behave like the APNU/AFC Administration which had no intention for the development of the agriculture sector.

In the communities of Mahaicony Creek, villages such as Hyde Park, Washclothes, Gordon Table, Karamat, Waterdog Creek and others have not seen a *de facto* Minister of the last Administration in five years. The then Hon. *de facto* Minister of Agriculture, the furthest he went in Region 5 was to Toots Bar in Mahaicony, unlike our Minister of Agriculture, who took office three weeks ago and has already visited 16 communities in Region 5. The Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall, visited 14 communities; the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, Mr. Collin Croal and the Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water made 17 communities visits; and the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs visited seven communities already in Region 5. This is the way we intend to manage the affairs of Region 5 and not to come here and *blow blow*, not to come here and try to tell us that you have done so much under the APNU/AFC

Government, while you did absolutely nothing for the people of Region 5.

In concluding, 2020 has been a difficult year for us as Guyanese. We had a Government in office, at that time, that never showed genuine interest in the development of Region 5. They were aimless, visionless and clueless. They were a set of elitists who were only concerned about themselves and their cabal, *blow blow*. As the PPP/C has done in the past, it will continue to work in partnership with all stakeholders – the private sector, the producers, the manufacturers, the minibus operators, the millers, the farmers, the fishermen, our healthcare and education delivery workers, our public servants, our rice farmers, sugar workers and vendors – to ensure effective delivery of public service to all Guyanese, particularly in this crucial time. Despite these challenging times, our plan for prosperity in this emergency *Budget 2020*, which outlines the transformative agenda, is to ensure a better life for all Guyanese.

I fully support *Budget 2020*. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Speaker, I rise with my Colleagues on this side of the House to challenge the authenticity of this Budget that is before us in this National Assembly. Permit me, I want to quote from this book here, *Our plan for Prosperity*. Before I do that, permit me to offer my condolences to the families of the Henrys and Haresh Singh. My heart bleeds with them. Also, they are my family and all the Colleagues on this side.

I would also like to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the National Assembly. I pray that God showers His perfect health upon you so that you could function in accordance with the oath of your Office, as we plan to do same on this side of the House.

Permit me to state, first of all, that I have heard the Hon. Members of Parliament from the Government’s side talk about agriculture, housing and education. I would like to say to the speaker who spoke before me that I was one of the proud recipients of a house lot at West Coast Demerara. When it was received, I had to take a picture, like he did, to the Ministry of Housing because it was a trench. I was told that they would have thrown dirt on the land, but what they did was clear some bushes so that the water fell and [*inaudible*]. Thanks to the “*One Stop Shop*” for house lots.

11.01 a.m.

On the same West Coast Demerara, I got another plot of land. It took the APNU/AFC Administration to really realise that dream, that solution for housing.

I can speak to Region 8 because I had encouraged boys in the area to purchase house lots for themselves in Region 8 and that was done somewhere around the airstrip area. *Lo and behold*, these boys’ lots are now being given to other people because of this change of system.

Let us get back to the real crux of the matter.

Today, I would like to look at the hinterland and Indigenous people of Region 8. Let us look at some public affairs quickly. I am quoting from this fancy book here: *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting Our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation; and Enhancing Welfare*.

Our first people, for the last years I was told, were given lofty promises. They were sold candy dreams but no delivery. More jobs, improved healthcare, more access to education, that is what were what were promised, but I arrived in Mahdia in 2004. I learnt from the previous speaker on that side of the House that 2,000 young Amerindians were out of work and were called Community Support Officers (CSOs). I am proud to say that I had visited one of those communities where those people were and I can say that they were hand-picked, lacked proper training and were going to teach people’s children. I am talking about the delivery of education. They were giving me a lecture on teachers’ training and I had done that in 1976-1979.

These young people were just talking about what the previous Administration did, that is the PPP/C Administration, rather than getting involved in the delivery of education for young children. I guess they were hand-picked from different families just like in Paramakatoi, Kato and in some other villages in the North Pakaraimas. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *Inaudible*]: I withdraw that.]

On the education front, I noticed, in 2015, at the secondary level, I was privileged to be there, that the Mathematics department enjoyed a 10% increase in passes, thanks to the APNUAFC Government and Administration, which saw the need for recalling retired people to work with young people. Someone on that side of the House had spoken about rehiring and some rehashing... [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Ms. Bancroft was doing a better job.] Check the records, please. I do not think a CSO can do that.

At Paramakatoi, this APNU/AFC Administration inherited a school at Kato that had defects. Thanks to this Granger-led Administration that straightened all those things. Today, ... [Mr. Hamilton: Straightened yourself out of Government.] Thank you very much, Brother Edghill.

I was privy to sit in a consultation. I am talking about ‘dinner for two’. I thought that was a great consultation, but after that little movie ‘dinner for two’, then some bits of papers were passed around for people to sign as they were consulted. I want to suggest that, this plan for prosperity, that was done in a record 31 days, maybe, was done with that in mind.

In Region 8, for Education – I am looking at line 610, - Education Delivery - there is an increase of 45% in 2019 from an APNU/AFC budget. I am talking about the employment cost. It was increased by 45% in 2020. Now, can the Hon. Minister say to this honourable House, what is responsible for this increase? Bearing in mind that I was bombarded with value-added tax (VAT) reduction, tax rebates and what have you, that would put more money in people’s pockets.

Let me move along to Health Service Delivery. The same line item is enjoying a 36% increase. Public Works also is enjoying a 23% increase. We need answers for all these increases, while the rate of VAT is being taken off.

Permit me to draw your attention to a couple of things in this official report. As I speak about sustainable livelihood, I am talking about the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme that was encouraged by the APNU/AFC Administration.

Women – I learned from speakers on the other side of the House that nothing was done in Mahdia; nothing was done in Region 8. I am saying that women, boys and girls were given the opportunity to be trained, especially single mothers, in heavy duty equipment operation. With that skill, they should be able to earn a living in the mining industry.

I also want to bring to this House the fact that, even at Kato, because of this Administration’s intervention in education, even the dormitories will have to be... I want to encourage those on the other side of the House to ensure that they work along with the APNU/AFC, so that more children can be housed in dormitories, more children can have access to education and more children could be better qualified to work in their region, as alluded to by the Hon. Minister of Labour on the other side of the House.

He spoke to the issue of only allowing people from the region to be trained and to work there and not to... we are one people, we are one nation, with one destiny. How selfish it is for this Budget to seek only to segregate us and not allow us to intermingle, work, learn from each other and to support each other in the development of this dear land of ours?

I learnt from speakers on the other side of the House that there was no infrastructure, that the country was very bad and was in a very deplorable state. I can say that I enjoyed the privileges of travelling with people from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the road network, not only in Mahdia Town, but in Campbelltown and its environment, in Micobe, in El Paso, where the road was dusty and it took hours to get from one village to the next; it is now very smooth. Thanks to the APNU/AFC Government led by David Arthur Granger. [Mr. Hamilton: What are you talking about?] I am talking about from Mahdia to the landing down at Potaro. I am talking about from Linden to Mabura and I am talking about the crossing at Garraway Stream to Mahdia. I am talking about from Bartica to Mahdia. Thank God that we have a visionary leader.

I learned from the Hon. Member before me about electioneering. I worked as a Poll Clerk in Region 6 before and I can... voter impersonation.

We learnt that VAT is going to be taken off from certain commodities, so that more people could get access to vehicles, so that they can move around. Have we considered the carbon emissions from these vehicles that we are going to bring in, especially the older ones?

In this part of the House, we talk about a ‘Green State’, but I learnt, in some areas of this country, they are cutting down the trees that should purify the air for us all to breathe. What madness is this? I thought that was maybe *part and parcel* of the consultation for this Budget presentation.

I want to say that I learned from an Hon. Member of the House that nothing was done in the region. This is a reminder from what my Colleague before me said, thanks to the Head of the Guyana Water Inc. (GWI), we will have water available to 1,200 homes in the North Pakaraimas. Yes, they will get that.

Schoolchildren can have access to education and not ‘no child left behind’...

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

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Hon. Speaker. We are told that no maintenance work was done in the region but, for your information, Sir, and I want this House to note that, every village in the North Pakaraimas was given opportunities that the communities could get their hands on contracts to clear drainage for their villages and to enhance the road network. We are talking about community involvement and the money accrued from that could be used to help their children further their education.

Infrastructural work – there are better roads to access Mahdia. Where a journey took nine hours, it can now take four or five hours.

11.16 a.m.

Speaking about infrastructure, the hospital has been renovated. There is a new scheme by the airstrip and now, as we speak, there is a spanking new building for the law court. So our friends who are lawyers, on the other side of the House, can go practice law there. Not only that, there are units built for housing for different key areas so that people from Region 8, since that Mahdia has become a town, will not have to travel to Georgetown to get the basic arrangements for birth certificates and business licences. That speaks to development and not what is coined in this arrangement here that is similar to the ‘dinner for two’ arrangements.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Williams: *Mia Re Yon Pa Ton.* Mr. Speaker, I said hello to every one of the Hon. Members in this House. At this time, I would like to congratulate you as the Speaker of the National Assembly and also the first Amerindian Deputy Speaker. Thank you for allowing me and, with your permission, I would like to express my gratitude to the Almighty for giving me the opportunity to stand here in this honourable House. Also, I want to thank the People’s Progressive Party/Civic for giving me the opportunity to sit and stand here as an Amerindian, and the only Arekuna nation in this country. As I stand here today, I would like to invite my brothers and sisters, and all of you here, to join with me as we celebrate Amerindian Heritage Month 2020 under the theme, *Fostering Traditional Practices for a safe Environment*, during this COVID-19 pandemic.

As I speak today and as I present my contribution, I will use simple English grammatical structure, so that everyone here can understand, so as to avoid going to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) for interpretation.

Before I go further, I would like to thank the Minister of Public Works, Hon. Juan Edghill, and the staff of the Ministry of Finance who prepared and presented ‘our plan for prosperity’ for all Guyanese. Today marks a very important day as we present our *Budget 2020* for all Guyanese under the theme, *Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Growth and Job Creation; and Enhancing Welfare.*

The people of this country were tried and tested but not defeated. This Budget was prepared in a record time. I listened to the Hon. Members on the other side claiming that they did a lot for the people. I want to ask the question: Why is it that they were voted out with more than 15,000 votes? Why is it that they were voted out from the Government? Just ask yourselves the question as to why you were voted out. I listened to the Hon. Members on the other side telling us or the country that they want to bring back the former President David Granger’s legacy. It leaves me to wonder and I want to ask the Hon. Members on the other side which legacy they are speaking of. A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change Coalition undermined the Constitution of Guyana since the 21st December, 2018. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Are you sure?] Yes, I am sure of that. Our National Pledge was disrespected. It states:

“To be Obedient to the laws of Guyana.”

In 1992, with the leadership of the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic came with the programme, *Time for Change, Time to Rebuild*. In 1997, the PPP/C came again with the slogan, *One Good Term Deserves Another*. Today, I want to say that we, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, are here again as a change and we will rebuild this country. As I said earlier, *One Good Term Deserves Another* but, on the 2nd March, 2020, the Guyanese people spoke for themselves by putting the one-term APNU/AFC on the Opposition benches. This alone can speak for itself as to why they were voted out.

Our first people in Guyana were told of many promises and the *Good Life for all Guyanese* in 2015, but with dreams and no delivery. More jobs, improved healthcare, more access to education, improved communication, hinterland electrification and the list goes on and on, but they, instead, raised their salary within six months after assuming

Government. Was that a ‘good life’ for all Guyanese? During the 2015 campaign trail, the APNU/AFC went about criticising the then, my Government, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, for giving Amerindians handouts in the Amerindian villages. But up to now, those handouts, as they were called by the APNU/AFC, still exist unchanged.

Mr. Speaker, as I contribute, please allow me to emphasise on some but not all that affected the livelihood of the Amerindian people.

Education: This is the critical aspect of every child’s life and is essential for the future. The then People’s Progressive Party/Civic, prior to 2015, introduced a programme that the Guyanese children benefitted from the ‘because we care’ cash grant where a cash grant, of \$10,000 was given to each schoolchild, which assisted them with their school needs. Unfortunately, the APNU/AFC dismantled the programme and replaced it with the Five Bs Initiative – buses, boats, bicycles, books and boots. Today, I would like to inform the honourable House that the Five Bs Initiative was not meant for all Guyanese. The Amerindian people did not benefit from the Five Bs Initiative, so do not preach about the Five Bs Initiative because the Amerindians did not benefit from that, particularly in Region 7. [**Ms. Ferguson:** Not true.] It is true. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** I myself took boots.] The boots that were sent were maybe size 40 for adults and not for schoolchildren. The schoolchildren are still walk to school to date, walking miles, paddling in boats and risking their lives, just to meet in time for school.

If one does not go out of the office and reach out to people, one would not know what is going on out there. During the past five years, schools encountered a lot of difficulties, shortages of school supplies and exercise books. I can recall that school children were given half-cut exercises books because there were shortages. Prior to 2015, school supplies and exercise books were up-to-date in every school but, after 2015, we started to receive half-cut exercise books for each child. I am sorry I do not have the exercise book to show the House, but what I say is a reality.

Today, in the latter part of the year, as we present the 2020 Budget, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government has, once again, placed education at the top of the agenda. Education will be delivered online along with the Guyana Learning Channel Trust, and the Amerindians will not be left behind. Some Hon. Members on the other side mentioned schools being connected to the internet. Today, as I speak, the internet at the Desrey Caesar-Fox Secondary School in

Waramadong is a non-functional internet. Since October, 2019, no one showed concern about that school and the internet is non-functional.

In the 2020 Budget, the schoolchildren will receive their \$15,000 cash grant to boost their education and the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, for the next five years, will deliver quality education for all Guyanese.

Over the last five years, healthcare has been on a downfall; there were inadequate medical supplies in all the health facilities across the country, especially in Amerindian villages. I can recall that I went to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) with my father before he died in January and I stood in the line to receive the simple drug, Paracetamol. I waited for almost one hour just to be told that there was no Paracetamol in the pharmacy. I had to go to another pharmacy to buy a simple thing as Paracetamol.

Again, a lot was promised in 2015 by the APNU/AFC. The campaigners told us that the Kamarang District Hospital was a white elephant and that it will be transformed into a state-of-the-art hospital. Up to now, the Kamarang District Hospital remains a white elephant; no x-radiation machine, no proper laboratory, no ultrasound machine and the patients are still being referred to the GPHC for further treatment. There was a time when the health facilities in Upper Mazaruni ran out of medical supplies and depended on the Kamarang District Hospital but there was not have been enough for the villages due to shortages. Again, today, as I speak, some health facilities called and informed me that they are short of drugs and are still awaiting supplies that they had requested, even before the People’s Progressive Party/Civic took Office. Today, I am happy to inform the honourable House that the PPP/C Government has allocated, in the 2020 Budget, \$14.3 billion for the procurement of drugs and medical supplies, in order for the health facilities to be well-equipped and adequately supplied.

11.31 a.m.

On the 11th March, 2020 Guyana incidentally recorded its first case of COVID-19 which was imported into the country. The APNU/AFC Government then paid no serious attention to the pandemic and that caused the Guyanese population, especially the Amerindian people, to be at risk, because there was no immediate or proper response. Instead, they imposed certain measures that were not respected by the supporters of the APNU/AFC. There were inadequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies, to provide quality healthcare for the frontline workers, especially in the

Amerindian villages. I am pleased, today, that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government has allocated a budget to improve healthcare delivery in all health facilities and for frontline workers. In the PPP/C’s *Budget 2020*, \$475 million has been allocated for the Amerindians to benefit from the Coronavirus disease relief of \$25,000 per household and Guyanese as a whole.

The youths of today are leaders of tomorrow. As such, much emphasis has to be placed on youths, so that we can have our youths or young people involved in policymaking. Between 2015 and 2020, youths were non-existent and lacked employment when the Community Support Officers programme ceased; it was disbanded by the APNU/AFC. In the 2015 Budget debate, the issue of termination was raised and the then Hon. Vice-President Allicock admitted that he had terminated the programme. He made a statement in the House in August that the CSO programme would be replaced by the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) programme. The PPP/C Government did not terminate the CSO programme; the APNU/AFC did within two months of coming into Office.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, can I ask that my Colleague be given five minutes more to conclude?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Williams: As I speak today, in the Budget we have in 2020, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic would reintroduce the CSO programme. During the CSO programme, there were some youths attached to some sectors – education, health and business. I am proud to inform the House today that those youths who were involved in the CSO programme are now qualified laboratory technicians, professional nurses and teachers. That was a beginning of the CSO programme and what it did in the field.

Amerindian development is vital in our society today, but the village councils were not given work by the region. Instead, more than one contract was given to families and cronies, as the Hon. Member said yesterday. They denied the village councils work, simple work such as building a bridge, when the council has the capability to do such work.

We, as Amerindians, are the first set of people, but we were called greedy by the then Minister in 2017, and no one on the APNU/AFC side stood up to defend the Amerindians. For

instance, the then Hon. Minister of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs said that the remark was a small matter and up to now an apology was not given. It was further stated that the Amerindians cannot benefit from the oil and gas.

The Budget is a people’s budget; it is for all Guyanese. The sum of \$800 million is allocated for the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF). The information and communication technology (ICT) hubs will be introduced. In 2015, the ICT hubs were in place but since the APNU/AFC took over in 2015 that was halted. The One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) was dismantled. It was replaced with One Laptop Per Teacher; teachers received a laptop named Great Wall which, I heard, never functioned.

I listened to one of the Hon. Members on the other side speak about the solar systems in Bartica, but I want to tell the honourable House that Bartica alone is not Region 7; it has Lower, Middle and Upper Mazaruni and Cuyuni. The electrification programme was dismantled. Again, the solar systems were described by the APNU/AFC as handouts and toys. We were promised that we would be given a bigger one that could run electricity 24/7 so as to have our televisions (TV), fans and refrigerators working, but up to now nothing has been done. They promised but never fulfilled those promises. The electrification programme will be reintroduced. As I speak today, the Amerindian people will not be left behind. All the Amerindian people will be benefiting from this 2020 Budget.

As I close here, there are many areas that I need to address, but because of the time allocated to me I cannot finish. I support and endorse the 2020 Budget and I am kindly asking the Hon. Members on the other side to support this 2020 Budget, because at the end of the day, you, your families and your children will benefit from it. Regardless of who you are, join me, as we are *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Ms. Fernandes: Before I embark on my budget presentation as a youth leader, I must first reiterate the calls for justice for Isaiah Henry, Joel Henry and Haresh Singh. These calls are being made by thousands of Guyanese across the length and breadth of this country and also in the diaspora.

Last week, I chose to go and meet with the mourning citizens who took to the street demanding justice. I chose to be with them, cognisant of the fact that this seat that I occupy in this honourable House is not my own, but it belongs to and represents thousands of Guyanese. When those Guyanese called out for justice, it was my duty to be there, to stand with

them, fight for them, and to work towards implementing change that will benefit them.

It is in this regard that I stand here today, to demand inclusion and to defend the working class of Guyana, a group that was completely neglected in this 2020 Budget – a Budget that was touted as the peoples’ budget but that lacks the basic components to satisfy the needs of the working class in a time of emergency, given the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have heard nine presentations from the opposite side of this House thus far, and there was not a single presentation that highlighted any substantive aspect of the 2020 Budget that will benefit the poor people of Guyana. Instead, utterances of “the peoples’ budget” are echoed in this House. But those utterances are void of substance, empty words that mean absolutely nothing to the analytical mind.

The Hon. Members on the opposite side of this House are selling a dream to the Guyanese people, a dream that seeks to convince us that giving tax breaks to corporations will result in prosperity for the working class family, but this dream will not be sold, as such a concept is riddled in fraud.

Some of the most famous quotes about trickle-down economics, a concept that this Budget is based on, come from the minds of people like Mr. Warren Buffet, Ms. Elizabeth Warren, Mr. Bernie Sanders and economists too numerous to mention here today. The Politician, Mr. Bernie Sanders, once said:

“Trickle down economics is a fraud. Giving tax breaks to the rich and large corporations does not create jobs. It simply makes the rich richer, enlarges the budget deficits and increases income and wealth equality. We need economic policies which benefit working families, not the billionaire class.”

We can look at this from the billionaire class. I will quote from Warren Buffet. He said:

“The rich are always going to say that, you know, just give us more money and we’ll go out and spend more and then it will all trickle down to the rest of you.”

Mr. Buffet further said:

“But that has not worked the last 10 years.”

Trickle-down economics or the more technical term ‘supply-side economics’ is not only a failed 20th century concept that

first year economists and economics students would have learned in their classes when they read of how not to manage an economy, it is also, as sad as the fact is, the only way to describe the sad excuse for economic policy which the PPP/C intends to force on the working families of Guyana.

I want to give you some numbers now. The 2012 Census reported that there was a total of 210,124 households. This Budget caters to borrow \$75 billion to accomplish poorly structured goals set out in it. To further break that down, each household will now be burdened with a national debt increase of \$357,000 in a single quarter-year period to further enrich the wealthy. Imagine what \$357,000 would mean to the parents struggling to send their children to school. Imagine what that \$357,000 would mean to the cleaners who are barely managing to pay their basic bills. Imagine what that \$357, 000 would mean to the families who are struggling with the impact of the COVID-19. Instead, in an emergency budget, which was presented in the midst of a pandemic, the governing Administration is *dangling a carrot* of \$25,000 per household while, simultaneously, adding a national debt burden of \$357,000 to each household. Never before has there been a more direct attack on the working people of Guyana. This is not just incompetence; this is betrayal.

With this fact before our collective faces, the Guyanese people now have their intelligence insulted by this cabal, with claims that the oil moneys would not be used to cover outrageous new borrowing. The ridiculousness of the opposite side’s claim that they would not use the \$60 billion in total oil revenue expected in 2020 to cover parts of the \$75 billion they will be borrowing in this Budget, is a proverbial spit in the faces of the Guyanese people. Guyanese families who had hopes that moneys from the national oil wealth, moneys that rightfully belongs to them, moneys that they had hoped that they could have used to uplift their standard of living, these families must now watch as the hopes and dreams of a generation are trampled on by the greed of the PPP/C and their business friends.

11.46 a.m.

The PPP/C further made the delusional claim that cuts in taxable items and businesses would result in the reduced price of items and ease the burden on the poor; cutting these taxes will do no such thing. We are left to wonder if this is the result of a gross misunderstanding of basic economic principles or a show of total ignorance of economic science. It appears that we need to seek the help of some secondary school economic students to explain the upward stickiness of

price to the Learned Members of the opposite side of the House.

This Budget was crafted in deceit and betrayal. As I speak of deceit, I implore that we turn our attention to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. Just a few days back, the 2020 Estimates were presented in this House. That Budget presentation alluded to the amount of money that would be spent on culture, youth and sports. I turn your attention to the Budget speech pages. I have page 51, paragraph three, line two and I read:

“To this end \$2.7 billion has been allocated for Culture, Youth and Sports, for which \$805.3 million is for Sports.”

I just quoted from the Budget speech that \$2.7 billion is said to have been allocated to culture, youth and sports, yet, if you turn your attention to the actual Estimates, you would realise that a mere \$1.2 billion was allocated to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. With allocations of \$2.7 billion towards culture, youth and sports, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports will only receive \$1.2 billion, less than half of the budgetary allocations. This is nothing less than a vote of no confidence in the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports from his own Colleagues in his ability to effectively and efficiently manage any significant project under his portfolio.

Within the budget speech document, again, this time I turn your attention to page 49, paragraph three, lines five through eight and I quote:

“Additionally, His Excellency, President Irfaan Ali, has already announced that a Youth Advisory Council will be established, reflecting our country's diversity, for which \$25 million has been allocated to support its effective functioning.”

We see here, even the youth advisory council is not being entrusted in the hands of the appointed Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports. This is the level of deceit and betrayal that is reflected in this Budget. It is utterly disheartening that, in a Budget of \$330 billion, only 0.3% was allocated to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, when the young people collectively account for over 60% of the population in Guyana. This is a clear sign of disrespect to the youths.

There are businesses on Regent Street which will be getting tax cuts from this very Budget, which is greater than the total allocation to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. Let that sink in. The governing Administration has shown that

0.3% of its focus and priority is on our country’s culture. Zero point three per cent of their focus is on our athletes, and yes, the same 0.3% of their priority is on our future. How could we say that we are building a nation, when those who stand to benefit are not strongly considered? It is our youths, our future. If they are not reaping the benefits then I beg the question, who then are the real beneficiaries of this Budget?

Let me remind the honourable House of some of the accomplishments as it regard youths under APNU/AFC Administration; we have the Five Bs programme; 700 graduates from Government Technical Institute (GTI) with technical skills; hundreds of scholarships issued; \$186 million hinterland students’ dormitory constructed; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programme won the international prize in Dubai; information and communication technology hubs constructed everywhere; smart classrooms to facilitate e-learning; leadership, financial and literacy training; National Youth Corps; public sector college; best ever Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) results in the Caribbean; and the list goes on. This is proof of youth centredness when it comes to governance.

The PPP/C wants to tell Guyanese that they are a Government for all. I know differently. For I know first-hand what it is like to live in a community that was completely neglected under the PPP/C. I was born and raised Bartica, Region 7, a small community that has unwavering support for the APNU/AFC Coalition. Because of that fact, under the 23 years of the PPP/C rule, Bartica was neglected. Hundreds of people died for lack of basic healthcare in Bartica. Today, thanks to the APNU/AFC Coalition Government, the Bartica Hospital is now a regional hospital that saves hundreds of lives. The transformation that took place in Bartica, over the last five years, is simply unprecedented.

The Bartica Transport & Harbours Department Stelling is no longer an eyesore, like it was under the PPP/C Administration. The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) is no longer an old, not working blackout-oriented facility. Today, there are brand new power plants in Bartica with undisturbed power.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for you to tell us more and conclude, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Fernandes: I will reiterate my last point as I continue. As I was saying, GPL is no longer an old, not working blackout-oriented facility. Today, there is a brand-new power plant with undisturbed power in Bartica. That was the standard set by the APNU/AFC Administration.

The Budget was presented under the theme, ‘Our Plan for Prosperity.’ That alone is a very frightening concept. If the PPP/C’s ‘plan for prosperity’ is to increase the overall deficit of the percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 8%, then there is no prosperity to look forward to. If their ‘plan for prosperity’ is the meagre two-week bonus for the Joint Services, then there is no ‘plan for prosperity.’ If their ‘plan for prosperity’ is a one-off payment of \$25,000 per household, with no focus on equity versus equality, then there is absolutely no ‘plan for prosperity’ for you to look forward to.

I grew up in a simple family, the kind of family that so many Guyanese could relate to, the type of family that needs the most but often receives the least. I am sure that there are Members on the opposite side of this House who have similar stories to tell – stories of struggles while growing up, yet we see them standing firm and vigorously defending this Budget - a Budget that has absolutely no real benefit to poor people. To those Members, I say you are not a part of the problem, you are the problem. This is not the best you could have done when it does nothing good for the ordinary people of Guyana, but rather add to their already overloaded daily burdens. Tell me, where is the cassareep for the people of Guyana? This Budget was not put together for the ordinary people; it was not done with their best interest at heart. This Budget lacks compassion for our people. It reeks of crude capitalism; a system in which the wealthy gets wealthier at any cost. Today, I tell this honourable House that the cost will be borne by the 210,124 households.

I close by saying, if businesses are successful and achieve excessive profits, they are under absolutely no obligation to share their wealth with their workers. It, therefore, means that policies used to craft this Budget were never intended to benefit the working class of Guyana.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Before I move the suspension, let me just remind the Members of the Committee of Selection that we will meet immediately after the suspension in the Dome.

Hon. Members, this is a good time for us to take a suspension for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 11.59 a.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.12 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. We shall continue with the Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo.

Dr. Mahadeo: I first of all take this opportunity to congratulate you on becoming the Speaker of Guyana’s National Assembly, after decades of serving Guyana as a Member of Parliament and a Minister of Government. I am confident that you will serve with distinction as the Speaker of our National Assembly.

I would also like to congratulate Mr. Lenox Shuman on being the Deputy Speaker. As far as I know, it is the first time that someone from the Amerindian community is serving as a Deputy Speaker in Guyana and maybe elsewhere.

Let me also welcome all the new Members on both sides of the House, wish them all the best and tell them that their time in this National Assembly will be memorable. They could make it worthwhile. They could make it memorable by making contributions that are positive and making constructive criticisms.

I would also like to congratulate our Ministers. They have come in to lead at a time when Guyana is on a threshold. There has been a pause between 2015 to now. We have to pick up the pieces and move forward. This Budget was supposed to have been presented shortly after March, 2020. It is now here at last. I cannot proceed without congratulating the hard-working and dedicated staff at the Ministry of Finance and the Ministers who contributed to compiling this Budget in record time.

Also, please permit me to pay homage to the first people of Guyana, our Amerindian brothers and sisters. As the Hon. Member, Mr. Alister Charlie, said, it was in 1992 that President Dr. Cheddi Jagan recognised the contributions of our Amerindian brothers and sisters and designated September as Amerindian Heritage Month.

The Members on the opposing side of the House presented, during their term in Office, what they termed the ‘Good Life’ budget. These ‘Good Life’ budgets, however, introduced and/or increased over 200 new taxes.

1.16 p.m.

These ‘Good Life’ budgets took away the \$10,000 annual grant from our school children. These ‘Good Life’ budgets took away the subsidies on electricity and water for pensioners. The same ‘Good Life’ budgets closed the sugar estates and introduced value-added tax on electricity, water and medical supplies, among other items. The same ‘Good Life’ budgets increased fees for drainage and irrigation (D&I) and put VAT on agricultural and mining equipment, among others. This begs the question: who was really enjoying the ‘Good Life’? It most certainly was not the ordinary people of Guyana, who make up the majority of Guyana. I cannot help but say this: the mere fact that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change is sitting over there is testimony that those budgets were not really ‘Good Life’ budgets.

Internationally, it is known that Mathematics is a challenge for the APNU/AFC, my Colleagues across the floor. Remember the 33, 65 fiasco. Now, I am convinced that English Language seems to also be a challenge. It seems it is difficult to understand that this 2020 Budget, presented by my Government, has not only restored the school grant but has increased it. It has restored subsidy on water for pensioners. It has removed taxes that were introduced by the previous Administration. It has catered for the re-opening of sugar estates closed by the APNU/AFC. It has removed the fees for D&I and the VAT from agricultural and mining equipment. This is a Budget that will benefit each and every Guyanese, including the Members on the other side. It begs the question: which of the two – the APNU/AFC’s budget or this Budget – actually look like it is leading to the ‘Good Life’ for Guyanese generally? The answer is obviously a no-brainer. The promises made in our manifesto would be kept, starting with this Budget. We have heard some of my Colleagues already explaining how our manifesto’s promises would be kept.

The last time I made my presentation in this honourable House, I, along with my Colleague, Dr. Frank Anthony, was labelled by the then Minister of Public Health as spreading untruths, when I informed this honourable House about her incompetence and that of her politically-appointed heads in the various regions.

Under the stewardship of the APNU/AFC Government, the public health sector in Guyana was devastated. Let us talk about health service delivery using Region 6 as an example, the region where I come from and where my Colleague who is scheduled to speak after me comes from. I heard a Member on the opposite side, Hon. Member Holder, talking about square pegs. An ex-bank clerk managing the second largest

region’s healthcare services, what do we call that? Obviously, a square peg. A Minister of so-called Public Health having no clue of healthcare delivery. That is a square peg.

I asked doctors managing hospitals in all 10 administrative regions of Guyana about their issues. Among the issues raised were shortages of drugs and medical supplies, non-functional equipment, non-co-operation of Regional Executive Officers (REOs), especially in the hinterland, and fuel not being released for health staff to make their visits. When we took over, in Region 6, there were five anaesthetic machines; four of them were not working. This was in the month of August. A Bio-Medical Engineer was asked to check and see what can be fixed. He fixed one immediately. Two others, which were not working for over three years, will be fixed within the week.

Here is a shocker and an example of how the APNU/AFC Government functioned. There was a new anaesthetic machine that was bought for millions of dollars, sole-sourced. By the way, I must pause here. An Hon. Member in this House, when making a speech in 2015, said that sole sourcing would be in the past under the APNU/AFC. That is definitely not so. This one was sole-sourced. This new anaesthetic machine has never been used and cannot be used in the New Amsterdam Hospital. It is parked there. Do you know why it cannot be used? It cannot be used because it is an anaesthetic machine to be used for veterinary services – to put animals to sleep for surgical interventions. I need the advice of the Hon. Attorney General (AG). Sir, who is liable? Is it the supplier, the receiver or somebody else? How do taxpayers get their moneys’ worth?

On the other hand, as an animal activist, I say that we should not treat animals badly. At the same time, we should not treat human beings as animals. So, imagine my surprise when the Hon. Member, in his opening remarks, said that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government employs *square pegs in round holes*.

The Hon. Member, now on the Opposition, bragged and boasted about a computerized tomography (CT) scan machine that they received in 2015. By the way, that machine was negotiated for under the previous PPP/C Government. During our last budget debate in 2018, pictures were displayed showing, supposedly, a CT scanner being installed in the New Amsterdam Hospital. Once again, I get the opportunity to refute that untruth. The CT scanner is still not operational up to today. It is my Government that is putting systems in place to ensure that this machine is up and running by the end

of the week. I have to mention that, for five years, when that machine was lying idle, it could have saved the ordinary man millions of dollars. It was stored in a room. Storage was not free. It was at a cost of \$14.5 million per month and \$174 million per year. Could you remember the infamous Sussex Street Bond? I remember the same Minister saying that she was storing the CT scan machine, a \$90 million piece of equipment, in the so-called bond, as a justification. In one year, we could have bought two machines. It boggled the mind then and it continues to do so today.

The story in Region 6 gets even worse. In the *Report of the Auditor General* for 2018, paragraph 972 states:

“...comparison of the prices paid for drugs and medical supplies procured by the Regional Administration from local suppliers with that of the prices paid by MMU as indicated on the price listing submitted, revealed that items bought by the Regional Administration had significantly higher prices when compared to the MMU’s prices.”

In some cases, the region paid 300% more. In two instances – and it was quoted in the *Report of the Auditor General* 2018 – the region paid as much as 1669% more. A tablet, Risperidone 2mg, is \$13 dollars per tablet in Georgetown. The region paid \$230 for one. They did not buy one; they did not buy 100; they did not even buy 1,000; they bought 8,400 of these tablets. Calculate the taxpayers’ moneys that were lost. Surgical gloves that could have been bought for \$929 per box, the region paid \$5,200 per box. I wonder if this is the reason we have no record of central purchasing of drugs and medical supplies. Was it to facilitate this kind of spending that the Auditor General reported? One could ask what happened with the Regional Procurement and Tender Administration Board in Region 6. Why did it not oversee such spending? The answer is that the Regional Procurement and Tender Administration Board in Region 6, which is supposed to have Members from both sides, the Government’s and the Opposition’s sides, had no Members of the Opposition sitting on it. Bear in mind, in Region 6, we had 20 out of the 30 regional seats and we had no representation on the Regional Procurement and Tender Administration Board (RPTAB). Someone on the Opposition, some Hon. Member, spoke about corruption. Well, that is corruption.

The same REO and team, which was appointed by the APNU/AFC, spent over \$76 million to supposedly purchase Coronavirus disease relief items. Among these items was the

rental of two buses. The only thing they did was rent these two buses. The Government had to provide drivers and fuel at \$480,000 per month. Whilst they were renting buses, under the shed at the Regional Health Services Building, there were three buses, in working order, parked there. What do you call that? Somebody... I am not going to say more.

Even with the supposed emergency purchase of drugs and medical supplies for the institution I spoke about, and to which the Auditor General referred, Region 6 was permanently out of drugs. It is still out of drugs and medical supplies. There are no intravenous (IV) antibiotics, Flagyl, Dopamine, adrenaline, Ibuprofen (IB), Glyceryl trinitrate (GTN), Hyperin, proton-pump inhibitors (PPIs), H2 blockers and sutures. The list is long; I am just mentioning those. As a surgeon, I could tell you that these items are critical and crucial to ensure a successful outcome for patients. Not only were the operating theatres non-functional, but even emergency surgeries would not have been done effectively.

In addition to the severe shortages of drugs, let me tell you something else. A new digital x-ray was purchased, again, through sole sourcing, to be set up in the New Amsterdam Hospital. Any medical personnel is going to tell you that a digital x-ray is excellent. Do you know what? The digital x-ray was bought. The old x-ray was removed but the new digital x-ray cannot work because a very important component is missing. How can this be possible? How was equipment being bought to serve the people of Region 6? The laboratory in Region 6 cannot function to its capacity because most of the equipment are non-functional – not because they are broken but because they were not serviced. We all know laboratory equipment need to be serviced regularly; they need to be calibrated so that patients could get correct results.

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

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

Motion put and agreed to.

1.31 p.m.

All positive programmes that we had in Region 6 were killed as soon as APNU/AFC got into power. The geriatric care programme was killed. The extended home-based programme was killed. The health centre management committees were killed. The health facilities were killed.

The previous Minister of Public Health recommissioned the National Ophthalmology Hospital in 2019. Guess what? For 2019, they did a grand total of two cataract surgeries, after the recommissioning. By the way, Hon. Members, two cataract surgeries in 2019, were better than zero in 2018, 2017 and 2016. The then Minister also commissioned an x-ray machine that, a few months after, is not working. There has been no servicing.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) management: you would want to cry. Guyana was on the cusp of becoming a nation certified as having no transmission of HIV from mother to child. That is no longer so because sometimes there were no HIV kits to test. There is no HIV medication. It is criminal that we are now having babies being born with HV, through no fault of theirs.

Lethem and Mabaruma were not spared. They received digital x-rays too, but the problem is that the x-ray needs a three-phase voltage system, which cannot be provided in Lethem and Mabaruma.

Let me quickly go to some of the things that will be done in Region 6: ; we will have the completion of the maternity ward; construction of Tuberculosis (TB) care and treatment centre in Port Mourant; rehabilitation of Mibicuri Hospital; and rehabilitation of the Winifred Gaskin School in Manchester.

Before I close, I need to reply to some statements that were made. The geographic Member of Parliament for Region 2 made some claims of achievement of the last Government. On speaking with the Regional Health Officer (RHO), the following came out, and if I were that Hon. Member, I would not have made any of these claims. The rehabilitation works at Oscar Joseph District Hospital, at the cost of \$9 million, included setting up centralised oxygen. To date, it is not working. A maternity home that was constructed, some two and a half years ago, was not completed; it had no furnishing. It is now being used as the COVID-19 centre after it was completed and furnished. It cost \$28 million. Construction of a new theatre at Public Hospital Suddie, the Member said, costs \$40.9 million. It was never used and cannot be used because it does not meet the specification. The roof is leaking. There was the extension of the drug bond in Suddie. They did not have drugs to store. Why did they extend the bond? Two incinerators, at a cost of \$10 million, were built. They cannot be used because they do not meet the specifications.

Rice: I want to remind the Hon. Member that Mr. Granger, then President, when the farmers met difficulties and asked for help, as they used to be given under the PPP/C, said rice was not Government’s business. Hon. Member, the success of rice in Guyana was not because of the APNU/AFC; it was in spite of the APNU/AFC. It was due to the farmers’ hard work, the new varieties of rice that were developed by National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAERI) under the PPP/C and the support of farmers’ organisations, such as the Rice Producers Association (RPA).

I just want to tell Hon. Member Fernandes that this Budget is in two parts. The first part has to cover the moneys that were spent, illegally, already. The second part is what we are trying to spend up to year end.

The Bartica Regional Hospital was a regional hospital, unless the Hon. Member declassified it and then reclassified it. Doctors there and in other parts of Guyana were trained in Cuba, under the scholarship programme that was implemented by the PPP/C. The focus of this Budget is on COVID-19 and stimulating the economy. Next year, you will see transformative programmes.

Mr. Speaker: Focus on winding down.

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a saying when I was very young, *El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido* – the people, united, will never be defeated.

I want to close by reading this poem, on which our prayer is built, by Rabindranath Tagore:

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action;

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.”

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

Mr. Jaiprashad: Pleasant good afternoon, Brothers and Sisters of this honourable House. I am very much happy to be here to represent the people of East Berbice-Corentyne. To be more specific, I am very happy to be here from the village of Port Mourant. I am representing the village of Port Mourant and I am proud to be on the side of the APNU/AFC. I was hoping to have some other Colleagues, from the other side, from Port Mourant but I am not seeing any.

Before I make my presentation, I wish to make a few comments on what the previous speaker mentioned. Firstly, I wish to say that, probably, he did not find the correct piece and he was referring to his 2015 piece because most of what he said is the track record of the PPP/C Administration.

I do not know if the \$10,000 story is a mantra for the PPP/C. Each presenter is reinforcing the \$10,000 grant. It seems to me that it was the only thing that the PPP/C did for the 23 years. The Hon. Member mentioned agriculture. I must reiterate that rice production was the highest under the APNU/AFC Government.

The Hon. Member mentioned the health facilities in East Berbice-Corentyne. Oh my! He was responsible before we took over East Berbice-Corentyne.

He mentioned storage. We had to break a padlock from a storage bond and when we opened that bond, Brothers and Sisters, there was taxpayers’ moneys stored there – pampers, milk, food stuff and all sorts of things. Now, the Hon. Member has the audacity to tell us about storing and storage. Come on, Brother.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my condolences to the family and friends of the three youths who were slaughtered a few days ago. Also, my condolences and sympathies to the other brothers and sisters who met their demise during the 43 days of this Administration. This Budget, presented by the Members on the other side, is not a people’s budget. It has nothing to offer to the poor man. This Budget was designed to give a few rich persons the opportunity to continue to trample on the lives of the poor.

I am a bit baffled in understanding how the PPP/C Administration is presenting a Budget far away from protecting and support the working-class people. I do not know what is happening to the Hon. Cheddi Jagan.

I wish to make reference to the Hon. Minister, Mr. Indar, who stated, yesterday, that the APNU/AFC took away the \$10,000 grant from the people. I wish to tell this honourable House that the \$10,000 grant was a *one shot and done*. The APNU/AFC Government did not believe in *one shot and done*. So, the APNU/AFC Government moved the minimum wage from \$35,000 to \$70,000. If my Mathematics proves me correctly, \$35,000 to \$70,000 is an additional \$35,000. We have not given the people \$10,000 and *done*. We have given them \$35,000 every month. Hon. Members, I am not seeing this growth in this Budget. It seems as though it will be another *one shot and done*. Hon. Members, for one year, the APNU/AFC gave families \$420,000.

I am urging Members on the other side not to leave statements hanging but complete their calculation. I wish to emphasise that there is no scale in this Budget to move wages and salaries to \$140,000 from \$70,000. We have doubled it from \$35,000 to \$70,000. I was expecting that this Budget presentation would have indicated that the minimum wage would be moved to \$140,000, but I have not seen that as yet.

According to the Budget speech, page 24, the Hon. Member mentioned strengthening local government. Let me repeat. The Hon. Member mentioned strengthening local government. Since when does the PPP/C understand the strengthening of local government? This is a copied phrase and this phrase was stated in the Act of 1980. I must indicate to the Hon. Member that he needs to state his source when he is quoting these phrases. I am happy that the PPP/C did some homework by reading the Act of 1980. I wish to further state that I must remind the Hon. Member that there was one Local Government Election in 23 years. I do not know how the phrase, “strengthening local government” is applicable to one in 23 years. It should have been eight in 23 years. Something is not matching up. Certainly, not the PPP/C. On our side, Members do not have the time to waste to read pieces of the PPP/C’s propaganda manifesto.

1.46 p.m.

The Hon. Member mentioned on page 24 of the Budget speech:

“We will implement our manifesto programme for local government which details strategic actions that will improve the efficacy of our Local Democratic Organs (LDOs).”

I wish to state that we do not have the time to waste to go to the PPP/C’s manifesto. I, therefore, wish the Hon. Member to

be more specific. Say exactly what you want to give to the people and do not speak in riddles. I wish to re-emphasise that local government was not a focus for the PPP/C in 23 years. They claimed that, in 1992, democracy was restored. How can you claim that democracy was restored in 1992, and you were supposed to have eight local government elections and you had one? It means ‘democracy’ has different meanings to different sets of people.

I wish to draw to the attention of the Hon. Member that the previous Administration knows about Local Democratic Organs. We never used it as a slush fund. We used the funds to rectify the slush system that the PPP/C left after 23 years. I wish to re-emphasise that we never used a slush fund. We used the fund to clean the slush that was left there for 23 years. This slush fund was a thing that they called the Interim Management Committee (IMC). By the time we are finished here on Friday, we will have a good definition for that acronym. Hon. Members, I wish to further emphasise that, in order to clean that slush from the IMC, we had to use budgetary funds. We had to ensure that all of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and municipalities had elected members. We believe that the people must govern themselves. That is why we had two elections in five years.

I wish to say that, in two Local Government Elections, we were able to ensure that the people voted for more than 600 members in this country to be councillors, chairmen, mayors, *et cetera*. We did not handpick friends and cronies and make them members of the IMC. We engaged in a process called local government election. This is a process in which we have shown that we did two in five years, as compared to one in 23 years.

In paragraph 4.12, the Hon. Member mentioned:

“From all accounts, LDOs were underperforming and negatively impacted as a result of an unclear policy direction.”

I wish to state that one in 23 is hot air. Let it soak in. Come on, Brothers and Sisters, we must understand that the PPP/C had one Local Government Election in 23 years and have come here to tell us about democracy. Something is definitely wrong.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is your two-minute notice.

Mr. Jaiprashad: The Hon. Minister, Mr. Indar, mentioned the blackout story. Let me inform the honourable House that

it has been 43 days since this new Administration took control of this country and we have had 13 blackouts already.

Let me remind this House that, for 23 years, the PPP/C Government was mandated to fix the Corentyne highway by putting up some lights. I wish to say that, in five years, the APNU/AFC Government lit the Corentyne highway. I do not know how their ‘Plan for Prosperity’, as they call it, will be there for the people. They had 23 years to put a few lights on the Corentyne highway and they did not do that. Hundreds of persons were killed there, due to accidents, and you did not do that, and you come here to tell us that you care – ‘Our Plan for Prosperity’. We fixed it in five.

I wish to emphasise that this Budget does not reflect the will of the people. This Budget does not cater for the poor people of this country. As such, we need to ensure that better systems are put in place so that the poor people of this country will be properly and rightfully represented.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Ramsaran: I am happy to be able to stand here, once again, to congratulate the Ministry of Finance and the hard-working team, in not only putting together a budget, but putting it together in a certain context. I think one speaker from the other side attempted to put it in context - what the team did, at what period, and what other distractions they might have had.

Remember, we had the COVID-19, if I could stress, at a time when ... [**Mr. Ramsaroop:** We have COVID-19.] Well, we do have it still. I am happy that you are awake and alert, and I am happy that the ladies are prompting me. The Budget was being prepared in some peculiar circumstances, which, probably, will never be repeated. That is one of them.

Secondly, there was a protracted economic downturn, triggered mainly by the closures. When I say closures, everybody automatically knows what closures I am speaking about – the massive closure of the sugar industry. It was not sugar alone but the whole industry. Sugar is not only about the brown substance that one eats when it is produced; it is about the health systems that they help to provide, the walkways that they keep clean and well-organised and so on. I think that many people, a little side note here, speaking about sugar today and other days seem to think only of the sweet substance that Guyana is famous for – Demerara crystals. But it means more. Probably at another discussion level, when some of you grow up, we can go into that. The Skeldon Sugar Estate, what does it do? What about the

cogeneration? What about the assistance it lends to two cattle rearing societies in the area? Things like that.

My memory says there is something called the Sukhram Cattle Pastures, which the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) had some obligation to help in the community. So, GuySuCo, and sugar and Berbice *is a different thing*. But I just thought I should mention that in an aside.

Now, before I get into my real talk, my real appeal to you is to see this as a document, a costed plan, the Budget, which says that Guyana is back on track. I definitely admit to stealing that from one of my favourite songsters – who created that phrase, Guyana is back on track – Dave Martin. Way back, as soon as he brought that tune out, I thought, “You know, this is so appropriate.” That was at the time, many years ago, when Guyana was getting back on track, again, under a previous PPP/C regime.

That is another thing that I want to talk about. Two persons on this side mentioned it, and I think somebody over there intimated it too. Guyana, for its entire history, especially its post-independence history, and even a few years before, only made progress when the PPP/C was in Office.

When I discussed how I will enter [*inaudible*] news for my presentation for these younger folks, they said, “But, Dr. Ramsaran, why are you saying Guyana is back on track?” It must be so, because, once the PPP/C is in charge, Guyana will always be on track. The problem is we have to now use lots of resources, not to be on track, but to pull us back from where we were and get us back on track. It was like a pause. Somebody had their thumb on the pause button. We have released it and now we can breathe.

Talk to the young people in the streets: Pitt Street and Corriverton. They feel a difference, but we have to caution them. The PPP/C are not magicians. We need to find the resources to do the things we want to do. People in the markets, at the funerals and the weddings – and I am told that people over on the other side like to attend funerals, and sometimes they turn up at the wrong funeral, but not over here – are saying, “yes, we feel lighter. Guyana feels fluffier.” But the point is that we need to be very conscious. We cannot become complacent. This is especially to the membership of the party and its structures, the supporters and those persons on the other side who might not have voted for us or who might have voted against us, although they see what the PPP/C is worth.

Look at how many young and new faces we have on our side. Look at them. I wanted to open my intervention by congratulating them. Look at the gender mix. Every one of them is a fighter; they came from the recent campaign trail. They are educated, they are focused, and they have lots of years ahead of them. I am certain that we have laid the foundation for the continued victory of the PPP/C for many years to come. Why do I say this? It is because I never thought I would have to say this, but as a person getting older, I would look over my shoulder sometimes and say, “I wonder where the people are to replace us?” And then I look around and I see Mr. Charles Ramson, and I say that we will be safe. I see some of the new people who have come into the parliamentary team and say we are safe. You are going to be over there for a long time, guys. I only mentioned one guy, Mr. Ramson, because he is tall and everybody can see him, but there are some smaller packages who are just as powerful – dynamite. We are going to keep you there for some time, at the advice of the electorate. Some of them made a mistake, they said, and they voted wrongly.

Then again, where is Moses and where is ...? Oh yes, Mr. Trotman is across there, but you do not hear him now. Where is Moses? Is he in the desert? Is he going to be crossing the Red Sea or the Demerara River shortly? We are here to stay for a long while; that is why I want to recommend to you this costed plan, a budget; that is it by definition. They have done well. You all have been here for a long time, probably for as much as you are old.

Before I get into the theme that I want to explore today, ‘Guyana back on track,’ I want to say this: I am not going to be hitting at the young gentleman over there who joined the opposing team recently, but I would rather say that he needs to do some fact-checking.

For example, he was very vociferous and [*inaudible*], over there, in accusing the PPP/C Government of having accepted or having tonnes of expired medication. I am going to be easy on you and say that you did not say an untruth and you did not attempt to deceive the Assembly, but you probably have to fact-check your information. Those things that the gentleman referred to, some things that are expired in some container in some particular space, were gifts, and they had to be taken with the other good things as part of the gifting. When you get a little bigger and grow and come into the system, you will know that there are certain agencies that bring things in freely. Once in the container, it is collected.

2.01 p.m.

If you have been around for some time, or if previous Ministers of Health have been advising you, those on the Government’s or the Opposition’s side, or probably they do not know themselves, you would know that you have to take the container, along with those things that are good and bad, and that is a difficult thing to do. The balance is a win balance for everyone. The people donating the container gets rid of it and gets rid of the stuff, but you have to take care of the structure, especially with medications. That was either a *low blow* or a *no blow*. I would like to be kind to you. [**An Hon. Member:** *Blow blow.*] Okay, *blow blow*. Is he one of the young *blow blows*? [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Yes, blow.] Okay. If he continues like that, I do not think that he would stay there long. The young people in Berbice will get fed up of him. So, that is it.

When I was Minister of Health, I was put in this position too. You have to take what is in the container but that is just an aside. Mr. Ramjattan seems to be prompting me. He wants to hear the main speech. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** Let us hear you.] I see that you are even rubbing your fingers in glee. Mr. Ramjattan, let me say this, we have put that aside. One of your younger Members... and I advise that you, and I know that you would do this, give him a little talk about how to fact check. I think that is a fancy term they are using now in the news, like in the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and the Cable News Network (CNN). They are doing it a lot with Mr. Donald Trump, who is one of the most powerful men in the world, if not the most powerful. So, I am advising you, Sir. You are not as powerful as he is and so you could take that advice too. It shows that, just another aside, the persons who were in the leadership of the Ministry of Health, over there, probably never assimilated and never imbued these things. They probably were just around the place not getting their real work done.

Guyana is back on track. The Budget, the costed plan being presented, shows that. We would like to point out that, for example, for medication, there is a shortage now across the system, and I am talking to you as Brothers and Sisters. Since 2017, and I am speaking to Mr. *Prakash* Ramjattan and all of the other good people over there, this has been affecting our supporters and your supporters. What is more? Let me give you a little aside. When one does not have the medication for one’s chronic diseases and one has to go to the corner shop and buy it, that is okay because one is getting it, but one might not be getting it in adequate and persistent quantities. It opens one up when one is weakened. When one says that he or she has concomitant ailments or pre-existing conditions, it opens one up, to a larger degree, to becoming a victim of the

COVID- 19, or even an ordinary ‘flu’. It is in your interest and in our interest that you overcome this, since we want to protect our nation, your supporters and our supporters.

Since 2018, there have been no major purchases and that is why there are shortages. How could this be? Who is going to be disciplined? Those are things that we are discovering and we will have to put it in order. That is why I am very delighted to see the amount of moneys being given, at the central level, to the Ministry of Health, to buy medications and medical supplies and, at the same time, in lesser amounts. As is the tradition, it is being given to the regions, within their discretion, to buy certain other emergency drugs that they might need, which are peculiar to those regions. We intend to continue the diligent oversight of the spending of those moneys in the regions because we know that, sometimes, there could be mischief.

That is one reason I am very enamoured by this Budget or this plan that has been put forward. What is more, and I made some notes here, is that it is being put forward in other conditions, not only the stress of the existing pandemic, but in a short space of time. Somebody reported that we, the Government, will be crafting it in 21 days, as if to fool us and make us look a little bit inattentive, but we ended up crafting it in 20 days. Those are things we should be looking at. Those of you who were there, on the other side and were in Government, would know how stressful and sometimes distressful it is to create a budget, especially when you turn up at the Ministry of Finance and they want to knock this and that out, legitimately, because there is just so much money to be had.

I want to congratulate the team that put the *Budget 2020* together in such a short time and I want to congratulate them for even putting it together, at least, one day earlier than was planned. Those are things that I want to observe before we get into the full discussion of ‘Guyana back on track’. [**Mr. Jones:** Backtrack.] That is not big news now, and I am told that you should consult one of your Hon. Members. I think that Mr. Felix is his name, Mr. McCoy. [**Mr. McCoy:** Backtrack.] Yes, we are back on track. How do we stay there? What are the challenges to keep this ship on an even keel? The main challenge would be getting the resources to buy the bulk medications and medical supplies that were not there.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is your two-minute notice to keep you on.

Dr. Ramsaran: We would like to get that over to you. At the same time, we would like to tell you that the Ministry of Health had expanded when the People’s Progressive Party/Civic was in Office a few years ago, before we had this pause button pressed for a short while. Training was a significant aspect of our work. The PPP/C believed in having the Ministry of Health and other ministries as learning organisations. In other words, you would come in, and even if you have one level of education with specific technical education, you would not stay there forever. We would keep building you up.

I would like to note that, in the Budget, under the various programmes, how much moneys are being put aside. In every case, it is small, but it is still significant increases in the moneys that are being put aside for education. What is that? This is developing the human factor in terms of the post-graduate studies in medicine and its various aspects. I think there are now 13 programmes in medicine and, of course, you see, ever so often, the advertisements for nurses and doctors being trained. As far as the health sector is concerned, we are going to be having a good staff of doctors. What we did note is that, due to certain changes to their contractual obligations, made by your regime, they would now have to be waiting until they are eligible for old age pension, which is at age 65, to get a little lump sum of money to do something big. I get the impression that we will explore, actively, returning the contract, whereby, the gratuity of 22.5% is given at the end of every six months. That is why a lot of them are leaving. That is why some of them are lethargic – our doctors – because the PPP/C trained about 2,000 of them in a short space of time. How many have you been training? Those 2,000 can now go on further to becoming specialists. Many of them were disgruntled, that is, the ‘Jagdeo Scholars’. That is the term I use, the ‘Jagdeo Scholars’, and it would get some people angry. Under the Jagdeo regime, sometimes, almost 2,000 people were sent, predominantly, to become doctors. They would come back to Guyana to build the country and to follow their contractual obligations, and your party mistreated them and broke a contract virtually. So, those are things that we would be addressing.

I want to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, the nation and, of course, the people on the other side of the House and the PPP/C supporters too, that there are adequate resources put in the Budget to see that this learning process continues, and for Guyana to gradually become more independent of foreign specialists. It is difficult. We have a very good arrangement with the Chinese and the Cubans who send lots of specialists. The aim is now to gradually retire those. We would probably

never be able to retire them, totally, in the next few decades. We would replace them with Guyanese who have been training in different institutions, including the University of Guyana (UG), and also in China and in other places where they get scholarships, and of course, the significant portion being of Cuban origin from the Cuban universities. Those are some of the things that are reflected in this Budget.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, to get you to conclude on this track, you would need an extension.

Dr. Ramsaran: I would conclude now. I would like to recommend this Budget, this planned document...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to offer my Colleague five minutes more to conclude, which he is entitled to.

Motion put and agreed to.

Dr. Ramsaran: I had total silence, I thought I had bought them over and that was good enough, but I want to thank Ms. Teixeira for giving me another go at it.

We have the Ministry of Health, which is what you would call a learning organisation. In other words, you would come in with your education, at whatever level you are and however you got it, either at your own expense or with our Government scholarship, and we would continue to develop you. Those are things that would not be seen as ordinary or tangible, but it is there in the Budget – training and continued training scholarships. That is why I am throwing this out because I see a lot of young people over there. I am certain you would know people of your own age group who might want to become doctors or who are doctors or nurses already and may want to further their studies. You would be seeing the advertisements in the newspapers for these programmes, but that is where we put in for the quality, we do not stagnate. There are doctors; how do we get them to become a specialist? How do we get them to become, for example, a surgeon and so forth? Lots of resources are in the Budget for that and it shows that the PPP/C is leading the Ministry of Health in the direction of building a sustainable health sector and system.

For example, we have a good primary healthcare system. Let us do good at the level of the health centres. The more doctors we have in those health centres mean the more we can do. We can have the doctors visit the communities and homes, which are aligned to that particular health centre. As a matter of fact, the good theory of it is that we are hoping that

each health centre would have about 5,000 to 8,000 people with some *[inaudible]* community. The team, because we have expanded it, would include more nurses and, especially, more doctors. For example, at one time, recently, we had six doctors at the Campbellville Health Centre. Previously, which was years ago for a protracted period of time around the early 90s, there was one doctor present. Those are the small things that are funded in this Budget.

I want to congratulate the Ministry of Finance for looking at it in that regard. These are the things that were gotten from the PPP/C regime and have continued and are reflected in this Budget for this short period. I am certain that they would continue in other budgets under the substantive PPP/C Administration. Those are the little innovations that you might not feel or see. Definitely, we see where we can have higher training continued. It will also give young Guyanese professionals the urge and the option of staying and building families in this country.

I would like to take a wider bite of the Budget, not only for the health sector but with the plans that the PPP/C has in relation to small homes for intellectuals and young professionals, which will buttress that effort. Not only would we be having more doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals wanting to stay, but they will have the material incentive to do so. Where do I stay? Do I still stay at home with my mother-in-law or do I get one of these houses that President Irfaan Ali spoke about when he was Minister of Housing? That is the link we are making. I think that the Ministry of Health will definitely be looking, very anxiously, at how we can retain. This is the sub-theme that I am speaking about – not only train but retain and not terrorise them in such a way that they have to wait until they become 65 years old to get a lump sum to buy a car, only to find out that they could only buy a bicycle. Things like those we would be looking at and I see hints of them being funded.

I think my time is running out. I would like to push in some other points in terms of training, not only at its highest level. We look up to the doctors as being the pinnacle of the pyramid but, down below, we also see where training can come in other subheads for other workers in the health sector.

I noticed, too, mental health. I am happy to see mental health was still retained because we are accustomed to speaking of the non-communicable diseases (NCDs). When I was the Minister of Health, a few years ago, we had an adequate NCDs and mental health unit. There is definitely going to be some of these units from the traces that I am seeing in this

Budget and knowing what is coming. We would definitely be placing emphasis on mental health. It has always been on the back burner in Guyana and in other countries. Over the past few years, the PPP/C had started to put it on the front burner by, for example, getting support from international agencies, *[inaudible]* universities. For example, I remember the Psychiatrist, Dr. Bhiri Harry, who brought in a team of 21 specialists from the New Canadians’ Centre of Excellence Inc. I have not seen such things repeated in the past few years. The PPP/C would see that such an initiative continues. Why? Because we are putting mental health back on a pedestal, as well as non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. It was there towards the end of my term as Minister of Health and I am certain, from what I am seeing in the Budget and other discussions, that it would be ‘hitting the roof’ to become fully entrenched as one of the pillars of our public health system.

Mr. Speaker: I think you are going to have to conclude now.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I have just *whet your appetite* and I am open for constructive discussions in a more informal atmosphere. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Joining us, *via* a virtual platform, is the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes.

Ms. Hughes (participated virtually): Mr. Speaker, may I confirm that you are hearing me clearly?

Mr. Speaker: I am. We are just going to confirm that the Dome is hearing you.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you very much.

2.16 p.m.

I rise, in this most honourable House, to deliver my contribution to this Budget debate and, for the first time, to be part of discussions that will shape this Twelfth Parliament of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

The fact that I am speaking with you virtually is a sign of these difficult times. Sadly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and safe distancing requirements, we are unable to meet in our traditional home, usually in Stabroek.

Although this Budget is dubbed, ‘our plan for prosperity,’ let me first emphasise the ‘our’. It is clear that there is not much of a plan here and there is little recognition of the current national environment we find ourselves in today. We realise

that it is anything but one on which we can build a prosperous nation.

A budget is defined as “an estimate of income and expenditures for a set period of time” and that is the problem with *Budget 2020*, which was presented – a vacuous series of figures with no proper consultation or reference to the realities of Guyana today.

To start, at this time, it is clear that this Budget was given, maybe, to the best person who could read it. Is it not strange, *eye pass*, in Guyanese parlance, that we are drowning in meaningless talk of transparency and accountability, while the people of this soon-to-be nation that will be similar to Dubai, still today, the second day of this Budget presentation, do not know who is their Minister of Finance – that man or woman who we Guyanese will ultimately hold responsible for the management of our millions?

How is it that, with all the scheming and plotting by the then Opposition after the no confidence motion of 2018 and this ‘no frills budget’ – those are Member of Parliament Edghill’s words and not mine – we still do not have a Minister of Finance?

The fact that the presenter of this Budget has a close association with religion and, yet his speech was devoid of any compassion, with no indication that we should all still be our brother’s keeper, a principle founded in all religions, is beyond me. The fact that this Government missed this supposed momentous opportunity in ‘our plan for prosperity’, to rally us all together in a spirit of unity, peace and forgiveness, is simply sad. How can we forget that land of love, hope and unity?

I know that the heckling will soon start. ‘Speak to the budget and numbers,’ that shrill voice on the Government side will shout, but I realise that, at this time, numbers do not cut it in Guyana. Let us get honest, let us take a look at our reality, our Guyana today.

If we, in Guyana, thought that the last five months of the election debacle were hard, the last two weeks have been brutal on the sensitivities and sensibilities of every Guyanese, regardless of his or her race. The fact that we have a massive mistrust of each other and that, three generations later, it still threatens the stability of our dear land of Guyana, is frightening. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that the numbers of this Budget must speak loudly and clearly. It should have a plan to address these deficiencies; it does not.

The last two years Guyanese have been drowning in the propaganda wars of doom and gloom. Let us look at the sectoral performance of the economy. As stated in the Budget speech by MP Edghill, and I quote him:

“End of year outcome for 2019 grew by 5.4%”.

Believe it or not, the rice, beef, pork, mutton, table eggs and fishing industries grew; quarry and mining expanded by 10.6%; the growth in gold mining by 3%; and even the bauxite industry, with all of the criticisms and negative talk, by his own admission, grew by 1.7%. He said, and I quote:

“The outturn in the gold mining industry was spurred by small and medium scale miners...”

It increased by over 25% on the previous year.

Do you think the representative of the Ministry of Finance would care to admit that the previous Minister of Natural Resources and the Junior Minister, at the time, maybe had a plan, a specific policy and initiative that resulted in the phenomenal growth to which he refers? Certainly, that could not have come from an APNU/AFC economic plan, but guess what? That was 2019. Then we were told that rice and other manufacturing increased by 26.4%. I was wondering if these words were being spoken by the real Minister of Finance, that is, my good friend, former Minister Jordan.

These are the words of the current Government, the PPP/C, which came to rescue Guyana. I heard the words grown, increased, expansion and expanded many times in the presentation. I wonder if members of the Private Sector Commission (PSC) heard this part of the speech. On pages 10, 11 and 12 of this Budget speech, the words growth, expansion and increased appeared more than 12 times on these pages. How can this be when the economy was then under the management of the APNU/AFC Coalition?

In reality, we know that there was consecutive growth all four years of the APNU/AFC Administration. The discussion, or lack of discussion, or the poor level of constructive discussion, really is an indication of one of the major problems we have in Guyana today. That is, the ability to build on the good and on the achievements, regardless of where it came from or who implemented it; and the inability, by many, to be honest with the facts and to *give jack his jacket*. The PPP/C are masters at propaganda, and I will be the first to admit it. With all this growth and the picture of doom and gloom painted and consumed by many, including

some in the international community, I wonder if this is the same country we are talking about.

One would have hoped that *Budget 2020* would have be transformational and that it would have achieved all that the previous Government failed to do in those four long years. Yes! I am being sarcastic, but we see the same political agenda of the PPP/C and the continuation of a failure to put Guyana first.

The presenter of this Budget, in this honourable House, at paragraph 3.3 in the printed copy of the speech stated and I quote:

“The sugar growing industry contracted for a fourth consecutive year, with sugar production declining by 11.8% from the previous year...”

And guess what? You are planning to reopen sugar estates that failed to have a competitive advantage when it comes to production costs. No plan is articulated in this Budget to ensure that we do it a different way and for it to not become the black hole it was in the past. Instead, we will hand over, triumphantly, more than \$5 billion of taxpayers’ moneys as pay back to your political supporters. Could we get to a time when profitability and competitive advantage are the prime considerations of the day?

On 11thMarch the, I wrote to the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), sharing links to *Facebook* posts that incited the most disrespectful manner of racial hostility. After receiving a prompt acknowledgement, there has been no indication that any concrete monitoring or anything was done to start to reduce the level of race hate we saw on social media. The seeds of this despicable acts and our ‘you do and I do back’ mentality were sown a few months after our 2015 Election. It is important that we remember that, and it was articulated consistently by one of our supposed role models and top men in Government today. This talk has blossomed and continues unabated today.

Imagine, even the ERC had to issue a public disclaimer regarding the utterings of one of its own Commissioners. It is against this backdrop of growing race hate that I lament that this Budget has no clear definitive statement or entity that it will focus on, and is adequately financed, to deal with the issue of growing racial intolerance in Guyana.

Social cohesion has been tossed on the dumpsite, with no replacement at this time, at a time when we have become so barbaric, we now beat, break and brand with an ‘X’ on the

mutilated bodies of our young Guyanese. The Ethnic Relations Commission, like the Elections Commission (GECOM), failed us Guyanese at the time we needed them the most. May I suggest that the more than \$220 million granted, in this Budget, to the Ethnic Relations Commission might be insufficient?

This Budget, understandably, takes cognisance of our COVID-19 reality, as it should, and speaks of bringing under control the spread of COVID-19.

I recall in March, when invitations were issued to the then Opposition for participation in the national COVID-19 Task Force, these were vehemently rejected. How ironic it is that, for the first six months of dealing with this pandemic, our COVID-19 statistics remained relatively stable, tottering around 400 cases, while in the last four weeks of our new Government, this has increased to more than a 100%, galloping out of control.

What about the infrastructure we need to help us manage this COVID-19 pandemic? I can stand tall and proud of the legacy left to this country through the hard work of the former Ministry of Public Telecommunications, which, today, one would have thought, is all the more necessary to be able to deliver education, health, a safe city and other services in a COVID-19 world, as is identified as a primary focus of this *Budget 2020*.

In 2015, I met a public sector still in the dark ages when it came to the delivery of services online. With the support of hardworking staff and public servants all across this country, we embraced the concept of creating a digital nation and putting Guyana on the same footing as her colleagues in the Caribbean and the rest of the world.

Over 120 Ministries were connected with secured internet through an e-Government network, which was established long before 2015 but never put into operation. With this network in place, we connected over 158 primary schools, 105 secondary schools, 30 technical and vocational institutions, opened 173 ICT hubs, provided free internet to RDCs and NDCs offices, internet to over 72 hinterland communities, hotspots, 11 fully equipped smart classrooms and a few smart hospitals across our hinterland regions. Not to forget the safe city solution with cameras, connectivity at markets, police and fire stations.

Now, why would you dissolve this Ministry that provided dedicated focus on the expansion of infrastructure and

services and the training of our people, which became the envy of many of our sister Caribbean countries?

I am not *tooting my own horn*, but seek to remind the current Administration that a solid digital infrastructure is in place, which must be expanded to meet the demands for online learning in our COVID-19 world.

Recently, I read stories and news releases about broadcast to schools, and I want to mention that, at the age of 9, and I am not saying that there is not a place for this medium, I read stories for broadcast to schools, and guess what?

2.31 p.m.

More than forty years later, I lament that I have heard little or nothing on the use of existing digital technology and plans for changing and ensuring safe distancing access so that we can still use some of the facilities that were already in place. Most importantly, what is the role of ICT in alleviating some of the current crises we face regarding the delivery of education to our children. Let us face it, this is the reality. If one does not have money in Guyana, today, and one cannot pay for the internet, and if one’s child does not have a device, the child’s learning and progress will not be able to proceed unhindered. If one comes from poor circumstances and his or her child does not have any of this connectivity or a device, then one knows that the child will face hardships and flounder.

I raise this because this Budget should have spoken, in a greater voice, not to the ‘One Laptop Per Family’ of six years ago, but to the one laptop per child, as is required in these times of COVID-19.

In 2015, Ram & McCrae, in its audit of the infamous failed fibre optic cable, highlighted a scandal of unsurpassed corruption, involving a close relative of a former President of Guyana, to the tune of over US\$2 billion, with absolutely nothing to show for it. I know that everybody knows that I am talking about a scenario pre- APNU/AFC of 2015.

Even with the progress that one can see that was made, a quick look at Appendix T in this Budget highlights the fact that this sector – this ICT Sector – has, in fact, received \$400 million less this year. This makes no sense.

But, there are even a few more misgivings in this Budget; the Ogle to Demerara bypass road would now be reduced to a two-lane, Ogle to Eccles bypass road, and not a transformational gateway. That is simply shocking. It is shocking, recognising the growth in populations that reside in

Diamond and in places like Parfaite Harmonie, and the fact that more than 10,000 cars are put on our roads every year.

I am thankful that we left in place, under the Hinterland, Poor and Remote Community/Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) project. Equipment, including very-small-aperture terminal (VSAT) dishes and laptops are ready to be implemented in 200 hinterland communities, as part of an ongoing commitment to expand connectivity and bridge the digital divide.

I am happy that mention was made of our project to rebuild and renovate the Linden Call Centre, which it is continuing, so that the employment potential it will offer can be materialised. As a people, we must move away from ‘if it is not my idea, it cannot be good’ way of thinking. It is the same taxpayers’ moneys that every government spends in the production of these budgets.

This time around, this Budget is not about numbers, but about what we, the leaders of this beautiful nation, will leave this generation and the next generation. How will we honour the blood-shed on these lands long before independence, which continues today? The blood of six peoples, five of whom travelled to come here, some against their will and leaving a better life to be unpaid slaves, others coming, choosing to seek a better life in what was to be this ‘New World’.

I noticed that my Colleague, Dr. Ramsaran, my good Friend Bheri, raised a couple of points. What was interesting is that, if we play back the start of his presentation, we will note his reference to ‘backtrack’. He is absolutely correct, Guyana is backtracked; back to the racial hostilities; back to the violence; back to the innocent slaughter of young Guyanese, especially African young men; and back to aircraft found on remote airstrips full of drugs, cocaine and, sometimes, a dead body, as I think happened just over the last couple of days. We are back to degrading women, as we know many have a reputation for. So yes, I do agree with a lot of the sentiments from my Colleague who spoke just prior to me.

In closing, whichever way you cut it, we have failed to forge the one people, the one nation, with a common destiny that we can all subscribe to. Until we do, no amount of oil discoveries, no amount of thousands of barrels of oil per day, will make a difference or stop the blood that will continue to be shed. Until we have a system that works fairly, in the interest of all Guyanese, we will not move forward.

Regrettably, a lot of the events of the last three weeks have just convinced many Guyanese, a large section of our

Guyanese population, that the current Administration is not interested in moving forward and is not interested in shaping a Guyana that we all can call home.

I want to remind us all that, when we play this game, there are no winners. We have seen it in the last week. We have seen it in the unrest that currently plagues our country. Our history, any part of the world, is replete of examples that highlight that when it comes to racial intolerance, there are no winners. Our own poet, Martin Carter, reminds us that we all will be consumed.

Better must come. May this honourable House play a pivotal role in its fast arrival.

Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the *Budget 2020* debate, under a theme that is reflective of the Budget and a Budget with measures to realise that theme.

Let me join with my Colleagues to commend the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill and his team for presenting the first emergency Budget of our Government in record time. I would like to use the words of the Hon. Minister, as I describe the Budget as a:

“...no nonsense, no frills, no bluff, people-centred, pro-poor, result-oriented approach to launching the nation back on the path to prosperity, after the hardship imposed on this nation during the last five years by the APNU/AFC Government.”

A national budget usually takes, maybe, 150 days to be prepared and presented in the National Assembly. However, under the guidance of His Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali and Hon. Vice-President Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, we have completed that Budget in a record time of 27 days. Like them or not, these are two geniuses when it comes to economics, maybe two of the best Economists in Guyana and the Caribbean.

I was a bit taken aback listening to the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, because I was told that the Hon. Member is the Shadow Minister for Natural Resources. However, what we heard for the last 20 or 25 minutes from the Hon. Member is a lot of story-telling and wild assertions, which cannot take our country forward.

I would like to outline our strategic objectives for 2020, which include bringing under control the spread of COVID-19, opening the economy and restoring economic activity to a level of normalcy.

We have heard so many comments about the COVID-19 pandemic from the previous speaker and other speakers on the Opposition benches. It is sad that we are trying to use the COVID-19 pandemic for politicking. It is sad that we are using the COVID-19 pandemic to gain cheap political points when people are suffering. To deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, we must take a national approach and we must work together to bring the COVID-19 pandemic under control. It is sad that the previous Member had mentioned that the cases are skyrocketing, but what the Member did not mention is that, under the previous Administration, when we took over Government only a month ago, the number of tests conducted per day was only 31 on average, only 31 tests per day.

I am happy to inform that, under our Administration and only one month in Government, we have increased testing to almost 300 per day. A month ago, there were only about two or three trained persons to conduct the tests in this country, imagine that. The previous Administration was preparing and would have spent \$160 billion over the last seven to eight months. Not a cent was spent to train persons to conduct the COVID-19 test.

Today, we have more than 40 persons who have been trained to conduct the COVID-19 test. When we talk about COVID-19, Guyanese are reminded of the COVID-19 hospital – a mere shell – and over \$1 billion expended there with no one trained to man that facility and no oxygen facility present in the hospital. How can we take patients to a mere shell, when we had expended over \$1 billion on a property that is not even owned by the Government of Guyana? That is criminal.

The year 2020 will go down as memorable in the history of Guyana. Some people say it will go down as the year when there were massive reincarnations. There were massive reincarnations, based on the APNU/AFC, when the dead came out from the ground, voted and went back into their tombs. The year 2020 would be remembered as the year when a country was being hijacked, when Elections were attempted to be rigged and we were going back into a dictatorship.

There were many mentions in this House about Statements of Poll (SoPs). I would like to say that I have seen all the 2,339 SoPs for all of the polling stations throughout the country. I do not know how many on the Opposition benches have actually seen the SoPs, but yet we claim fraud. Wee claim fraud, but we have not seen a single Statement of Poll.

The year 2020 will be remembered as the 33 days that we spent at this facility, where we recounted every single ballot

and it still showed that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic got over 15,000 votes more than the APNU/AFC. That is a fact. The year 2020 will be remembered as the year when Guyanese started to breathe again, with the return of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic in Government. The year 2020 will be remembered as the budget, which was pro-investment, pro-poor and pro- working class - a budget that will take us and prepare the foundation for the year 2021 and beyond.

2.46 p.m.

Let us, also, remind the House that, of the \$330 billion allocated, \$160 billion has already been spent by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change. When they sit in this House and condemn the Budget, they had already spent \$160 billion out of the \$330 billion.

This emergency Budget was commended by a number of individuals and organisations in and out of Guyana. We were told by the former President, Mr. David Granger, that *Budget 2020* is a copycat budget and that it is an APNU/AFC budget. Yet, we have heard almost every Member on the Opposition benches condemning *Budget 2020*. Are they saying that Mr. David Granger is wrong? Are they condemning his comments as well too? What we have heard from the Opposition benches is a regurgitation of 2015 and 2011 and that is what we have heard over the last day and a half.

In that vein, I wish to commend the Hon. Member, Ms. Philadelphia, I believe, in all rights her speech was very objective and very forward-thinking, when she spoke about training of young people to manage the oil and gas sector. I would like to let her know that is the intention of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration. There was no local content framework in place, even though the APNU/AFC preached about oil and gas and first oil for so many years. There was a policy that was more targeted to benefit the companies and not locals, but we intend to ensure that we have a strong local content policy followed by regulatory framework, so that our locals can enjoy the benefits of the oil and gas sector.

Budget 2020 is not a *lampy pampy* budget. *Budget 2020* is not a pro-private sector budget, as the Opposition might want to say. *Budget 2020* is a people’s budget. Many have said it is a pro-private sector budget. My Friends, that is the mistake that the APNU/AFC made and that is why they are sitting on that side of the House because instead of incentivising the private sector it penalised the private sector. No Government in this world can create employment for all of its people. The

Government would need the support of the private sector. That was its mistake and that is what it continued to do. That is why it is going to remain over there for a very long period of time because we cannot see the Statements of Poll.

Let me highlight some of the measures that *Budget 2020* will address. The increase of old age pension to \$25,000 – it is not only about the increase in the old age pension, but our Minister of Human Services and Social Security is taking steps to ensure that this money goes to the homes and villages of these poor pensioners. In the past the pensioners had to sit under a shed with their umbrella or line up by the Guyana Post Office Corporation (GPOC) in Georgetown to collect their \$20,000. We are taking steps so that this money can go to the doorsteps of our pensioners. I am happy to tell the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, too, that we are taking steps to ensure that the shop owners in the hinterland do not take advantage of the pensioners. We know that happened under the past Administration, where the pensioners took their vouchers for \$20,000 but received only \$10,000 or \$15,000 in return for goods. We are working to ensure that our pensioners in the hinterland get their full share of the increase.

The return and increase of the cash grant to \$15,000- it is another promise fulfilled to the children of this country. Unfortunately, the Opposition still boasts that the Five Bs programme is better than the cash grant. Now, how can a right-thinking person actually say something like that? If one does the Mathematics, because anybody can do the Mathematics, the Five Bs programme was benefitting maybe 10,000 children in this country. If one is to add the number of seats in each of the David Granger buses, boats and bicycles that were distributed, it would not reach 10,000. It would not reach 10,000! If one is not aware, there are over 170,000 schoolchildren in the public school system, but the Five Bs programme was only benefitting 10,000 students. How could it possibly be better?

The removal of value-added-tax on essential items and goods – in 2015, and beyond, there was the promise to reduce VAT. Yes, it was reduced from 16% to 14%, but there was a backlash, as usual, under the APNU/AFC. It increased the number of items that one would have to pay VAT on. These items include medical supplies, school supplies and construction materials. We are removing VAT on all of these goods and services *via Budget 2020*, another promise realised in one month. This, of course, will significantly reduce the cost of living. Charging people VAT on electricity and water is almost criminal in a country as Guyana.

The \$25,000 COVID-19 relief – my Friends, we have heard snide comments about pittances. Could you say to the people of Guyana how much you have given to them? How much of the \$160 billion that you had already spent in 2020 was spent on the people of Guyana? How much of that \$160 billion was given to the people while they were suffering under the COVID-19 pandemic? My Friend and Colleague, the Hon. Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, had outlined how the \$160 billion was spent. It was spent on bringing lawyers to determine whether 33 is greater than 32. It was spent on lawyers to determine whether the word ‘valid’ actually means ‘valid’. It was spent on lawyers to tell the then Government that it lost the elections. That is where the money went, instead of spending it on the people who needed relief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sum of \$800 million for the Amerindian Development Fund – my Friend, again, the Hon. Mr. Henry, while I believe he is not fully equipped with the facts in terms of the Community Support Officers programme, I ask that he equip himself with the facts. He would see how the CSO programme will benefit almost 2,000 young Amerindian brothers and sisters.

Incentives to the Agriculture sector – agriculture has always been important to this country. Agriculture is the reason why all of us are in this country. We must look after agriculture. I would like to commend our Minister of Agriculture who has been doing a wonderful job so far. We had promised that we would reopen the sugar estates and we will do that. We have budgeted \$5 billion to reopen the Skeldon, Rose Hall and the Enmore Sugar Estates and, that we will do. Unfortunately, we cannot open the Wales Sugar Estate because of the state in which it is in today and also, because of the state that the Opposition reduced it to today by selling out the materials as scrap iron. That was the trade of the Wales Sugar Estate. I can recall clearly, because I sat in the Eleventh Parliament, when the then Minister of Public Security, the Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, said he was right-sizing the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) by closing down those estates, right-sizing GuySuCo by putting 7,000 people out of jobs, most of whom are his fellow Berbicians. I have heard, too, the Hon. Member say, how long do you want people to cut cane? Let them go and work in the oil industry. I believe that the Hon. Member knows that the oil industry is a capital-intensive industry and not a labour-intensive industry. There is no way that the oil industry would be able to employ more than GuySuCo employed.

For the upgrade of the West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH), the Leonora Diagnostic and Treatment Centre and the Diamond Diagnostic Centre, one would find the allocation in *Budget 2020*. That is another promise fulfilled. Since they are speaking about my Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, he will tell you, in his presentation, that we are going to have multi-purpose complexes in Linden, Berbice and Essequibo very soon. [**Mr. McCoy:** Equitable distribution.] That shows, as my Friend said, an equitable distribution. We did not put agricultural projects in certain areas alone and certain senior Members would know about the agriculture projects I am referring to. We did not build stadiums in certain areas alone. . We will build stadiums in Berbice, Linden and Essequibo.

I heard the rollover projects were mentioned this morning. I am a bit confused, because the last budget that was passed in this country was passed in December, 2018, and we are still talking about rollover projects in September, 2020. Something is definitely wrong here. Where is the rollover? That is why they were rolled on to the opposite side of the House. Let me remind the Opposition Members that our manifesto is a five-year plan and not a one-month plan. I know just as many Guyanese have high expectations, now too, because they are seeing what we can do. They left us broke and we have to rebuild from scratch, just as we did in 1992, because we are committed to building this country for all Guyanese.

Under our Administration, for the next five years, there would be a number of transformational projects that would take our country, as one presenter earlier said, to the little Dubai or the Singapore of the western hemisphere.

The four-lane high span Demerara Harbour Bridge, which the APNU/AFC spent over \$200 million to do a study for, not a brick, not a load of sand, but \$200 million, just to conduct a study to building a new harbour bridge. We will build that in this term in Office. We have already started talks with His Excellency the President of Suriname to have a bridge across the Corentyne River that will open untold opportunities for Guyanese and more so Berbicians. In the field of tourism and trade it will give us a direct market to Europe through Suriname. We have already started talks with Brazil to do the Linden to Lethem highway which the APNU/AFC spent millions on a study again, but nothing has been done. Just a mere study has been done.

To address the issue of power generation, because of the high cost to produce electricity in Guyana, the Government of

Guyana will engage in a gas to energy project within its first term in Government. This will be done so that the cost of electricity will be reduced by 50% and, as a matter of fact, we have already set up a task force to start working on the gas to energy project.

3.01 p.m.

The gas to energy project, my Friends, will bring investors to our country, because we will have cheap power. It will create employment and goods and services for our people. These are some of the transformational projects that will make Guyana into a little Dubai under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration.

Mr. Speaker, if I may turn to some of the Budget measures that would directly benefit the natural resources sector. There is a sum of \$1.5 billion for hinterland roads. Building the hinterland roads will not only benefit loggers and miners, but it will benefit our Amerindian brothers and sisters who live in those areas and regions and who have to travel through those almost impossible roads. We have heard tales and stories that many companies had withdrawn their operations from the Puruni area because it is impossible to traverse the Puruni road as it is right now.

We will look at opportunities of possibly bridging Orealla to Kwakwani by having the Bissaruni road done. This is something that would open up those communities. It is something that would increase the mining and logging activities in that area. The \$1.5 billion towards hinterland roads is very much welcomed in the natural resources sector. This would be supported by the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission with almost another billion dollars so that our hinterland roads will be in a better state. If one is to speak to any logger or miner, the number one problem is the roads. If they do not have proper roads, it will carry up their production cost. If we have better roads our production will increase.

The removal of VAT and the reversal of duties on mining equipment and machinery – the last Administration claimed to be supportive of small miners and loggers, yet, it had imposed VAT on machinery and equipment. We are removing that in only one month in Office.

The tax concessions on mining, agriculture and forestry and the removal of VAT on hinterland travel – we know that local travel is already expensive as it is. The APNU/AFC imposed VAT on local travels, not only hindering the loggers and miners, but our Amerindian brothers and sisters who have to

travel and pay VAT on travels; that will be removed. That is another promise fulfilled in only one month. We will remove licence requirement for mining equipment and, of course, we are going to amend the National Log Export Policy, so that the forestry sector could bloom and breathe again. As we know it, the forestry sector is bankrupt. We are going to amend the National Log Export Policy, which will enable people without concession and sawmill to export logs. As it is now, only people holding a concession could export logs. We are going to change that to allow sawmillers to export logs and, of course, still encourage the value-added forest products. We are going to encourage that the loggers export the lesser used species that are not used on the market, which would be the intent of amending the National Log Export Policy.

Our new Government will buy 50 new four-wheel drive (4x4) vehicles to support security in the mining, logging and hinterland regions. This is very critical in the mining and logging sector. Security is of utmost importance, especially when it comes to mining and gold miners transporting their gold. The PPP/C Government has listened, and we have delivered.

The speaker before me, the Hon. Ms. Hughes, mentioned in her presentation that there were no consultations. Apparently, the Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, is not *au fait* as to what is happening in Guyana. This team of Ministers here have been in almost every single community and every single region in only one month, even though we are faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Natural Resources has held consultations with a number of organisations, including the Guyana Gold & Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA); Women Miners Association (WMA); National Mining Syndicate (NMS) which was established by the former Hon. Minister Broomes and it became a political body that is now willing to work to ensure that we move the sector forward; Ituni Small Loggers Association (ISLA); the Upper Berbice Forest Producers Association (UBFPA); the Forest Producers Association (FPA); the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA); representatives of the National Toshias Council (NTC); and a number of small and medium scale loggers and miners. We held consultations with all of these groupings to ensure that their voices were heard and their needs are reflected in *Budget 2020*.

I know my time is running, so I would like to go directly into the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) properly. This

Commission was terribly mismanaged and was on the decline. The Guyana Forestry Commission is bankrupt and sadly so. It is unable to pay its staff members, the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions, the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), the Guyana Power and Light Inc., the union dues and the \$25,000 bonus announced by the APNU/AFC Government in 2018. As of today, staff were not paid their bonuses since December, 2018.

In 2014, the Guyana forestry sector had a net surplus of approximately \$211 million. We had export earnings of over US\$53 million. Unfortunately, by 2019, our exports were reduced by over US\$20 million. I listened to the Hon. Mr. Trotman, former Minister of Natural Resources, when he mentioned that 600 hectares were given for conservation. That is quite commendable but, at the same time, 6,000 hectares were given to friends, cronies and families who cannot even work the lands, as we speak here today, and who did not have the capacity and resources to work those lands. Those were the reasons why, today, the Guyana Forestry Commission is in that state.

Worse yet, Iwokrama International Centre for Rainforest Conservation and Development (Iwokrama) is bankrupt. Iwokrama is now seeking a subsidy from the Government to maintain its operations. Because of the lack of resources, Iwokrama is unable to monitor its preservation and so illegal logging and illegal mining have taken over today. Thanks to the PPP/C Government, we are going to give Iwokrama some money so that it could carry out its operations. It is strange as to why Iwokrama is in that state today. It is because of the APNU/AFC’s failure to nominate the four persons to sit on the Board, so that the Board could seek donations from overseas organisations. The Board has not been functioning for the last three to four years. That is the reason.

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

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to propose that the Hon. Member has five minutes more to conclude his speech.

Motion put and agreed.

Mr. Bharrat: The Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, also mentioned, and rightly so, that between 2015 to 2020 Guyana had the highest gold declaration. That is true, merely because Troy Resources Limited and Guyana Goldfields Incorporated were brought here by the PPP/C Administration. It is strange enough that, at my first meeting with the Head of the Guyana

Gold Board (GGB), it was reported that there is an overdraft of almost \$4 billion.

Petroleum Production – oil could be a blessing or it could be a curse, as we all know, but it depends on the management of the sector. To avoid the resource curse and to achieve resource opportunity, an inclusive, non-partisan, a transparent and balanced approach must be implemented. We intend to take this approach so that we could establish the petroleum commission of Guyana, which will be re-tabled in the National Assembly very soon.

Since the new Administration has been in Office, the Ministry of Natural Resources has undergone institutional changes, whereby the Department of Energy is now under the Ministry of Natural Resources. The Department of Energy previously functioned in a policy direction capacity, technical and operational capacity and basically operated without much guidance. Under the PPP/C Administration, the Department of Energy will be converted into a professional and technical unit to manage this sector. I want to say and put on record that, as of today, no one from the Department of Energy has been dismissed or sent home. The team is actively involved in the Payara agreement negotiations with ExxonMobil Corporation, GGMC and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). As we speak, they are currently meeting to trash out issues so that we could get that licence agreement.

It is our intention that the Department of Energy and the Petroleum Department at GGMC be subsumed into the Petroleum Commission within the shortest period of time. This is so that there would be less political interference and the sector can be managed by non-politicians. The APNU/AFC spoke so much about oil and gas, but we are surprised to realise that there is no proper financial architecture in place to manage this new sector. There is no proper Natural Resource Fund Act, even though one was passed in 2019 after the no confidence motion. We need to ensure that we repeal or amend this Act, so that it is insulated from political interference and define how the funds flow into the budget and how it is used. As mentioned, the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill will be re-tabled because this Bill was tabled in 2017. It was sent to a special select committee, but in 2017, based on our arguments, it is giving the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources too much power. Even though we are on the opposite side, today we still hold the same position, which is that we do not want a Bill that will empower or give the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources all of the powers over the petroleum commission of Guyana. The commission must be independent.

On the local content framework, His Excellency has already established a high panel team that will soon start consultations and workshops with the relevant stakeholders, so that we could have a proper local content policy in place and the regulatory legal framework to ensure that Guyanese benefit from the oil and gas sector. We could talk about the local content policy, but if we do not have a legal framework, how are we going to safeguard the benefits for Guyanese?

We will actively engage in a robust corporate social responsibility (CSR) because we believe that CSR can benefit the communities throughout the entire regions. We believe that training is important, so we will invest heavily in training come 2021. We have already held discussions with the Government of India, the Government of China and a few other partners to have scholarship courses in oil and gas offered to our young Guyanese who can benefit from this sector.

3.16 p.m.

I would like to take this opportunity, also, to re-announce Guyana’s 18th oil find in the Redtail-1 well. This already adds to the Liza-1 and Liza-2 wells. Once the Payara Field Development Project agreement is approved... Currently, we are engaged in negotiations with the technical and legal teams and not politicians. The technical and legal teams are engaged in negotiations with ExxonMobil Incorporated and the other bodies, so that when we have a production licence, it will reflect the will of the people, and the benefits from it will go to Guyanese and not only to the company.

Since the new Administration has been in Office, we have ensured that we reviewed the work of Bayphase Oil and Gas Consultants who were working on the Payara Field Development Project agreement. Even though we are pushed for time because of the election impasse and the last five months that we lost, we have not signed that agreement. It is because His Excellency would like to be comfortable that when he is signing an agreement, he is signing an agreement that will benefit Guyanese. That is the reason why we have engaged the Government of Canada for assistance to re-examine the Payara Field Development Project agreement that is being done by Bayphase Oil and Gas Consultants consultancy. That consultation is ongoing. I must admit that, since being in Office, for approximately one month, we have been working mostly on the Payara Field Development Project agreement, which would benefit Guyana as well as the local content policy which will benefit Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding, I stand firmly before you committed to this task and I assure you that we plan to strengthen our institutional capacity and adapt a strong legislative and regulatory framework for the sustainable management of our nation’s natural resources, through the programmes, plans and projects that I have outlined to you before.

I wish to conclude with a quote from the famous and great Nelson Mandela:

“Action without vision is only passing time, vision without action is merely day dreaming, but vision with action can change the world.”

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Ramsaroop: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my presentation, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the National Assembly. I wish you well and health.

Before I begin my presentation, I would like to put on record two points. One, my good Friend, Hon. Member Dr. Ramsaran was correct, and I support him fully when he said, ‘Guyana is back on track.’ For the last month, there was an increase in the COVID-19 death rate; floods, blackouts, protest back in business; the murder rate has increased; and drugs are back in business. I fully support you, my Friend, Guyana is back in business.

I also want to put on record, Hon. Member Minister of Natural Resources, that sometimes it is good to fact-check the records. When we took over in 2015, GFC was already bankrupt. There was \$600 million that was taken from the pockets of the GFC for a building on High Street which is now a white elephant. As I go forward, I will elaborate more on the point.

My contribution to the *Budget 2020* debate will focus on the natural resources sector, specifically, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the sector agencies formally under its mandate. First, I would like to recognise the commitment and dedication of the management and staff of the Ministry; those of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, the Guyana Gold Board and, especially, the Commissioner and staff of the Guyana Forestry Commission. The latter agency, as of August, 2020, seemed to have been the whipping horse of the Chief Whip on the other side of the House, who, in my view, does not have the qualifications to make this pronouncement.

I do not know which year’s financial audited accounts for the GFC the Hon. Member was recently reviewing. I will assure this honourable House that it was not those of 2013, 2014 or 2015. Maybe it was that year when they were last in government that the \$600 million, which I spoke about, was taken from the coffers of the GFC to build a white elephant that is on High Street. It was declared unsafe for human occupation, abandoned and given to a friend contractor. The \$300 million loan to Iwokrama was never repaid; \$200 million was transferred to the Consolidated Fund and some went to the Guyana Marriot Hotel, Georgetown and the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO) fiasco. I am urging the Hon. Member to ensure that he checks the records and do not be misguided.

It was during his Government’s previous tenure in Office that the PPP/C betrayed the sacred assurance given to the international community by the Party’s founder and leader as Executive President of this Republic when His Excellency stated that ‘there shall be no logging below the fourth parallel.’ Upon his death, the PPP/C Government directed the GFC to do otherwise. It was the Executive President of my Coalition Government, while in Office, who restored the honour of the PPP/C founder and leader when His Excellency, Brigadier (Ret’d) David A. Granger stated to the international community that the tropical forest below the fourth parallel would be dedicated for biodiversity and conservation. What an irony!

I have just earned my first cap by entering into this honourable House. Therefore, I stand advised to stick to what I know. The perusal of *Budget 2020* addresses, under Programme 261 – Policy Development and Administration of the Ministry of Natural Resources the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) Project. This Project focuses on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+). The REDD+ targets the related benefits from watershed protection, water conservation and enhancing the sustainable livelihood of the Indigenous people. The Forest-Dependent Communities is a grant project worth US\$3.8 million to which the PPP/C Government signed a Technical Cooperation Agreement with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), a local donor partner, in February, 2014. Unfortunately, it was never implemented. It was deemed and declared abandoned. It was my Coalition Government, when we came into Office, that was able to recover the project and, in late 2016, established the Project Execution Unit under the Ministry of Natural Resources and implemented the REDD+ Readiness phase of this World Bank project.

I wish to take this opportunity, at this time, to commend the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Project Execution Unit at the Ministry for the tremendous and efficient work that was achieved over the last three and a half years. The REDD+ Readiness phase reports have, now, been commended to the hands of the current Government. This side of the House looks forward to how the best interest of Guyana will emanate from these reports especially the benefits which will occur for our Indigenous brothers and sisters and the forest-dependent communities.

The importance of this REDD+ Project, as part of forestry, cannot be underestimated. It also addresses programme activities, agriculture, that is food security; mining, that is reducing deforestation and the use of mercury; climate change issues; and infrastructural development. Programme: 262 – Natural Resources Management states in its objective:

“To promote and support expansion and diversification of the economy by facilitating responsible exploration and development of the Guyana’s natural resources through effective management, regulation, and oversight by the regulatory agencies.”

Strategies include improving sectoral natural resources management, enhancing regulations for mining and logging companies, supporting value-added production and increasing sectoral access to natural resources data bases. Many of these strategies commenced under the Coalition Government. The GFC, under the purview of the Ministry of Natural Resources, over the last five years, accomplished the following just to name a few.

Our achievements are as follows: we have reviewed the Forestry Concession Agreement. It was done for both the local and foreign companies. This is how we were able to set aside and recover those lands that were issued under the fourth parallel. We, also, in this programme, secured the 800,000 hectares that were given to friends of the PPP/C and gave them to the Guyanese people.

Strengthened disclosure of information – we have publicly released a disclosure of information that one could see on the GFC’s website. Everything that the GFC has done is on a portal on the GFC website. We have nothing to hide. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible.*] My Friend who is asking, you could go and check it out.

It was our Government that set up the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). It is an agency within the

Ministry of Natural Resources that the PPP/C Government was hiding from because it did not want to disclose who owned what. We found that the former President, Mr. Ramotar’s brother-in-law owned an oil block. That is what you should have talked about, my Friend.

We have strengthened the entire GGMC collaboration. I would like to commend our Hon. Minister because he ensured that he saw this one. When he mentioned the moneys from GGMC to build hinterland roads, it was because of what we had said – the strengthening of inter-agency collaboration. That is what we have done.

The National Forest Inventory – I am proud to say that the last National Forest Inventory was done in the 1950s. Within the period of two years, we established the National Forest Inventory. We had put aside \$300 million to do this which I have not seen, yet, in the Budget.

We increased the tariff on imported pine wood and pine products, because there was an influx of pine wood into our local industry. They were crying on it. What we have done is increase that tariff so that local businesses could survive.

Under the programme for forestry communities, we have expanded this programme to a total of 69 communities which have access to over 500,000 hectares of forest land. Not one company wants to take a monopoly. That is what we have done. We have done that.

Forest land and employees – these communities which own over 500,000 hectares of land have employed over 6,000 persons directly from these communities; nearly 40 to 60% are women and youths.

3.31 p.m.

When we took over Government in 2015, indeed, we supported the European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Action Plan (EU FLEGT) programme and we managed to continue it. On 23rd November, 2019, we had initialled the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) which will pave the way for markets, so, that there will be continuous improvement of the sector. We look forward to recognising the accomplishments of the current Government in Office, but it will take a tall order to upstage or outshine the APNU/AFC-led Government.

One area to which I draw your attention is the forestry sector in the hands of the private investors, and it is their initiative that will have to be given special attention regarding value-added products.

The other area is the strategic land use management and the competition among agricultural settlements, mining, forestry and industrial zones. This must be given special attention if Guyana is to maintain its commitment to the Paris Agreement of 2015.

Mr. Speaker: This is a two-minute notice.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Regarding forestry conservation, increasing acreage under protected areas, tropical forestlands are important to the world to ensure mitigation methods address climate change and enhance the natural environment.

Hon. Members of this House, I would like to be assured that we are all committed to safeguarding the natural patrimony of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana that will accrue benefits for our people. I look forward, in the not so distant future, to examining the stewardship of the natural resources sector of the current Government in this regard. We will be watching.

As the geographic representative of Region 4, please permit me to speak about that geographical space. Healthcare has improved tremendously in this region where new health centres were built and some resuscitated to facilitate the elderly, so that they do not have to travel to Georgetown and wait for long hours. We have done that. Inadequate drugs and staff are no longer issues. Some of these centres are equipped with technological equipment to do things like the (x-ray) and ultrasound so that patients no longer have to go to one central location to do that. I am proud to say that we have a COVID-19 testing site also on the East Coast.

Agriculture in this region has, once again, seen the light of the day with the Hope Coconut Estate becoming self-sufficient and self-financed. This is how we do it, not by bailouts, and bailouts.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please get an extension to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Ramsaroop:

This has become a reality due to the right-thinking visionaries of the Coalition-led Government. It is not by accident that I joined this team. Looking back at what was done by the

Coalition and what existed before, and coupled with what was presented to this House on Wednesday, 9th September, I am convinced that I have made the right choice.

I am, again, proud to inform this noble House that the Coalition Government had invested tremendously in the drainage and irrigation department. This saw excavation of drains and canals being done regularly in the area. Now, allow me to *ring my bell*. Flooding is a thing of the past, all thanks to the Coalition Government. It must be told that all villages and communities are benefitting from the same – no more ‘green’ or ‘red’ villages.

Water services have improved tremendously. We can now enjoy a 24-hour service of water. This was over the last five years, under the leadership of the humble servant, Dr. Richard Van West-Charles. For this service, I will give the PPP/C a fail grade.

The Budget presented to this House is a hot mess and does not adequately cater for the needs of the small man. In fact, it is a clear distinction of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. I came to this noble House proud and as a humble servant of Region 4. I am pleased to state that Coalition Government ensured internal roads and streets were upgraded. I can joyfully state that all communities benefitted from this. Once again, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic has been given a fail grade for not distributing resources across all communities.

The improvement of the streets and roads were complemented by streetlights. We are not talking about the fairy lights that Courts Guyana Limited normally lights up on Main Street during the Christmas season; we are talking about streetlights. Thank you to the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, former Minister of Public Infrastructure. You have done well, Sir.

I recognise that the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development has taken his job seriously and I commend him for that. As a matter of fact, almost immediately, he embarked on visits to various communities. I am putting him on notice; there must not be a return to what was obtained during the 23 years in Office, that of ‘red’ villages versus ‘green’ villages. Every community must benefit therefrom. I challenge the Hon. Member to build strong allegiances with the Local Authority Areas (LAAs) and let it ring out, loud and clear, that his concern is giving power to the small man – the real man.

I wish to clearly state that this Budget is an insult to right-thinking Guyanese. Rather, it can be considered a wet slush.

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

Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water [Ms. Rodrigues]: Mr. Speaker, preparation of the measures set out in *Budget 2020* began long before 2020. It began immediately after His Excellency, President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali was elected to be the presidential candidate for the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. It was being crafted throughout his journey to all 10 administrative regions of our country. It was being crafted in every community, with every meeting, every interaction, every promise and every plea he heard from the ordinary Guyanese. *Budget 2020* was designed by the people of Guyana; it is the people’s Budget.

It is with humility and pride that I rise to make my maiden presentation on the occasion of *Budget 2020*. As a young woman with humility, from a small but multi-racial, multi-ethnic community from Middle Road La Penitence, addressing this great House, the highest policy forum in our country, I am honoured to be doing so on behalf of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

Allow me to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to His Excellency President Ali, Vice-President and General Secretary of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo and, by extension the people of Guyana for the confidence reposed in me to support the work of the new PPP/C Administration in the housing and water sectors. I am also privileged to work alongside my Colleague, Minister Collin Croal, whom I consider a friend.

After five tumultuous years of the APNU/AFC Coalition, during which its leaders sought to help themselves to our country’s resources and treated the people as though they were forgotten, the PPP/C was given the mandate by the people of Guyana on 2nd March to resume the management of those resources. It is a mandate and a challenge which the PPP/C accepts with the full knowledge that we must simultaneously clean the Augean stables left by the APNU/AFC Coalition, while enabling the people of our country to enjoy the right enshrined in article 26 of the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana* – the right of all Guyanese to proper housing accommodation. Despite this right, with its attendant and necessary corollary of a corresponding duty imposed on the Government of the day, the APNU/AFC, for the first time in the history of Guyana, dispensed with a properly designated and

functioning Ministry of Housing and Water. It did not take President Ali a day to undo that travesty.

Let me say, my description of the mess inherited as the Augean stables is not hyperbolic or an exaggeration. The Coalition did not even know how many applications were outstanding, further demonstrating their incompetence. Budget speeches of 2015 and 2016 made no mention of a backlog of outstanding applications. It was not until 2017 that this House was told of a backlog of 25,000 applications. Subsequently, in the *Budget 2018* speech, after almost four years in Office, the APNU/AFC admitted that there was a backlog of 50,000 outstanding applications.

What we do know is that the APNU/AFC left office with a higher number of outstanding applications than it inherited. That is the fact. How did it respond to this demand for housing? Its miserable performance in the housing sector is further demonstrated when one examines its allocation record over the five-year period.

I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, mentioned some 600 lots were distributed in Bath Settlement, Region 5. Let us not look at a single area. If we are going to talk about the record, then we have to look at the entire picture. Let us look at the entire picture.

The allocations made by the APNU/AFC Coalition in 2015 totalled 1,223. The allocations made in 2016 totalled 2,020. The allocations made in 2017 totalled 1,131. The allocations made in 2018 totalled 776. The allocations made in 2019 were 1,301 and the allocations made in 2020, from January to July were, 1,987. This represents a total of 8,434 house lots distributed by the APNU/AFC over the five years. This total of 776 are people that we see at the Ministry on a weekly basis making applications. This total of 8,434 is only a mere 16.9% of our target of 50,000 house lots in five years. We will teach them how to get it done. We will fix that. We have already given instructions to address the applications and allocation system to ensure that it is done systematically, fairly and expeditiously.

This PPP/C Administration will give meaning and reality to article 26 of the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana* by going one step further, as in our manifesto for the General and Regional Elections 2020 and, indeed, for all the elections going back to 1992. We are determined to enable every Guyanese family to obtain a proper home, in a safe, secure and proper neighbourhood; not as squatters or tenants, but as responsible and proud owners with titles that banks and other lending institutions will regard as good security.

3.46 p.m.

The Budget speech has signalled the Government’s intent with the restoration of the interest relief on the \$30 million ceiling on loans, the interest which is tax deductible for first time homeowners. There is the increase from \$8 million to \$10 million for low-income loans, which allows low-income households to borrow up to an additional \$2 million at a lower interest rate.

Now, let me tell you about our plans for the housing and water sectors.

You heard in the Budget speech by the Hon. Member, Minister Edghill, in his most eloquent presentation, the announcement of free water for pensioners and the removal of VAT on water and building materials, bringing immediate relief to our citizens and going a far way to encourage home ownership.

The Ministry of Housing and Water has, under its remit, responsibility for the Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA) and the Guyana Water Inc. (GWI). The Ministry’s mission is addressed through three programme areas: Policy Development and Administration, Housing Development and Water Service Expansion and Management.

Our Housing Development programme is designed to implement national housing and settlement policies through an efficient, well-planned, coordinated and structured framework, in order to realise the development of sustainable, affordable and modern settlements.

Under the APNU/AFC Administration, there was a lazy, haphazard, and uninspiring approach to housing, with emphasis on allocations and not on providing housing or shelter for Guyanese. There was mass distribution of house lots in the lead up to the General and Regional Elections, as a political gimmick, and, in the period following, as a final grab before the official announcement of their defeat.

APNU/AFC, in its 2018 Budget presentation, promised Guyanese a community experience. This, it said, would have entailed not just units or lots, but also roads, drainage, sidewalks, lighting, social services and recreational facilities. From January to July, 2020 alone, APNU/AFC made 1,987 allocations, representing 99.35% of its target. But guess what? Out of those 1,987 allocations, it only processed a meagre 251 titles, representing 16.5% of that target. Do you know why? It is because these lots were allocated to our people in areas not even under the ownership of CH&PA, a

far cry from the promised community experience. This PPP/C Administration will rectify that and deliver serviced lots through a comprehensive and coordinated approach between CH&PA and GWI, so that Guyanese can live in dignity and not be pumping water from the canal, two years after occupying their lots, like the residents in Lust En Rust.

One of the APNU/AFC’s community experience is located at Experiment in Region 5, where 19 houses were built some two years ago. You have heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Faizal Jaffarally, mention these 19 houses in Region 5. Until now, not one of these have been occupied. The houses built in Experiment are indeed an experiment, one that went horribly wrong, leaving CH&PA with a security bill of \$23 million and counting. The project lacked vision and strategy, since the houses were not built to target any particular income bracket. It was another brainless approach to housing and the reason they remain unoccupied up to now. The houses, which carry a price tag of \$140 million, have become dilapidated and infested with termites, making them uninhabitable. We have the evidence to show what has become of those houses in Experiment. By the way, since they were not built to target any specific income bracket, a flat house with three bedrooms is being sold for \$8.5 million. I am not sure which low-income earner can afford a flat house for \$8.5 million.

The Coalition was not concerned about whether Guyanese had roofs over their heads. The former Minister could not have been bothered to simply sign letters of assurance so that homeowners could have approached the bank to have their mortgages approved. Only last week, Minister Croal signed a huge backlog of letters of assurance, which were applied for years ago under the APNU/AFC Administration.

I heard, again, the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, mention the record of GWI under the management of Dr. Van West-Charles. The condition of GWI is a travesty. In 2015, when the Coalition took Government, GWI had just over 600 employees. Today, GWI employs over 1,300 staff and there is no corresponding benefit to justify this overstaffing. There is more than 100% increase in the staff. GWI is bankrupt. Pipelines throughout the country are porous, there was no maintenance and the system has been left to decay. That is the legacy of Dr. Van West-Charles. For example, the Hon. Member mentioned Region 5; he spoke a lot about Region 5. Well, I went to Region 5 and I will give you just one example of a community called Champagne. Look at this. [*The Hon. Member displayed a photograph.*] This is a leak in Region 5, that has developed into a massive hole in the road – this is Region 5. This is the legacy. This leak has been there for one

year. For one year, the residents have been calling to report this leak and nobody went to fix this leak – none of the 1,300 staff. Nobody was bothered to even respond to this leak. But I would not be aware of a problem and not fix it. It took one day, and it was fixed, bringing great relief to the people of that community.

Under the new Ministry of Housing and Water, housing will be restored to the place it enjoyed before 2015, with better to come. Our approach to housing will be comprehensive, with the emphasis not on mere allocation, but on promoting, encouraging and facilitating home ownership among ordinary Guyanese, catering for all income brackets.

I will outline for this honourable House and for Guyanese, the projects in the housing programme for 2020. One billion seven hundred and twenty-one million dollars is allocated for infrastructure development to make serviced lots available. This allocation includes moneys for the acquisition of lands from National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL), the Guyana Sugar Corporation and Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC), as part of our 50,000 house lots commitment to the electorate. We are already planning for that 50,000 house lots. We have not limited ourselves our targets to an annual target. We are thinking big and we will deliver on those 50,000 houses lots, way in advance. This 2020 programme sets the conditions for the awakening of the housing sector under the PPP/C.

Two hundred ninety-two million eight hundred thousand dollars is budgeted to commence preparation of land for residential lots. This amount will be used for construction of roads and bridges to access lands for preparation works in Recht Door Zee, Block A1 Annandale, Cummings Lodge, Industry, Vigilance, Lethem and Kwakwani, among many other locations. Guyanese can look forward to an aggressive and fair allocation exercise, as these lots become available.

Further, \$200 million is budgeted for the procurement of electrical line hardware material for installation of electricity in another 16 housing areas, including Cummings Lodge, Annandale, Prospect, No. 79, Skeldon Estate Backland, No. 75 Village, Hampshire and Williamsburg.

Essential to the development of housing schemes, is the adequate supply of potable water. We have budgeted \$80 million for the installation of wells at Lust En Rust and Prospect. When you are thinking housing, you have to think comprehensively. We do not want people occupying rice fields. They do not have roads; they do not have bridges; they

do not have light; they do not have water; they cannot proceed with their lives.

Essential to the development, many residents, in housing areas on the East Bank Essequibo, West Bank Demerara, East Berbice, Lethem and Linden, suffered greatly from poor security, especially, single mothers, who fear to get home or to venture out after sunset. Our Government recognises this problem and has allocated \$49.2 million to begin addressing it by installing light-emitting diode (LED) streetlights in 16 housing areas: Belle West, Schoonord, Zeelugt, Uitvlugt, Farm, Covent Garden, Herstelling, Peter’s Hall, Kilcoy/Chesney, Wisroc, among many other areas.

New works will be completed in upgrading four kilometres of main access roads and bridges to industrial and commercial areas to incentivise private developers moving forward with job creation projects in Prospect, Perseverance, Little and Great Diamond. The sum of \$150 million is allocated for these projects.

The upgrading of the main access road and bridges for private developers in Prospect and Perseverance will allow for access and commencement of works on approximately 500 house lots, while the upgrading of the main access road for industrial and commercial in Little and Great Diamond will allow for access and commencement of works on a further 300 house lots. Another \$150 million is proposed for upgrading three kilometres of road to asphaltic concrete in La Parfaite Harmonie, Herstelling, Ecclesregard, special attention will be placed on the most vulnerable and Zeelugt. This will bring great relief to more than 800 persons in our society, our senior citizens and the Indigenous people, or 200 existing house lot beneficiaries.

I turn now to the third programme, Water Service Expansion and Management. Under this programme, the Ministry is responsible for efficiently delivering quality, affordable and equitable potable water services to all Guyanese and leading the institutional mechanism for integrated water resources management in Guyana. In support of the Water Services Expansion and Management *Budget 2020* was presented against a background of a major world health pandemic, which has impacted the world economy and the financial markets as a result. The world’s major economies have seen significant job losses, resulting in severe hardship for many families. It is our Government’s aim to extend the coverage for the provision of potable water throughout Guyana, with emphasis on unserved areas as a top priority. It is our focus to work towards the achievement of Sustainable Development (SDG) Goal 6, which is to ensure access to water and sanitation for all by 2030. This will result in the improvement in the quality of life for all Guyanese, the increase in water security and will extend to coastal, urban and hinterland areas.

Of major concern to us is the non-revenue water (NRW), collection efficiency and meter coverage. The impact of

COVID-19 on the nation’s potable water provider has been severe. The GWI has seen a 14.1% decline in revenue collection due mainly to more than 50% or 90,000 of its customers failing to honour their bill payment obligations. Collections for the second quarter totalled \$1.193 billion, compared to \$1.394 billion in the first quarter of 2020.

This is as a direct result of reduced interpersonal contact with our customers with the onset of the global health pandemic COVID-19.

4.01 p.m.

On the other hand, GWI expended over \$2.8 billion to ensure continuous water supply as the nation implements COVID-19 containment and mitigation measures to combat the pandemic. This represents an average monthly operating and maintenance cost of \$468.6 million, which consists of procurement of chemicals and spares, and the management of the hinterland water supply systems. Government has budgeted \$2.8 billion to support the improvement and expansion of water supply infrastructure, nationwide, under the potable water and sanitation sector. This provides for sustaining and improving access to potable water across the coastal, urban and hinterland communities, continuing the reduction of the non-revenue water programme and increasing access to potable water across the country. In this regard, special attention will be placed on the most vulnerable in our society, our senior citizens and the Indigenous people, to ensure that they have improved access to potable water to assist them in the fight against COVID-19. Our Government has already announced the removal of the hardship tax on potable water and the reinstatement of the water subsidy for pensioners.

In support of the Water Services Expansion and Management Programme, the following sum is allocated: \$56.5 million for the procurement of smart water meters for over 2,500 customers in La Parfaite Harmonie, Friendship, Providence, Mon Repos, and the Beterverwagting areas. This initiative will result in an improved service level and a reduction of non-revenue water. In meetings with Dr. Van West-Charles and the team at the GWI, they complained a lot about non-revenue water, but no meters have been ordered by the GWI for years. The GWI has not a single meter to install for a new service, but they are complaining about non-revenue water.

A sum of \$30 million has been budgeted to commence the implementation of the fire hydrants programme to increase

firefighting capability in housing areas. We have begun in Region 6, in the East Canje and Fort Ordinance areas. These areas were chosen due to excellent pressure, population density and ease of installation. We anticipate that some 20,000 persons will benefit. The sum of \$50 million has been budgeted for the installation of a raw water intake line to the Bartica Water Treatment Plant. This will result in increased access and improved service delivery to more than 7,000 residents in Bartica, Region 7. Government has provided financing under this programme for the installation of smart meters in Amelias Ward, Linden, resulting in the reduction of water wastage and increased pressure for domestic use where desired. A sum of \$113.3 million has been budgeted for Region 4 for the procurement of pipes to replace aged and encrusted mains between Vlissengen Road, west along Church Street, to Cummings Street. This initiative will result in improved water quality, reduced losses, and improved level of service, and it is expected to benefit 200,000 persons when the project is completed.

Twenty-five million dollars has been budgeted for the installation of a transmission line between the 1763 Monument to Cemetery Road, including the reinstatement of that road. This initiative will result in improved water quality, reduced water loss, and improve the level of service for more than 20,000 households or approximately 80,000 residents. A sum of \$25 million has been budgeted for the upgrading of the transmission line, Vlissengen Road to Lamaha Street, including the road reinstatement. This will improve the water quality, reduce loss and increase pressure, benefitting approximately 40,000 residents.

One hundred and twenty million is budgeted under the Hinterland Water Supply Programme to benefit over 9,300 residents in the various hinterland communities. The following initiatives will be executed: installation of mains, pump stations and new services in Port Kaituma, Mabaruma and Santa Rosa, Region 1. We will never forget our hinterland communities. And so, in this presentation, I hope that you have realised that we have tried our best in this emergency Budget to cover Regions 1, 4, 7, 9 and 3, trying as much as possible to reach as many of our citizens as possible, regardless of where they live or their political affiliation. Under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration, every single Guyanese will benefit under the housing and water sectors.

Mr. Speaker: This is the two-minute notice.

Ms. Rodrigues: Additionally, we have budgeted \$10 million for the procurement of materials for in-house drilling, construction of water distribution networks and expansion in villages, including: Shulinab, Shea, Chiung Mouth, and Itabac. This initiative will result in increased access and first-time access for some 2,000 residents in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Chiung Mouth has been without water for two years and we will address this before the end of this year.

In closing, I wish to assure the Guyanese people that we are working for them. Our Government does not take lightly the trust and confidence they have reposed in us, and we will ensure that *Budget 2020*, and every budget presented by us, hereafter, positively impact their lives and improve their standard of living. I also wish to assure the Guyanese people that, in addition to honouring our commitments in our manifesto, we will initiate the necessary reforms and take the necessary steps to ensure that the right of every single Guyanese to elect a government of their choice never comes under threat again.

I fully support *Budget 2020*. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I propose that we take the two other presenters immediately and then we shall adjourn for the day. There are two presenters with 15 minutes each, plus five minutes, to conclude, if they so need.

I also want to bring to the attention of the Assembly that we had an unfortunate occurrence yesterday, and many of the Members and staff who ate have had severe intestinal issues. And, I note that one Member has posted imputing some other motive. I will quote the post, but I will not say the person’s name. It states:

“Several APNU+AFC MPs may have been food poisoned by food prepared by Parliament’s caterer(s). Developing story.”

As far as I know, the incident that happened did not segregate the APNU/AFC Members of Parliament alone, but it was an occurrence which we are investigating. I trust that the offensive post will be taken down and that Members will continue to carry themselves with the decorum of a Member in the highest lawmaking entity in our land.

Hon. Member Sherod Duncan, you have the floor.

Mr. Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Permit me to give thanks to our Heavenly Father, in whom we live, move and have our being, and by whom all things

subsist. With that, I want to recognise my parliamentary Colleagues who have been part of this robust discussion in this honourable House, thus far. The team on this side, our team, has done well, so much so that I think it leaves little for me to say and I should begin my contribution wit 'in conclusion'.

The word 'parliament' is an English term derived from the Anglo-Norman period, dating from the 14th Century and coming from the 11th Century. The French word *parlement* from *parler* means to talk. However, a proper reading of the Budget reveals that the only talk that can be had here is old talk. It is not a serious Budget by any measure. The fact that the Hon. Bishop Edghill presented it is indicative of that fact and tells of its many inherent defects. One gets the sense that the Hon. Member wrote it too. It is not serious fiscal talk but rather *gaff talk*, or *hot air talk*. But we have come to talk, so let us talk.

Let us talk public security and safety. The Budget has a broad theme – 'Our Plan for Prosperity'. When one studies the Budget, prosperity, for our Friends on the other side, only means prisons and police stations – \$38.9 billion worth. That is their focus – full stop. Outside of that narrow, short-sighted agenda, every programme, going forward, was already on the table and in progress when the PPP/C took the reins of Government. It is a cut and paste job. This is Ms. Rita Persaud’s MNG 2100 – Introduction to Computer Science – at the University of Guyana (UG). It is elementary. Frankly speaking, it is plagiarism. It is fraud. It is not a budget; it is a *fraud-get*. A *fraud-get* is defined as your predecessor’s budget, badly over-photoshopped and presented as your own. What better place to read a *fraud-get*, than at the now infamous Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC)? It is because this was the place where one thing was promised and, like prosperity, it delivered a budget for the boys and not prosperity for the people, but poverty for the rest of us and punishment for poor people. The PPP/C promised a one-month bonus for the Joint Services, but they gave a *lil* thing and, like the joint services votes, the rest went missing. Why? It is because it is not a budget; it is a *fraud-get*.

The PPP/C promised land in a country of 215,000 square kilometres and now they are saying that lands are not available. Why? It is because they are not presenting a budget; it is a *fraud-get*.

The PPP/C promised to reverse 200 tax measures, with immediate effect, upon taking office. And now, they are saying that budget constraints will stop them from doing so.

Why? It is because this is not a budget; it is a *fraud-get*. And even several of the measures that they told the Guyanese people they would remove, were already removed earlier this year and were already being enjoyed by suppliers and consumers, and do not provide new relief. These include value-added tax on electricity, water, medical supplies and hinterland travels. These removals of VAT were already being enjoyed by the people when the PPP/C came into Office. Yet the PPP/C is claiming that it removed these tax measures. This is because this is not a budget; it is a *fraud-get*.

The PPP/C promised to reopen the sugar estates, and as soon as the youthful Minister took office in that sector, he said, and I quote, from the news:

“The reopening of the estates will depend on when we finish the studies ...”

They do not like studies, but he is going to do studies.

“... and see what exists in the government because right now you have a pandemic in the country and the world reality is different...”

4.16 p.m.

Why did he promise one thing in the campaign but is delivering something else when he is in Office? Why? It is because this is not a budget; it is a *fraud-get*.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic said that the centre for disease control and prevention at Liliendaal was a shell. Yet, the Minister of Health has quietly moved patients into that shell. Is that not medical malpractice? Why? It is because this is not a budget; it is a *fraud-get*.

The PPP/C told this nation, when it took Office, that the treasury was bankrupt. Yet, according to this Budget’s overall deficit, which declined from \$19.7 billion in 2018 to \$17.4 billion in 2019, it is budgeted to sharply increase by \$75.9 billion, nearly 4.5 times the size in 2019. Why? It is because this again is not a budget; it is a *fraud-get*.

Let us talk public security and safety. [**Mr. McCoy:** *Inaudible*.] I do not know why Mr. McCoy is whining, he should take his licks like a man. But, hold on, I do not want to offend the Hon. Member. I will retract the word ‘man’ from that statement.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you also need to refer to any Hon. Member as ‘Hon. Member Mr.’ or ‘Hon. Member’.

Mr. Duncan: So guided Mr. Speaker. In 2015, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Coalition took Office. Across the divide, the people got a taste of the ‘good life’ for the first time in a long time. In the security sector, we got to work on reducing crime, rebuilding public trust and reforming public security systems. Whether it was the production of machine readable passports; the decentralisation of the application process and issuance of passports; fine-tuning a comprehensive public security plan; ensuring improvements in recruitment standards and training by revitalising the cadetship scheme; countering human, drugs and arms trafficking; acquiring vehicles and equipment for modern policing to fight banditry, piracy, terrorism and other violent crimes; or it was putting in closed-circuit television (CCTV) feeds as part of the Smart City Solution for the national capital city and repairing and fixing the very contentious 911 Emergency System.

This was progress, but, as we say colloquially, *these people know good when to time a pot*. Now that they have come into Office, they are eager to eat from all of our toil and sweat and are calling it prosperity. We call it a *fraud-get*.

By 2016, the APNU/AFC Coalition had sought to modernise and equip the enforcement arm of the State with the resources to enable it to serve citizens, engender investor confidence and build trust and goodwill in the business community.

The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Coalition understood the times and rose to the challenges. Fast forward to 2020. The big vision of *fraud-get* is two water tenders, one for Linden and one for Bartica. I must note here that some clarity might be needed about whether this is a typographical error. It is not water tenders, but it is actually water cannons because the PPP/C like water cannons and, based on where they are going, I would not doubt if it is water cannons.

By 2017, we begun our expansion and rehabilitation programme. Works included the expansion of the Mazaruni Prison to accommodate 400 inmates, which is 61% more than the current capacity. We started work on the construction of a new Georgetown Prison and efforts continued to modernise the Guyana Police Force during that very period. There were 114 police stations across the country that benefitted from increased vehicular access to support their response time to reported crimes. The list goes on for 2017.

This *fraud-get* is attempting to reverse Guyana into the future. It will not produce anything close to the work that the APNU/AFC Coalition has done in the last five years. *Fraud-*

get does not put the people of Guyana first; it puts the PPP/C and its friends first. Great leaders emerge out of great circumstances. President Lyndon B. Johnson emerged out of the challenges of the 1960s, resolute and armed, with the domestic agenda *The Great Society*. The main goal was the total elimination of poverty and racial injustice. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had *The New Deal*, while John F. Kennedy had *The New Frontier*.

“All Presidents, in the crucible moments of their nation’s history, must rise to the occasion, meeting the moment.”

As articulated by the great American historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin, in her book *Leadership in Turbulent Times: Lessons from the Presidents*.

In such seminal moments of our nation's history, we have had presidents like President Forbes Burnham with the plan to feed, clothe and house the nation. We have had President Hoyte’s Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) and President Granger’s ‘the good life’. In that ‘good life’, the economy was restructured; we were not teargassed or had pellet guns fired.

In 2020, in the crucible of the greatest public health crisis of ours or any generation, we have the ‘out of his depths,’ the Hon. Dr. Anthony; the economic wizard, the Hon. Bishop Edghill; and a *fraud-get* promising prosperity for *deh boyz* and poverty for the rest of us.

This *fraud-get* reminds Guyanese of another document, perhaps not even worth the paper it was written on, which is Order 60 of 2020. Like Order 60 of 2020, it promises things it knows fully well it cannot deliver. Like the ballot boxes tabulated in this very space, when we *buss* open the pages of *fraud-get*, there is a host of irregularities, discrepancies and anomalies. And, like the missing poll books, certificates of employment, and oaths of identity, the substance, depth and focus of this Budget are missing. The Minister of Finance is also missing. Page after page of *fraud-get* is like the Chief Elections Officer’s Report. We cannot say that this Budget is fair and equitable, and we cannot say that its programmes are credible.

I do not intend to be overly critical of this document, a document that mentions the words 'poor' twice, 'poverty' five times and the phrase 'private sector' 17 times.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes’ notice.

Mr. Duncan: I do not want to be overly critical. So, do not listen to my words. I turn to Ram & McRae’s *Focus on Guyana’s Budget 2020*. He deals with them in softer ways. In *Focus on Budget 2020*, published recently, it states:

“Under relentless calls for lower and lower taxes by the private sector, the tax mix has moved inexorably towards indirect taxes which are borne disproportionately by the poor.”

That is *fraud-get* 2020.

In *Focus on Budget 2020* by Ram and McRae, it states:

“There is no doubt that the PPP/C Administration has an understanding of poverty and considerable experience of dealing with it. Surprisingly however, *Budget 2020*, by its own admission seems to reflect a different philosophy... there does not seem to be much in the way of progressive economics. The poor needs more than hand-outs. They need actions that raise their hopes and aspirations, they need to believe in their soul that they are part of a grand plan... As the Financial Plan of the Government shows the measures are financed partly by a massive expansion of the deficit.”

That is Ram and McRae’s *Focus on Budget 2020* and I go on with another quote.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you go on, you will need an extension to continue so that you can conclude.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation on the *fruad-get*, I mean the Budget, sorry.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Duncan: Ram and McRae’s *Focus on Budget 2020* states:

“Businesses are particularly pleased with the tax measures of which the exemption from corporation tax for health care and private education ranks and rankles. The one size fits all cuts by 50% of the increase in licence fees necessarily fail to address those eminently sensible specific increases, including those under the Intoxicating Liquor Licensing Act (Cap82:01). The blanket reversal of land charges fails to take account of the grave abuse of small farmers by rapacious landlords operating in the agriculture

sector and the varying rates of land charges across the country.”

Again, Ram and McRae’s *Focus on Budget 2020* states:

“The budget contains several measures which positively address the needs of Amerindians, the poorest segment of the Guyana population. Time may not have permitted the Government the opportunity to address the plight of the coastal communities, the villages, and the perennially deprived areas such as Albouystown, Plastic City and Tiger Bay, which cry out for redevelopment.”

The report concludes:

“To use the famous cliché, this is the largest budget ever. The question is whose budget?”

This is Ram and McRae asking the question whose budget? Certainly not a budget pro-poor.

The use of money to print this Budget on paper is to not be prudent with the spending of taxpayers’ money. To write it down or to speak of it in the English language is an assault on the language. They might as well have written this Budget in Latin, now called the dead language, because it is just as useless. And besides, the PPP/C likes the dead for voting purposes.

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

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, kindly allow me, as I make my maiden presentation at this forum to, first of all, congratulate you on your assumption to a higher office. Allow me also to sympathise that you are unable to be here physically with us because you have become a casualty of a global pandemic that is going to change the way we live for a very long time to come.

The experts say that the virus does not travel, but people do. You, like all of us, should exercise care and caution with who you mix with. Not every *lampy* and *pampy* you should be going close to. This is so that you can avoid having to become a victim.

The Budget that we are currently discussing is, of course, a product of intense work by the major players over the last few weeks. The team was headed by no less than His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, with able support from the Vice-President, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, and the hardworking team at the Ministry of Finance. I think that all of us here and the

Guyanese people owe these people words of congratulation for the effort they made to complete this Budget, after we had gone through five months of turmoil since the conclusion of the voting on 2nd March and which led to the conclusion of the elections, way down 2nd August.

Throughout this period, we have witnessed brazen efforts by individuals to promote the biggest heist of a people’s will to elect a government of their choice.

4.31 *p.m.*

I recall the former Prime Minister of Jamaica, Mr. Bruce Golding, who led the Organization of American States' (OAS) mission to Guyana, saying:

“I have never seen a more transparent effort to alter the results of an election”.

He went on to say:

“It takes an extraordinary courageous mind to present fictitious numbers when such a sturdy paper trail exists”.

No country deserves to go through the pains that Guyana went through after the voting of 2nd March.

We have many brave people, some of them are present here, along the lines of what Mr. Bruce Golding spoke about. Some of them chose not to be here but to make presentations virtually. They are probably not as brave as others who played a big role in not recognising the will of our people. When the Hon. Member, Mr. Narine, said that this budget delivers Christmas in September, if all of us had respected the will of the people, we would have had Christmas in April, after the discussion.

We heard words about weapons against various sections. I would say clearly that no weapon formed against the will of the people of Guyana will prosper. The will of the people, even after five torturous months, has delivered to the people of Guyana, a government of their choice and nothing can take that away from our people.

We are now discussing a Budget that seems to be causing a lot of confusion in the Opposition camp. Some are saying it is the former President David Granger’s budget. Some, in their presentations, said it is a copy of their budget and then went on to lambaste the Budget. Others are saying that it is a no-good budget. We need to examine the Budget thoroughly to see what it is that it brings to our people and whether any

section of our population is left out for consideration in the measures that are stated.

We also have to take this Budget contextually. That is in the context that it was prepared in, the context in which it was delivered, and in the context that we are deliberating on – the numbers. One fundamental issue that must be made clear is that we are into September and whatever is in this Budget, expenditure wise, a huge amount of it has already been committed by the previous APNU/AFC Government. This is the context in which the global pandemic also plays a major role in determining how we move forward.

Only just now, the speaker before me spoke about an analysis done by Mr. McRae and questioned whose budget it is. It might be argued, and it could be argued that this Budget is friendly toward the private sector, but the private sector is recognised worldwide, also, as the engine of growth. In a situation where one is faced with a pandemic, none of the sectors, especially the productive sectors, can perform without being given that enabling environment to do so, and without enjoying the comfort of Government policy in order to move forward with investment that will see job creation.

The pandemic, of course, constrained our country tremendously. When we look at the numbers now, they appear to have been inflated and, the politicians over on the other side, laid claim that it happened because of this Administration’s inability to handle it. I have a different view and that is to say that, because the previous Government did not adequately address the issue and did not put adequate measures in place, we are now discovering the extent of the infection across the different regions because of increased testing and all of that. I note that the Hon. Minister of Health said, only yesterday or it could have been last night, that the time between testing to the time of getting one’s results will be reduced to about 45 minutes. That, by itself, is commendable.

There is no known cure worldwide, presently. That is why, as a country, we have to take precautions, we have to observe the protocols, we have to avoid large gatherings where social distancing cannot be accommodated and we have to ensure that we widen our scope to test throughout the length and breadth of Guyana.

That is why some of the measures that are put in this Budget are intended for the short-term, taking those constraints into consideration to ensure that our economy is provided with a platform that it could kick off from, so as to deliver on that

which is promised. That, of course, is 'our plan for prosperity.'

Worldwide, the economy grew by 2.9% in 2019, which is a reduction of 0.7% from 2018, but, it is projected to contract by 4.9% in 2020. This year, for the first time, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is projecting negative growth for all group of countries. This gives you the global picture within which Guyana, as a small economy, has to operate. That is why, after serious consideration, the kind of measures that are entailed in this Budget are intended to instil confidence in all our sectors so that we can do well to bring good for our people.

Guyana itself, without the oil economy, has experienced just about less than 5% negative growth. Our economy itself has contracted by that. Without oil, the rest of the economy is projected for this contraction of 4.9%, which brings us to oil and the role it will play in the overall development of our country.

We have been warned time and time again about falling prey to the Dutch disease. Right away, you can see that, without oil, the economy would have contracted by 4.9%. How do we avoid this Dutch disease when we are experiencing and projected to experience negative growth in sugar, poultry, milk, seabob, forestry? Of course, the Budget shows all the numbers that these sectors have declined by.

We can avoid contracting the Dutch disease by making investment in the areas that are renewable, not those finite areas. That is why we have to invest in infrastructure, we have to invest in agriculture, in tourism and in the extractive industries. We also have to invest in people because the danger of collapsing is very real. I want to use Kuwait as an example. As a country that depends a lot on oil, a very rich country, well, hitherto very rich, currently, that country is faced with financial difficulties and will be unable to pay salaries for November. May we be reminded that Kuwait produces just about 2.9 million barrels of oil per day. Now, if a country with that level of production can face financial difficulties to the extent where it is unable to pay basic salaries, then, a country like Guyana will have to exercise budgeting, result-based budgeting, to avoid being placed in a similar situation and to ensure that we achieve the growth that we are projecting to achieve, way above the 40% mark.

The measures here include, of course, investment in our people and investment in industrial parks. Under our Hinterland Electrification Programme, 25,000 solar panel systems and energy mix comprising of hydro, solar and wind,

will add just about 400 megawatts of power. We have budgeted just about \$34.5 billion for the transportation sector. We are going to build new roads; we are going to enhance old roads to make them better.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is your two-minute notice.

Mr. Seeraj: Of course, to give incentives, we spoke a lot about the taxes. This Budget states clearly that the new taxes will revert to their 2014 level. Farmers, especially in Region 5, will be happy to know that, from a demand made by the APNU/AFC of \$15,000 per acre, they will now be required to pay \$3,500 per acre, which is the 2014 level. Land rent will be reduced from \$7,000 to \$1,000. Drainage and irrigation charges will be reduced from \$8,000 to \$2,500. The dray cart operator and the fishmonger pushing his cart along will not be required to pay these draconian fees.

These are the kinds of investment of a Government that knows what it is about. These are the sectors that it will make investments so as to stimulate our economy.

When we talk about the Budget in our presentations, we must also be careful to present the facts because it is easy for anyone to check and present it in a way that is analytical and that can give one the true picture. One of the Hon. Members, I think the Hon. Member Jaiprashad, boastfully said that under the APNU/AFC the rice industry achieved its highest target. I will not quarrel with that, but I will go on to say that, the target was achieved...

Mr. Speaker: Before you go on, Hon. Member, let me give you the true picture, you need an extension to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, can I have my Hon. Colleague be given five minutes more to conclude?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Seeraj: This target was achieved in 2015. What the Hon. Member did not say was that, by 2019, there was a reduction in rice production by 0.8%. This is not much, but it tells you about trend and trends are important in doing analyses. Likewise, I could tell you that, in 2009, rice production was 359,000 tonnes, but by 2014, it was 635,000 tonnes. Here again, over a similar period of time, we would have doubled production under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration. Whereas, the former Government of the PNC – APNU/AFC – came on a platform that was solidly built. It achieved the highest target in a couple of months because of what we had done.

4.46 p.m.

After five years, that which they met, they were able, only as they are able to do, to reduce a good thing. These are some of the things that we have to deal with. My Hon. Colleague, Minister Susan Rodrigues, spoke about the Guyana Water Incorporated. As you know, the delivery of water is essential. How do you justify over 100% increase in staff, when your output barely reaches about nine? One hundred per cent in staff – from over 600 to 1,300 – and you barely increased your output. This shows clearly that the previous Administration’s budgeting strategies were aimed at expenditures that are of a non-revenue nature. A country cannot develop by making and spending in areas where one cannot hope to generate revenues.

We were told about fantastic salaries for persons who are not even turning up for work. This was replicated throughout the different agencies of Government. That, of course, was quite unhealthy for the economy. That is why, after five short years, the PNC – APNU/AFC – is back where it belongs, in the Opposition.

I remember clearly, during the elections campaign leading up to 2015, the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, went out to different areas, and spoke to Guyanese and said, 'Give us a chance, give us a term. If we do not do good vote us out'. Well the people have listened. First of all, they gave them a chance and allowed them to perform. They performed so poorly that they were voted out. The story did not stop there because the Hon. Members did not keep their promise. They said they would leave if they were voted out, after 2nd March, 2020. It took us quite a long time to achieve that objective. All kinds of things will be happening now.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, spoke about racial hostility. I will address that matter. Before that, I want to say clearly that there were a lot of high-profile employees of the State who were involved in doing only political work. That contributed to the demise of the PNC – APNU/AFC. They were not only unproductive, but they were also given cover by the 'big ones' in Government. They had a high official, a Coordinator, I think, of the Community Policing Group (CPG) every day outside here, during the recount process, on television. He was paid under the programme. When they were supposed to be delivering services to the people, they were out there trying to hoodwink the Guyanese people into believing that they had won the elections, when they could not even produce their statements of poll. I know the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, was asked directly, in television

interview, recently, why he believed he had won the elections and where were his statements of poll. The Hon. Member did admit, truthfully, that he was only in possession of a few statements of poll.

I would like to say that, if the Hon. Member was in receipt of a few statements of poll and the rest were in the possession of the PNC, then those statements of poll would have come from areas where the AFC would have hitherto been strong and considered their strong areas. The results actually showed that they are not strong there anymore. By logical deduction, the Hon. Member could have arrived at an accurate prediction about the results of the elections recently held. But, as they say, the rest is history.

In relation to a comment made by the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, I had a look at today’s *Stabroek News* newspaper, and I want to quote from an article by Mr. Freddie Kissoon, where he stated that:

“While Granger, Harmon and other opportunists, with the exception of Lawrence, were inciting black people to damage Guyana one man stood extremely tall, the father of one of the Henry boys and by extension the uncle of the other. He was never comfortable with racist demagoguery Granger and Harmon had used that led to death and destruction. He did not endorse the explanation of the murders being a hate crime. Like Lawrence, he disassociated himself from the robberies and beatings of innocent Indian people in Region 5. Maybe, in his own little way, he knew Granger and Harmon had come to Region 5, not to mourn the Henry boys, not to empathise with their families and relatives, but to use their deaths to destroy Guyana because they lost the 2020 Elections.”

The Hon. Member spoke about racial hostility. We, as leaders, in this hallowed Dome must be responsible for our actions because people will look up to us. If we are to chart a course of unity and if we are to chart a course to achieve those noble goals of one people, one nation with one destiny, we must all engage at a different level. We must take politics out of the equation when we go to give our feelings of support, sympathies and condolences, in a highly charged environment that can lead to destruction and, in extreme cases, the death of our people. Those people are looking to us for leadership and we must take it on as a serious responsibility for us to give the kind of leadership that this country needs so desperately at this point in time, by working

together to deliver what is said here: prosperity for all Guyana, prosperity for all our brothers and sisters.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity to make this presentation in this Dome.

Ladies and gentlemen, Colleagues, all without exception, I want to wish all of you a pleasant evening. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member. Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. Hon. Prime Minister.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 16th September, 2020.”
[*Prime Minister*]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m., on Wednesday, 16th September, 2020.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly now stands adjourned to 10:00 a.m., Wednesday, 16th September, 2020.

Adjourned accordingly at 4.54 p.m.