



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

5TH Sitting

Wednesday, 16TH September, 2020

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.08 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 (37)

(i) MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE’S PROGRESSIVE PARTY/CIVIC (PPP/C) (37)

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.

+ 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,
Ministry of Legal Affairs,
Carmichael Street,
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,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.

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

+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight’s Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

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

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

[Absent]

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

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

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

* Non-Elected Minister

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
Lot 96 Duke Street,
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+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
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+ Hon. Nigel D. Dharamlall, M.P.,
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Minister of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
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+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
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Minister of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
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+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
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Minister of Human Services and Social Security,
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+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,
Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Main Street,
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+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
Minister of the Public Service,
Ministry of the Public Service,
164 Waterloo Street,
North Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

Junior Ministers (4)

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

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.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water,
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Other Members (14)

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Central Rupununi,
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Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,
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Corentyne,
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Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,
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Campbellville,
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Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,
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Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,
Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,
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41 Robb Street,
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South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.
*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.
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Industry,
East Coast Demerara.

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)
(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

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Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, M.P.,
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Georgetown.

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

Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P.,
Lot 933 Block 1,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

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Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.,
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Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,
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Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P.,
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Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,
Lot 842 Eccles,
East Bank Demerara. [Absent]

Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,
Lot 151 Durbana Square,
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Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P.,
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Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.
Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.,
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Johanna Cecilia,
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).
Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.,
Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field,
East Bank Demerara.
Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,
Lot 1110 Plot ‘B’,
Herstelling,
East Bank Demerara.
Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,
Lot 590 Good Hope,
East Coast Demerara.
Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
Lot 1282 Block EE,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.,
(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
Shulidnab Village,
South Central,
Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)
Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini),
Mabaruma Compound.

(Virtual Participation)

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

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

Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
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Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,
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Plantation Belfield,
East Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P.,
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Craig Milne,
Cove & John,
East Coast Demerara.*

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

Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
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Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.*

Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
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Church Street Mahdia.
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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.

[Absent]

(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. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
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Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor (ag)
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Ms. Christina Ramroop,
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Ms. Indranie Persaud,
Reporter
Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter
Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
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Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Reporter
Ms. Bianca Cummings,
Reporter
Mr. Rohan Ramjas,
Reporter
Ms. Nadeila Allen,
Reporter
Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter
Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

5TH Sitting

Wednesday, 16TH September, 2020

Public Business – Government Business

413-509

Estimates of Expenditure 2020 - Budget Speech

415-508

Adjournment -

510

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have a few announcements.

Update on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Test Results

Firstly, following the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) test, which the Clerk, some Members of the National Assembly and I took over a week and two days ago, and the results of those tests proving that a few of us had tested positive, the Clerk had arranged for all staff members of the Parliament Office to be tested.

Today, I want to update you on the results of those tests. Out of 126 samples taken, 14 members of staff have proven to be positive.

The Clerk had taken the necessary actions, since the test, to ensure that our staff had been provided with the supplements and that the necessary protocols had been taken, pending the results of the test. For the 14 persons who are positive, he is currently making arrangements to ensure that we can look after the good health of our parliamentary staff.

Please bear with us as COVID-19 is beginning to take its toll on members of staff of the Parliament Office.

Issues Concerning Food Served to Members of Parliament (MPs)

Hon. Members, the Clerk and the Speaker spoke about the issue of the food that was served a few days ago.

Subsequent to our discussion, the Clerk and one of our Hon. Members met with the providers and had a long discussion. Several suggestions were made and the caterer is currently trying to ascertain the cause of the contamination.

Let me assure you that we are taking every possible step to eliminate a reoccurrence and to give you some answers as to what caused the effects on several Members of the National Assembly, including Members of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition, the Deputy Speaker and Members of the Government.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following report was laid:

- (1) Minutes of Proceedings of the 1st Meeting of the Committee of Selection held on Tuesday, 15th September, 2020.

[*Mr. Speaker – Chairman*]

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, two days ago, we had an oral question without notice submitted by the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir. Yesterday, I ruled on that question. Yesterday, also, the question was re-submitted by the Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones.

Again, today, I rule that, under Standing Order No. 18, questions without notice have two elements: urgency and importance or it should relate to the business of the day.

I maintain my position that the question submitted does not qualify as urgent. It is important but it does not qualified as urgent. So, I am not allowing that question.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2020 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES 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 under-mentioned 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.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, as I stand here, today, to respond to the Budget, which was presented last Wednesday, I do so not in my own strength, but as the Good Book states:

“God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect.”

As I rise, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your ascension to the Office of Speaker of the National Assembly and I wish you well.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) said that, given the length of time since a budget was read in this noble House, coupled with the pandemic, an emergency budget was required. An emergency budget was, thus, the expectation of the Guyanese people.

What the Guyanese people got instead of an emergency budget was a private sector paycheck with a \$25,000 hush money.

The citizens of this country expected to hear a budget presentation that captured the seriousness of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and the population. The people of this country expected to hear a budget focused on programmes and policies and geared at relieving the citizens of this country from the adverse effects of COVID-19, especially the citizens whose lives were turned upside down during this period. Though I am not surprised, I am, however, appalled by what is being touted as ‘our plan for prosperity’. The question is: whose plan?

After reading this Budget speech, it became quite clear who will be prospering. The Budget that we have before us is a private sector budget.

It must be noted that the capital projects started by the APNU/AFC Administration are present in the Budget and those are fine. However, the other parts added by the PPP/C to address social, economic and fiscal issues are anti-working

class, anti-public servant, anti-environment and anti-progressive.

To further underscore this point, if anyone took a look at the members of the Private Sector Commission (PSC), now roaming the halls of the Executive in official capacities, it would leave little doubt that the paymasters are being repaid.

In the first four paragraphs of the Hon. Member’s Budget presentation, the word democracy was mentioned three times. Please allow me to help the Hon. Members on the other side understand what democracy is not, in the hope that they will also understand that so much of what they are doing is wrong and change their approach.

Democracy is not locking staff out of their offices because you deem them to be political appointees. Democracy is not moving a public servant from one region to another in an attempt to frustrate him because his political views do not align with yours. Democracy is not a Minister overreaching to become a police investigator and question someone in custody. Democracy is not a Minister using his position to coerce a citizen, held in custody beyond 72 hours, to incriminate a fellow citizen, so that said Minister can fulfill his political agenda.

So, yes, it is easy to proclaim democracy, but as the saying goes, *actions speak louder than words*.

What we are witnessing is what we saw happening before 2015 and I quote from *Bread and Justice*:

“...eschewing democratic practice and ruling through the means of political repression, victimization and the limitation of popular expression and of the participation in national life of all but the most loyal supporters of the ruling elite, manipulating racial and tribal divisions among the people in order to consolidate their rule.”

I found it rather disconcerting that the Members of the other side of this House would come two days in succession and still not make it clear to all the citizens of this country their plans or a vision of how they will be ensuring prosperity for all citizens of this dear land.

It has been two days and there is no clear message on how they will be dealing with the rapid increase in the COVID-19 deaths. It is as though the other side was caught off guard, not knowing that the spotlight would be on them, as they are now, one by one, being placed in front of the cameras and

struggling to put into words what they personally view as the way forward.

10.23 a.m.

I read *Budget 2020* with great intrigue. I looked to see if there was any indication of an increase for our public servants. So much ridicule and dissent were vocalised, over the past five years, by the Hon. Members on the other side about what public servants ought to be given. This, despite all we were able to accomplish. So, I could not imagine a budget presented to the House without an attempt to match or even surpass, through a substantive retroactive increase, what public servants received over the last five years. It must, therefore, be highlighted that the minimum wage for public servants, including teachers, nurses, doctors, members of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the security services, increased annually under the APNU/AFC Government. Imagine, in 2015, we raised the minimum wage by 26%, in 2016 by 10%, in 2017 by 20%, in 2018 by 7% and in 2019 by 9%. Overall, minimum wage was raised by 77% or from \$39,570 to \$70,000.

Specific issues related to salaries and allowances for our nurses, teachers and Sweeper-Cleaners, that were pending for many years prior, are among the benefits accrued by public servants under the APNU/AFC Administration. So, I must ask the Hon. Members on the other side why they have chosen to neglect the public servants in this Budget.

We have a right to believe whatever we want, but not everything we believe is right. The Hon. Member, Ms. Rodrigues, noted yesterday that the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) had increased its employment number by over 100%. The Hon. Member thought that increased employment was a travesty. As the Hon. Member obviously did not take the time to become *au fait* with the workings of GWI, she would not be aware that we came into Office in 2015 and met innumerable communities not having water. I know my Colleague MP, Ms. Ferguson, would respond in detail to this and so I will go no further than to say, maybe, the Hon. Member should take a look at the accomplishments of GWI in the past five years and determine whether this could have been done with the meagre staff that were in place in 2015.

Hon. Members on the other side are highlighting that they intend to create 50,000 new jobs. But, at every turn, they are seeking to get rid of public servants. This begs the question: is it their intention to fire the entire public service and then rehire people as they attempt to reach their 50,000 goal?

I am certain that there may be some who would want to attribute some merit to the false statements that the treasury was left empty. I stand here, today, and say without fear of contradiction that if the treasury were empty, the Hon. Members on the other side would not have been able to approve \$600 million for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) for wages and salaries. If the treasury were empty, we would not be able to be debating a budget, today, of \$330 billion.

So, if the Hon. Members on the other side continue to insist that the coffers were empty when the APNU/AFC Administration left Government just a few weeks ago, they must reveal to the people of Guyana the true source of the moneys being spent and being promised to be spent through this Budget, especially given that the value-added tax (VAT) and other taxes have been slashed for their business buddies. Perhaps, the source is a personal bank account or two, though I doubt it. Not that it is impossible that some of their personal bank accounts could contain these large sums, but it is most unlikely that it is all about philanthropy. So, I do believe that the Hon. Members on the other side need to relook at this situation.

The Hon. Member, the Minister of Labour, highlighted, on Monday, that the Government is giving consideration to raising the age of retirement of public servants, retraining and bringing them back into the workforce. Firstly, it was the PPP/C Government that, in 2012, utilised funds from the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and purchased a building in the Republic of Suriname valued at €670,000. In addition, the PPP/C took \$2.5 billion from the NIS to build the Berbice Bridge, leaving the NIS unable to increase pensions for retired employees, consistent with the increase of salaries and allowances made during the 2015 to 2019 years under the APNU/AFC Government.

So, public servants, having retired, after working, in some instances, for as long as 30 years in the public service, cannot go into retirement comfortably with the pension they will receive. So, it makes sense for the Hon. Minister to try and find ways to clean up the mess they created by suggesting to our retired public servants that they can be retrained to earn more. It is because they know they made some bad investments with public servants' money, which are affecting public servant ability to retire in comfort. This would not be the situation if the NIS moneys were not misused in the first place.

Further, I should bring to your attention that many youths heard the statement and were confused. One of the questions asked, in response to the Hon. Member’s proposal, was: how do you intend to reduce youth unemployment if your plan is to retrain retired citizens to bring them back into the workforce?

However, it really shows that the PPP/C has no vision for this country. There is not even a consistent narrative, none, as the Hon. Member, Minister Hamilton, advocated for the retraining of retirees, while the Hon. Minister, Mr. Indar, condemned the employment of retirees. The only word that could come to mind is schizophrenic.

There is nothing of substance in the Budget for public servants. What we have, instead, is a clear indication that the PPP/C intends to significantly reduce the human resources currently in the public service. This is the deceptive nature of *Budget 2020*. I quote from a famous book that states what is before us:

“Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit; with his mouth, one speaks peace to his neighbour, but inwardly he sets an ambush for him.”

Why do I say this, one may wonder? Let us start by focusing on the statements made by the Hon. Member during his Budget speech presentation. The heading given to the section that focuses on public administration is entitled ‘Public Service Human Resource Development’. This gives the impression that the main focus for the Ministry of Public Service would be creating and implementing policies and programmes that would develop the human resource currently in the public service. Hon. Member Edghill stated:

“We intend to oversee and implement new management practices, such as Performance Management System, while exploiting technological advancements.”

On its face, this appears to be a transformative approach. However, it must be looked at in the context of what this regime has done thus far. Requests have been made for the names of all who were employed during the period of the APNU/AFC Administration. We cannot and will not overlook the possibility of the Hon. Members on the other side using the Performance Management System to attempt to remove persons from the public service whom they deem to be supporters of the APNU/AFC.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Parag, made public statements on scholarships to which I had previously responded. In addition, it appears that the Hon. Member is confused between the meaning of demographic and geographic, so I feel the need to explain. Demographic is the study of a population based on factors such as age, race and sex, while geographic relates to the physical features of an area. Therefore, contrary to the Hon. Member’s reading, I did not offer a demographic chart, but instead, a geographic chart that clearly showed the number of persons who gained scholarships to attend the University of Guyana (UG), based on their region of origin.

The Department of Public Service awarded scholarships for students to attend local institutions, other than UG, as well as international institutions. Thus, the Hon. Member Ms. Parag’s conclusion that the numbers shown represented the total number of scholarships was false. The Hon. Member Ms. Parag’s statement that scholarships were skewed to one demographic and geographic in Guyana can only be seen for what it is, a view of the PPP/C that the APNU/AFC would do exactly what they did while they were previously in Office. I must assure this honourable House that if the Hon. Minister actually takes the time to peruse the data, she would recognise that her statements and beliefs are skewed and not the management or distribution of scholarships over the last five years.

I request that it be placed on record that the scholarships awarded under the David Granger-led Administration were consistent with applications received. If candidates of a particular ethnic group applied for scholarships more than candidates from other groups, then one would expect the number of scholarships awarded to be consistent with this fact. It is important to note that, contrary to what the Hon. Minister Ms. Parag’s public comments suggest, all names of English origin do not necessarily reflect a particular ethnic group, especially since, over the past five years, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs was allocated a significant percentage of scholarships by the Department of Public Service annually.

Further and very importantly, under the APNU/AFC Administration, the Scholarships Selection Committee was reconstituted to represent the multi-ethnic nature of our society and allow for a more transparent process in the awarding of scholarships.

Finally, on this matter, I hope that the Hon. Member Ms. Parag’s observation that there is limited human resources

skills across the public service would allow her to recognise the need for the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service. I hope that the Hon. Member would shy away from the PPP/C’s inclination to destroy anything developed by the APNU/AFC Administration, regardless of the financial and social costs.

The obvious lack of vision in this Budget affords me the opportunity to not only highlight what we were able to accomplish in the public service, but also what we believe is the best direction for the public service, given the juncture at which we currently find ourselves.

Within a week of the Budget presentation on 10th August, 2015, President David Granger set up a Commission of Inquiry (COI) to conduct a diagnostic review of the salaries, condition of service, training and other matters pertaining to the improvement of efficiency of the performance of the public service and the wellbeing of public servants in the public service. [**An. Hon. Member:** Where is the report?] It is on Ms. Parag’s desk. The COI report was adopted in the last quarter of 2016. One of the major recommendations of this report was converting contract workers to the regular civil service. The APNU/AFC Administration employed the phased approach to tackle the recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service of Guyana. In phase 1, we concentrated on moving contract workers to the public service establishment. By 2019, 80% of contracted workers were moved to the fixed establishment. Thus, more than 5,000 contract workers have converted to the pensionable establishment of the public service. The remaining 20% are contract workers who are over the age of 45 and who cannot get on to the pensionable establishment after this age, as per the Public Service Rules of 1987.

10.38 a.m.

During phase 2, restructuring and reforming systems of administration and resource management should be addressed. In this phase, the Ministry should tackle the modernisation of the public service, producing an estimate of skills and talents for the public service, including oil and gas and economic diversification over the next three years.

This output should feed into the formulation of a strategic training plan, the improvement of managerial competences and, at the same time, upgrading of the compensation system linked to performance management would be next. These tasks would require substantial budgetary support as well as capabilities. It is my hope that the Hon. Minister would take a similar approach to ensure that the public service is

adequately equipped to respond to the growing needs and expectations of the society.

A Permanent Secretary (PS) and Regional Executive Officer (REO) retreat occurred in 2017 to discuss and formulate a mission and vision for moving towards a human resource management approach for the delivery of public services. The organisational structure was reformed into planning and analysis, development and operations, scholarships, human resources and central personnel, information systems and registry to focus on the strategic intent of the COI. We also adopted a systematic approach to training in 2018 and beyond, under which the Planning and Analysis Unit produced a preliminary assessment of the training needs of the public service for the next three years.

In 2020, the human resource needs assessment service should extend this estimate of training by incorporating oil and gas as well as the skills needed for economic diversification as outlined in the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS). It is anticipated that the publication of the results of the Human Resources Needs Survey will encourage private investment. This project’s approach is to train a cadre of personnel who would learn and master the methodology of estimating human resources needs.

Again, I reiterate that it is my hope that the Hon. Minister would take a similar approach to ensure that the public service is adequately equipped to respond to the growing needs and expectations of society. The Hon. Members on the other side would have to make a decision about whether they would utilise the recommendations of the COI into the Public Service of Guyana or set it aside to get dust because it was established under the APNU/AFC Administration.

In 2016, the need to improve the quality of human resources within the public sector led to the constituting of the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service to provide entry level professional and specialised training for public servants who are expected to provide an improved quality of service anywhere in Guyana. Merging the current training unit into the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service to provide quality training across the public service has to be a priority. The interventions, being costly, would require a phased approach over a number of years.

Again, I reiterate that it is my hope that the Hon. Minister would take a similar approach to ensure that the public service is adequately equipped to respond to the growing needs and expectations of the society.

We, as a country and a people, need to recognise that there are some truths and fears that need to be addressed openly. This prejudice, xenophobia, ethnic hatred and racism that bubbles just under the surface of our masked smiles and forced hugs will go nowhere if we continue to pretend it does not exist. If we are to truly live as our motto requires, we must first look within ourselves. If each of us do this and face our own truths, then we would recognise our roles in creating the society that is best for all who call Guyana home.

The Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) has seemingly lost the confidence of the population. Maybe, our task to constitute our version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has come. We are at a serious junction in our nation’s history. We stand here, day by day, to debate a Budget that is lacking. We spend time here not recognising that what we do here is important. What we do as leaders in this country is important and the rest of the nation follows what we say and do. I would hope that all Hon. Members of this House would take cognisance of their role in this society and what is expected of them as true leaders of this society. If it is that we are going to live as one in this society, they would do the necessary and not cause anymore...

Finally, I wish to conclude my presentation by acknowledging that, as elected representatives, we all have an obligation to speak truth on all matters. As we meet in the shadow of the gruesome killing of the three young men, the painful truth of the last few weeks is that justice has not always been even-handed. As a country, we are clearly in internal distress and if our worse fears are confirmed, we might be adding to that burden a new distress that goes beyond our borders. It is my hope that the historic role this House has played in ensuring that Guyana is not drawn into partisan conflicts beyond our borders is maintained. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. The Hon. Member, the Minister of the Public Service will make her maiden presentation.

Minister of the Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I embark on my maiden speech, I wish to extend congratulations to you and to the Hon. Members who have been chosen to sit in this noble House.

Permit me to also commend the expediency and dedicacy with which my Hon. Colleague, Bishop Juan Edghill and team, compiled and presented *Budget 2020*, taking into account a global pandemic. This demonstrates true leadership by the PPP/C of which the Opposition should take note.

In the last two days, I have, disappointingly, acknowledged the abrasiveness of the Hon. Members of the Opposition with respect to this emergency Budget simply because they feel the need to oppose, irrespective of the fact that their presentations were reckless and replete with inaccuracies. This has left no doubt in my mind that their minds are far removed from the realities Guyanese face and are, therefore, unable to appreciate the relief measures contained therein simply because they ran a government like a banana republic.

Anyone with half of a brain would recognise, without delving into the Budget deeper, that the reversal of draconian tax measures, unreasonably and cruelly placed on the citizens of Guyana by the APNU/AFC, reaffirms this Government’s unwavering commitments to the prosperity of all Guyanese. It has been just short of two months since the PPP/C entered into Office as the legitimate and democratically-elected Government of Guyana and it is astounding to find that the APNU/AFC actually expended great efforts in exercising incompetence over the last five years.

I was going to jump straight into my Ministry but let me rebut what has been put forward by the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley. Ms. Sarabo-Halley has spoken to the accomplishments of the Granger-led Administration of granting or increasing the minimum wage. It is a fact that it is so, but it is also a fact, which has escaped her mind, that it is an obligation of any government to take care of its public servants and that is by increasing their wages. It was done by the PPP/C and it will be done again by the PPP/C.

Also, the Hon Member said that this Hon. Member, the Minister of the Public Service, ought to familiarise herself with the Ministry. But I will tell her that, clearly, she never presented a budget. However, she did not take the one year to familiarise herself with the fact that an increase in salary for public servants is not included in a budget. There is something called collective bargaining. That is what is done and then it is put in the budget.

While we are standing here, let us get our facts straight before we come and criticise something that the majority of the Guyanese people see as beneficial to them for the next five years and more. The PPP/C Administration, myself and all my Colleagues are not responsible for the misunderstanding of any terms of the English language by the Opposition. It is clear that democracy means something different to this Administration than it does to the Opposition. The Opposition collapsed the democracy in this country for five months and

suffocated the citizens until they had to get a ‘pull up’ from the outside.

We speak of democracy. Democracy is reflected in the will of the people. The will of the people spoke on 2nd March, 2020, which has led to today’s date in which we are presenting our 2020 Budget to help those citizens. It was through the will of the people. It is not just the will of the people but the supporters for the APNU/AFC along with the Hon. Members of the APNU/AFC.

I have heard quite a bit of heckling for me to pick up my speech. I wonder when we will take away the unethical behaviour of being in the public service while we sit in Parliament.

I turn my attention to the Ministry of Public Service, which falls under my portfolio. As this Government has said and as I have expressed on a number of occasions, we are committed to reforming and modernising the public service in a holistic manner. So, when my Friend over there said that she thought that I would take suit, I am way ahead of her. Modernisation does not only speak to software advancement; it speaks to a change in mentality to conform with the rest of the region and the rest of the world.

10.53 a.m.

[**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** You cannot use ‘her’ in the Parliament.] As far as I am aware, ‘her’ is still within the English language, even if I interchange it with ‘Hon. Member’.

I also took note of the fact that the Hon. Member shamelessly stood and spoke on employment when, after days of entering into the Ministry of the Public Service, she fired three persons. It was ordered by the then President that the letters were unlawful and that she is to reinstate them and give them their allowances. He ordered her, also, to apologise to them for humiliating them.

I also heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, about two days ago, stood and said that she was alarmed that the courts were being weaponised. As a practising attorney, and I repeat those words ‘practising attorney’ before I came into this House, every day we saw the courts used as a weapon. Do you know what? The court will be used a weapon against sanctimonious gangsters and riggers.

The Ministry of the Public Service: Before I go on to that, training is an essential part of the public service. That is not something that the Hon. Member does not know. I am sure

she knows that because she made reference to the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service. Now, we have employment there, but I will ask the Hon. Member, in the last year that she was there, what was the progress report on the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service? As far as I am aware, for all four years, persons from the College were employed in a Clerk III position, and those persons who were trained and entered into the public service have not moved from that post as of today’s date.

The Hon. Member, former Minister, also made mention of scholarship policies. I will say she repeated correctly; she paid lip service, but there was no action to that. I would place the burden on her to tell this honourable House how she got a scholarship and by what process.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am hearing quite a lot of noise in the Dome. This is the Hon. Member’s maiden speech. Please, let us give her the silence that she deserves.

Ms. Parag: I have also heard about my statement some time ago in the media in relation to the scholarships being skewed to one demographic and geographic. The statistics are here and I will state them.

In 2009, and this has been the pattern for the last five years, we have had one from Region 1, five granted to Region 2, five to Region 3, and 36 to Region 4. These are overseas scholarships, I will get to the local ones. There were a mere two to Region 5; 12 to Region 6; zero to Regions 7, 8 and 9; five to Region 10; and 36 to Region 4.

Local scholarships for 2019: three to Region 1, eight to Region 2, 25 to Region 3, 122 to Region 4, 11 to Region 5, 23 to Region 6, four to Region 7, zero to Region 8, four to Region 9 and 28 to Region 10. The hinterland and the Indigenous people, who they are fighting so much for over there, have been left behind for the last five years.

Prior to 2015, there was a policy where persons from the hinterland, who qualified...*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please allow me just to make an appeal, once again, for some amount of quiet in the National Assembly. This is your maiden speech, Hon. Member, and we ought to give you that respect. Outside of that, it is difficult for me to follow using the earphones *[Inaudible]*.

Ms. Parag: May I proceed?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, you could continue.

Ms. Parag: Thank you. Those were the statistics for the year 2009 and that has been the pattern for the last five years as it regard scholarships.

Turning to the budget, the Ministry’s budget is estimated at \$1,081,951,000 with \$1,013,484,000 being estimated for allocation to training and scholarships. If I were to compare 2019, where just over 500 scholarship applications were brought into the Ministry of the Public Service, in just three weeks, we have been able to receive over 700 applications from across the country. From Region 8, for the hinterland alone, we have 68 applications. That is how we are able to give an equal opportunity in the public service to reflect the diversity in Guyana.

I believe, some days ago, the Hon. Member, Ms. Philadelphia, laboured on training in the oil and gas sector and I heard it again this morning. Hon. Member, I wish to inform you that the PPP/C has advocated for training and to factor in training and scholarship grants in all productive sectors, inclusive of oil and gas as it is in keeping with the impact of Programme 142: Human Resource Development. No area that is a developing area in the sectors across the country will be left behind in training and scholarships.

The Hon. Member also made mention of modernisation. That is a common trend in modern public services across the world. It is not something that will be left behind. We had a website that was created, sometime ago, under the guise of modernisation. I have been apprised by the information technology (IT) specialist, in the Ministry of the Public Service, that the website is inadequate and that they are creating a website that is more user-friendly and that will allow for better application analysis, reporting and management of scholarships – something we have not seen in the last five years.

The Hon. Member also sought to attack my Colleague, the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water. What the Hon. Member did not say is that she jumped the line by applying, in May, 2020, for a house lot and was granted one in June of 2020. I have had an application there for seven years. When you *throw stones at glass houses*, you ensure that your house is made of concrete. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please, I am appealing to you, once again, it is the Minister’s maiden presentation.

Ms. Parag: The Budget that is estimated for the Ministry of the Public Service will serve well in terms of granting scholarships equally, fairly and across the board – that is the

aim. The Budget will also cater for the modernisation and professionalism of the public service. In addition to that, discussions and consultations are already on the way with the relevant stakeholders in an effort to modernise the Public Service Rules, which have not been looked at, at all, in the last five years.

The Hon. Member made mention of the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service of Guyana. I daresay that she did not take any of its recommendations and advice. She stated that they sought to regularise the public service by putting 5,000 persons on the pensionable establishment. However, to date, we have 111 staff in the Ministry of the Public Service. As a matter of fact, when I got into office on 6th August, 2020, that was the figure and still is the figure. We will see that nobody is unemployed. That aside, 43 out of the 111 staff are contracted employees for whom salaries, from January to July, 2020, were a whopping \$179 million. Clearly, the recommendations of the commission of inquiry to regularise were only looked at with a cataract-laden eye, as have been all of the visions from the APNU/AFC from 2015.

I believe that I have sufficiently stated why *Budget 2020* will not only serve the people of Guyana but, more particularly, the public service and the public servants of Guyana. It is there to also ensure that public servants are safe and secure in their jobs and that their welfare are always taken care of as well.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Budget also caters for aid to those who are on scholarships outside of Guyana.

11.08 a.m.

The Government of Guyana, in just about three weeks, will be sending aid to those students.

I heard heckling from the other side as it relates to copycats. The Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, when he spoke, said that everything that they do is copycatting. The first thing he said was that this Budget was discriminatory and oppressive, which was followed by the statement that we copycatted. Therefore, they were discriminatory and oppressive.

This brings me to the end of my presentation. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Again, I want to implore the House that, today, we also have a number of Hon. Members who are making their first presentations to the House. Please, it is getting very difficult for me to follow virtually because of all of the noise coming from the Dome.

With this, I call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, to make her maiden presentation.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to follow from my Hon. Comrades who made their maiden speeches in this Budget debate.

To you, Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your appointment to the position you now hold and I wish you every success. Please permit me to extend congratulations to all the newly appointed Parliamentarians in the House. I am very thankful to all my Comrades who have shown confidence in my ability and character to serve in the best interest of all Guyanese. To my husband and children, I say thank you for supporting and allowing me to serve the people of Guyana.

Standing here would not have been possible without proper upbringing, support and opportunities to serve my family and community, Mocha-Arcadia. I will forever be grateful to all of the individuals who spoke positively into my life and who continue to encourage and walk with me as I start this new journey. To the people of Guyana, my personal motto has been ‘serving to make a difference’. I am now placed here in another position where I can serve you without ill will and affection.

The entire progress of a nation is dependent upon the existence of its natural resources. Therefore, if our exhaustible natural resources are not properly managed and accounted for it can be depleted, leaving the people in their daily struggles for survival.

As I peruse the *Budget 2020* speech and documents, the questions of what is in it for me or how this will benefit me comes to mind. These are questions I recall myself and colleagues asking whenever we heard of the national budget. I recall gathering, in the staff room at St. Joseph High School, and trying to calculate with the Teachers of Principles of Accounts and Mathematics how much money we will receive, the question, I believe, all Guyanese would ask when hearing about the national budget being presented.

The question of what makes this a people’s emergency Budget, as referred to by the Hon. Members on the other side, is a question that must be answered. The natural resource sector covers 0.37%, only, of the total national budgeted sum in 2020. Policy development and administration covers 41.7%, while the petroleum sector covers 43.6% of that allotted sum and the natural resource management covers 30.7%. These percentages tell us where the finances will be spent in the sector.

However, the undertone of the Government’s message climaxes from the fact that the Government’s plan for prosperity is only possible by removal, reversal and reduction of value-added tax, taxation and administrative controls. I would like to remind this House that value-added tax was introduced to the Guyanese people on 1st January, 2007 by the then People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration. On the old Guyana Revenue Authority’s (GRAs) website, you will find all of the information regarding this one great tax system and its benefits. A few of the highlighted benefits are:

“VAT was introduced in Guyana as part of the PPP/C Government’s plan to modernise and streamline the taxation system.”

In summation, it was said:

“VAT is a simple, fair and efficient system which is difficult to cheat: VAT means that more people who benefit from the Government spending will contribute.”

Businesses can reclaim VAT they paid on their business expenses, since we do not pay VAT on VAT. After the introduction of VAT to the Guyanese population on 1st January, 2007, the budget speech which was presented the same year on 2nd February, 2007, was under the theme, *Building a Modern and Prosperous Guyana*. Is it not ironic that, now, 13 years later, in 2020, under the theme ‘our plan for prosperity’, the removal of VAT will present prosperity to this sector and the people of Guyana?

The online *PKF Guyana Tax Guide 2013* states that value-added tax rate is 16%, some items are zero-rated and very few exempted. One was to register if one turnover exceeds \$10 million per annum. I am of the view that, after seeing how VAT ought to be implemented, the new Government, apparently, has been awakened and for this we are thankful.

However, under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government, assistance to gold miners was given. Incentive schemes were encouraged where miners benefitted from the tax systems and remained compliant. These measures have worked as highlighted in Cde. Trotman’s report on the growth that had taken place in the natural resources sector. Eligible gold miners were exempted from the payment of customs duty on fuel, 8.59 matting duties, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), jackhammers, drills, flex hoses, expanding metals, pumps, pumps housing, impellers, shafts and engines. Through an agreement among the APNU/AFC Government, the Guyana Geology and

Mines Commission (GGMC) and the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA), 338 small and medium scale miners benefitted from tax concessions on machineries, equipment and fuel, and a waiver and remission of taxes on vehicles based on gold declarations.

To the Hon. Minister of this sector, could you say if the existing benefits, as highlighted above, will remain and the removal of VAT will be an additional benefit given to these miners? Or, will some of the benefits, as highlighted, be removed to facilitate the new benefits? The Hon. Minister yesterday answered my question, in his presentation, when he said that VAT will be removed in one month. This begs another question: how does the removal of VAT deal with the emergencies of this sector? I am positive that because of the constraints COVID-19 has brought, only the privileged miners will be able to purchase equipment and enjoy this VAT removal at this time. When one speaks of emergencies, it should address the immediate needs. I did not see, in the Budget, any emergency bailout fund that people in the extractive industry could benefit from now.

The removal of administrative control: when it comes to the removal of administrative controls, more consideration should be given. It was presented, in this Budget, that the requirement to register and take out your licence for mining equipment will be removed as well as the removal of police clearance for miners to transport fuel in their vehicles. There are two questions that ought to be answered: is the removal of these administrative controls necessary or is it the processing time and, simply, a change from the term ‘road licence’ to a more appropriate name that needs to be addressed?

These removals may lead to security issues, since clearance helps to provide authenticity to the individual who is transporting the fuel. I am quite sure that there will be several of the same machines operating in particular mining areas. Having this licenced registration also helps with identification and classification of machines and the protection against possible theft.

Registration also helps in the event of accidents, where the equipment can be easily identified. Food for thought, would it not be better for the Administration to re-evaluate? After all, 62.4% of the allotted sum, to be spent in this sector, was allotted for administration, management and development. The use of technology, I am quite sure, will help to expedite several administrative controls.

The policy of the APNU/AFC Government benefitted the miners and this sector by maintaining authenticity and

legitimacy, while giving tax incentives for small miners who met the administrative requirements. The natural resources sector made significant contributions in propelling the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) and incorporating youths, through the Natural Resources Apprenticeship Programme, into the sector through training projects. Under the APNU/AFC Government, the National Mining Syndicate (NMS), which is a constitutional body, was launched; the strategic plan of 2017 to 2021. The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) should be examined and the continuous plan to develop and encourage the ‘green’ economy should be advanced.

Coronavirus disease – 2019: we are aware that the pandemic has affected this sector. Under the APNU/AFC Government, measures were taken to control the spread of COVID-19 in and out of these areas. As such, I would like the Hon. Minister Bharrat to give details on how the Government plans to address this COVID-19 issue, specifically, in the extractive sector. In his presentation, the Hon. Member stated that 40 new staff were trained in the testing of COVID-19. How many of these trained staff are in the mining sector conducting testing?

As one of the geographical Member of Parliament (MP) for Region 4, it is important that I highlight the status of the area, East Bank Demerara. For 23 years, under the rule of the PPP/C Government, we saw infrastructural development of some communities and the neglect of others, like Mocha Arcadia, Bagotstown, some parts in Grove, Friendship, Soesdyke and Kurukuru, to name a few.

11.23 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: You have the two-minute notice.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I call upon the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, to ensure that this neglectful practice does not, and I repeat, does not repeat itself. The focus then was only to enhance areas where, mainly, their supporters were. My community, under the then People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration, was crippled and the deliberate flooding of farmlands caused our farmers to find alternative means of livelihood.

Hope came to those communities when the APNU/AFC Government came into Office. Herstelling pump station, which covers 4,500 acres, had benefitted both residential and agricultural lands from Providence to Little Diamond, Mocha and, in addition, 7,526 persons in the catchment areas were able to benefit. The APNU/AFC is responsible for roads,

water improvement supply, bridges and lights; and the Rural Agricultural Infrastructure Development (RAID) project helped to save us.

Several communities also have E-Governance Hubs which have tremendously increased in communication and have afforded easy access for students to complete their research. We expect that the Government side of this honourable House will let their actions represent their speech and continue the development of all communities; I say, all communities.

The koker at Little Diamond needs to be completed and the koker at Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL) needs to be opened to help with the drainage of the lands. At Soesdyke, there are five kokers along the main road which require your urgent attention, since they continue to erode and can be life threatening if they collapse. Mocha Arcadia, Soesdyke...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your urgent attention is needed to get an extension. Could someone move for you to get an extension to conclude?

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you. As I continue, Mocha Arcadia, Soesdyke, Laluni, Samville and several other communities need roads to be done. First Hill, while it is enjoying potable water and electricity, is in need of telephone services and internet access.

One project that has caught the attention of the East Bank residents is the sudden change of the road project from Diamond to Ogle, which is now to begin at Eccles. My constituents would like to know what is the purpose for the construction of the road, since we initially believed that it would have helped with the long lines of traffic from Grove and that which comes from across the Demerara Harbour Bridge. Was there any consideration for the use of the old Diamond to La Bonne Intention (LBI) route, which still exists, and where canes were pulled from and there is no need to worry about swamp?

Under education, schools were established to facilitate the increasing school-aged population. I would like to encourage the Hon. Members on the opposite side, especially in education, to consider having or keeping the breakfast programme. This is important, especially for children whose

parents are security guards and are unable to adequately prepare a proper breakfast before they enter into the classroom. Providing that would help these children not to enter the classroom on hungry stomachs and they would be able to have something nutritional to start their day.

The \$10,000 grant, while it is commendable [**Mr. McCoy:** It is \$15,000.] Yes, it is \$15,000. I am sorry. I would like to encourage the Hon. Members, on the other side, to reconsider the amount, since it is only one time, so that more can be done to assist, especially, the poor families that we have around.

In the community of Laluni, there is an ongoing issue where individuals have reported that persons have been sharing hampers in the community without the involvement of the elected bodies. It is something that requires urgent attention and does not speak well for the governing side. Persons have been registering names for the \$25,000 and they are excluding others. This does not speak well for the opposite side. This has also been reported from Kurukuru and other communities on the East Bank. I have visited Kurukuru and Laluni, personally, and was able to have first-hand information about this.

In concluding, I am yet to see what makes this a people’s emergency budget, since there are several unanswered questions. I am quite sure that the miners and all of the other workers in this sector require more immediate assistance. I want to end by using this quote, according to Mr. Kirk Boyd:

“Peace and prosperity can be attained through the realization of five basic fundamental freedoms, for all people...They are: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want, freedom for the environment, and freedom from fear.”

This Budget is void of satisfying the basic freedom of want for the average man and the freedom of fear. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, before I proceed with my presentation, I would like to respond to the Hon. Member who mentioned that, during the tenure of the office of Ms. Volda Lawrence, we had less COVID-19 cases. I would like to remind you that Ms. Volda Lawrence is not a medical doctor. She has no skills regarding epidemiological issues. She has none, and the only reason we are seeing more cases now is because after the Hon. Minister, Dr. Frank Anthony, took office the testing increased up to 300 persons per day. You need to take note of that.

As I rise to grace this honourable House, in support of *Budget 2020*, I wish to extend best wishes to all the new Hon. Members of this Assembly and I trust that we all work in unity as we embark on this new journey of higher service to this nation. I take this opportunity to offer my sincere gratitude to the people of Guyana who entrusted their well-being and future by voting to return the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government to Office. A special thanks to all stakeholders, both at home and in the diaspora, for their undying support in the fight for the restoration and preservation of democracy, and ensuring that the will of the people was respected post 2nd March, 2020, elections rigging attempt by our Colleagues now sitting on the Opposition side. Indeed, we have endured some perilous times for the past five months as we simultaneously fought against two viruses – the COVID-19 pandemic and the APNU/AFC rigging virus.

In this light, I wish to remind my Hon. Colleagues, on the other side, that it is the people and I repeat, it is the people of any democratic nation who have the right and the will to choose the Government of the day. I do hope that you learn from this experience that you placed this country in for the past five months.

In this nature, I wish to take us down memory lane of the horrific struggles and plight of the poor and ordinary people of this land, since our Hon. Members on the Opposition side are showing worsening signs of selective amnesia.

As a geographic representative of Region 3, it is my civic duty to be the voice for my people and outline the chicanery that occurred for the past five years working at the West Demerara Regional Hospital. I can say that serving under the fallen APNU/AFC Government is equivalent to working in the frontlines of a warzone. Myself and colleagues at the hospital could attest to this due to the challenging working conditions of not having basic medications, such as captopril or metformin, just to name a few, for our chronic disease patients. Our expecting mothers, in the Obstetrician-Gynecologist (OBGYN) Department, have seen dark days, especially those high-risk patients with gestational diabetes and hypertension, as medications, such as insulin and metildopa, were nil on many occasions. The CPG machines and basic family planning methods, such intrauterine device (IUDs), implants, oral contraceptives, amongst others, were difficult to access. Basic materials such as normal saline, gauze and intracaths, just to name a few, were also found to be nil in our drug bond many times.

Our referral of emergency surgical cases increased tremendously due to a nonfunctional main operating theatre, occupied by a faulty anesthesia machine, which was never fixed or replaced by a new one and only provided services for a mere six months for the past five years.

Our Electromagnetic Radiation (X-ray) and Ultrasound Departments have been through shaky times as well. These services were also abandoned by the previous Administration. It is totally absurd and unfair to our people to have them reach into their pockets and pay for services that are already covered by their taxes. Just to note, when these issues were raised on many occasions, with those in authority, we were told to remain silent because our complaints will only make the Government look bad. Well you do not only look bad, you are on the Opposition side and you will be there for a very long time.

As one of the many ventures in giving the ‘good life’ to the family and friends circle, contracts were awarded to a strong APNU/AFC affiliate, who supplied expired Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) rapid test kits to various health facilities in Region 3 and across Guyana. Imagine the risk that this posed to the health of our medical staff and patients of producing a possible misdiagnosis to the entire population.

As the world continues to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be ill of me not to give my gratitude to my fellow frontline workers in the health system for risking their lives, on a daily basis, to ensure that our people receive adequate medical attention and care. For one to place a blind eye and a deaf ear to our services in such a fragile and uncertain time, is more than atrocious and disrespectful to our healthcare heroes. Imagine our frontline workers were promised risk allowances, but never received a cent from the previous Administration. Today, our Budget has set aside \$150 million for our frontline workers battling in the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only will our frontliners benefit from this Budget, but every household across Guyana will receive \$25,000 COVID-19 relief cash grant. This is, indeed, clear evidence that our President has all Guyanese at heart and will continue to reach out in every area of our lives. In this light, I can assure you, like a Phoenix, our health sector will rise from the ashes and receives a total of \$14.3 billion, as we work to ensure that every Guyanese receives quality and efficient healthcare that we so truly deserve.

11.38 a.m.

As a sister of school-aged siblings, I have seen the great difficulty that my widowed mother faced after having the \$10,000 school cash grant snatched away by the APNU/AFC Government and replaced by the Five Bs initiative implemented by Brigadier. (Ret’d) Granger, which has proven to be a colossal failure, and only seen as a political gimmick to benefit the suppliers of this venture.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to force the temporary physical closure of our school doors, I can say with much pride that, thanks to the PPP/C Government, our children will not be left behind, but will be engaged in school activities *via* radio, television, newspapers and other social media platforms. Also, come 1st January, 2020, the ‘Because We Care’ cash grant will be reinstated and raised to \$15,000 per child. In addition to this, the \$2,000 uniform school voucher will be doubled to \$4,000, which simply means that our children will be benefitting from a total of \$19,000 for their school supplies. This is what a visionary government does. Instead of taking away from our kids, we give back, and we do so in double portion, full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.

As I continue to expose the incompetence of the former Administration, I now place emphasis on the blatant neglect of the youths across the length and breadth of this country. I wish to remind us that it was under the Bharrat Jagdeo Administration that thousands of young people were given equal, I repeat equal, opportunities to become doctors, nurses, agronomists, and teachers, among others. They were given a chance to realise their dreams of serving the people of this country and excelling academically. Unfortunately, the Hon. Members on the parliamentary Opposition side cannot boast of such massive contributions of human resources to this country. Instead, many of our nurses and doctors have left the system due to the deterioration of the working conditions, and the poor salaries and benefits that the health system has been plagued with for the last five years.

I wish to highlight the lack of specialty doctors within the system due to a very limited provision of little or no post-graduate programmes within the last five years. The Hon. Minister, Ms. Parag, mentioned that. Instead, the minute of opportunities that were created was a secret and were given to individuals who are or were perceived to be sympathetic towards the APNU/AFC Government. In this light, I would wish to remind you that, in November, 2018, it was Ms. Volda Lawrence who proudly mentioned, during a party conference at Congress Place that, the only friends I got is PNC, so the only people I *gon* give *wuk* to is PNC, and right

now I looking for a doctor who can talk Spanish or Portuguese and *ah* want one that is PNC.

That alone speaks volumes of what the previous Administration stood for. It was a family and friends take-all-affair, as we have seen in the shocking revelations of politically appointed members receiving luxurious salaries and benefits. On some occasions, persons were being paid for occupying frivolous posts, such as the famous Petroleum Adviser, while others were being paid for not even being physically present at work or in the country. Imagine the numerous young people who were desperate for jobs to help bring a meal to the table for their struggling families who were disenfranchised from a basic right of employment but, yet, an individual was receiving a salary fit for a king because he was the Director of Parks. Imagine that! Hence, you are all directed to stay on the Opposition side, park there, and continue to be there for the next 50 years and over.

It is a hard pill to swallow, knowing how our hard-earned taxpayers’ money was embezzled in the most notorious manner by the former Government. This only leaves us to believe that the APNU/AFC is an enemy of promoting higher learning and youth development, and has no interest to see us excel, academically or as a country. As we recall on the 2015 campaign trail, the then APNU/AFC Opposition promised jobs for youths and a ‘good life’ for all Guyanese. Instead, when asked about the creation of jobs, Brigadier (Ret’d) Granger, the then President, urged youths and unemployed persons to go and sell plantain chips for a living. What a sad and unfortunate situation for the youths of Guyana to be sent to sell plantain chips and set aside their dreams and aspirations of becoming someone who could build our human resource workforce and make a contribution towards the development of our country.

I wish to inform my fellow Guyanese that gone are the days when our youths will be set aside and replaced by geriatrics, as we saw occurring in the previous Administration. The PPP/C Government has included young and vibrant persons on our side – just take a look and I am sure you will agree with that – young people who are filled with zest and vigour, and are ever ready to serve our people in every area.

Many of our young professionals, single mothers and even the elderly, do not have the privilege of owning a fixed place of abode. I am sure that the Colleagues on the other side can agree with me that it is simply because not one housing project was done under their watch while in Government. Today, I can say with all confidence that our President, His

Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali, will continue his work in the housing sector by providing 50,000 house lots within the next five years to all Guyanese, irrespective of race, gender or political affiliation. The Government has allocated \$3 billion to begin works and land preparation for a new housing scheme, land acquisition, and infrastructural development in the existing schemes, amongst other things.

I wish to recognise and commend the works and legacy of our senior citizens in this country for instilling values and being the backbone of our families. It is indeed unfortunate that, under the APNU/AFC Government, they were abandoned and left alone out in the cold to suffer after having their water and light subsidies snatched away from them. It is indeed tragic that a Government which claims to care for all Guyanese would commit such an injustice to our older folks. I am truly elated that this will no longer be tolerated under a PPP/C Government. Come January, 2021, the old age pension will be increased to \$25,000. Also, free water service will complement this increase.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, to continue with your elation you would need to get an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Smith: As we celebrate Amerindian Heritage Month, I wish to congratulate two new Members of the National Assembly: Mr. Lenox Shuman on his appointment as Deputy Speaker of this honorable House, and Ms. Sarah Browne as Parliamentary Secretary. May you both serve well.

In this light, I wish to express my disappointment and disgust with the total neglect and disrespect to our nation’s first people by the previous Administration. After taking Office in 2015, the APNU/AFC Government, in its quest to dismantle the plans and programmes of the PPP/C Government, *took bread out of the mouths* of over 20,000 Amerindian youths within the hinterland regions. Imagine you *took bread out of peoples’ mouths*. Today, I can say that I am beaming with pride because help is here, and the PPP/C Government will resuscitate the hinterland communities by allocating \$800 million for the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF), which will see the reintroduction of the Community Support Officers (CSOs) programme to aid in strengthening the

development of their individual interests and creating job opportunities for over 2,000 youths. Three hundred million dollars will be allocated to the ADF for investments in productive assets, including tractors, trailers and agricultural tools, and the implementation of a programme that will see 25,000 solar panel units being distributed to our hinterland regions. This is what a PPP/C Government stands for. We ensure that no one is left behind, and that every Guyanese gets *a piece of the pie*. We do not take away; we give back.

In conclusion, I wish to thank His Excellency, Dr. Irfaan Ali; our Prime Minister, Brigadier (Ret’d) Mark Phillips; Vice-President, Mr. Jagdeo; and the Hon. Minister of Public Works, Bishop Juan Edghill for listening to the cries of all Guyanese and answering with a Budget that is not only pro-poor-people, but it is a Budget with a plan of restoration and deliverance from an antediluvian and poverty-stricken state to a prosperous, pro-humanitarian and economically developed nation.

I, therefore, urge my Colleagues on the Opposition side to do some soul searching. *Come down from your high horses*, because it is time to snap out of the utopia that you have been trapped in for the past five years. Allow the scales to fall off your eyes and take a good look at our ‘plan for prosperity’. Then maybe, just maybe, you will learn how to take a different path from your acarpous nature and grasp the basic principles that require good leadership and good governance in service to a nation.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Rajkumar: Mr. Speaker, I would like to first offer my congratulations to you on your appointment as the Speaker of the National Assembly. I know that you will uphold the high principles associated with this noble Office. I wish to take this opportunity, too, to congratulate and welcome all of the new Members of Parliament from both sides of the divide, and to invite all Members of this honourable House to continue to work to provide the ‘good life’ for all Guyanese. I am honoured to be elected, once again, as a Member of the National Assembly and to be given an opportunity to once more represent the interest of all Guyanese and, more particularly, the citizens of Region 2.

The PPP/C Government has tabled a \$329.45 billion Budget for the year 2020, which was presented to this honourable House by the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, on 9th September, 2020. This emergency Budget, as it is referred to, which took 21 days to prepare, maybe because of the haste, lack of proper planning and foresight, has several shortfalls. It

is visionless, lacks clarity and is deceptive and discriminatory. Any attempt to describe it as pro-poor and people-centred is a gross misrepresentation of what is *Budget 2020*.

As I listened to the Budget speech, I got the impression that the Hon. Minister was attempting to impute that, for five years, the APNU/AFC Coalition Government did nothing for the people of Guyana. This is not true, and I need to set the record straight. From 2015 to 2020, this country, under the APNU/AFC Coalition Government, has seen economic and infrastructural development all across this region, as never seen before when compared to any similar period of our country’s history. Roads, schools, medical facilities and police stations were built or renovated; streetlights were placed along our roads; and there was free internet access for secondary school students and information technology hubs across the country so that our citizens can have access to education.

11.53 a.m.

We were accused of not giving our children the \$10,000 cash grant, but we must not forget that the APNU/AFC Government provided buses, boats and bicycles to assist with the transportation of our children. Our Government also provided hot meals for our children. These things are far better than the one-off \$10,000 that was given. The people appreciated what we did, and we are proud to have done it.

Region 2 has had its fair share of infrastructural development. To assist the rice farmers with drainage and to alleviate flooding in the region, the APNU/AFC Government installed pumps at Lima, Three Friends and Devonshire. We, in the region, are thankful to the APNU/AFC Coalition for the three new generating sets which were commissioned in April, 2019. There has been no more blackouts since then.

We are also grateful for the new primary and nursery schools and police stations; the streetlights along the Essequibo road; the upgrade of streets in our community and in our region; and most of all, our children are grateful for the National School Feeding Programme which provides hot meals to them at school.

We were unable to complete some of the projects in our region. The Supenaam Waterfront Enhancement Project as well as the bridge at Riverstown public road were not completed. We hope that these projects would not be left to languish simply because they are APNU/AFC projects. We expect the commencement of the construction of the Abram

Zuil Secondary School, sooner rather than later. We also eagerly await the construction and the commissioning of the multipurpose sport complex that was promised by this Government.

Our tourism sector, over the past five years, has been nurtured, developed and matured under the APNU/AFC Government into a major foreign exchange earner. In 2018, we received over 286,000 visitors. This contributed approximately \$62.6 billion directly into the Guyanese economy and, at the same time, created 22,000 jobs. In 2019, we received 314,000 visitors, which contributed significantly to our economy. Tourism was indeed on a trajectory. Guyana won six tourism international awards in 2019 and one in 2020. Guyana was placed on the tourism map of the world and destination Guyana was well established. This is an accomplishment of the APNU/AFC Coalition Government, a Government with a vision for the development of tourism.

The APNU/AFC Coalition Government had established the Regional Tourism Committee (RTC) and tourism working groups in all of the 10 administrative regions, with the aim of developing tourism destinations or hotspots in those regions. The COVID-19 disease has had a negative impact on the tourism industry all across the world, and Guyana is no different. The closure of airports and seaports, restrictions on internal travel and COVID-19 restrictions, generally, have virtually brought the issue to a halt. *Budget 2020* has nothing of substance to support this vulnerable sector.

The APNU/AFC Government had established the Tourism Recovery Action Committee (TRAC), an entity responsible for engaging stakeholders, with the view of articulating a tourism recovery strategy for this sector during the period of COVID-19. The tourism industry is private sector driven and all stakeholders should be given support and assistance to ensure the survival of this essential industry. In *Budget 2020*, apart from the removal of value-added tax on water, electricity and hinterland travel, which was done by the Coalition Government since April, there is little provision for the support of this sector, even though it was recognised by the drafters that this sector is the hardest hit in this time of COVID-19. Nothing at all was done.

The Government must be prepared to provide more tangible assistance in the form of financial relief, especially for those stakeholders who may have found it difficult to repay their loans and restart their businesses. It must have been an oversight for not considering the tourism sector and for the removal of the corporate tax enjoyed by the other

stakeholders in the private sector. The business sector also suffered tremendously as a result of the various COVID-19 lockdown measures. Those businesses that were deemed non-essential, small businesses and itinerant vendors suffered loss of earnings and empowerment capacity. These vulnerable business entities need Government’s continued guidance and support in these times of COVID-19.

During the period 2015 to 2019, the APNU/AFC Coalition Government, through the Ministry of Business, approved and issued 872 grants totalling \$255,000,820,000 and created 1,307 jobs, while 297 loan guarantees were approved totalling \$1,056,471,000 and created 394 jobs. This is an example of how governments stimulate economic growth and create jobs. In June of this year, the Ministry of Business distributed \$1.6 million in small business relief grants to small businesses, to assist them in their challenges with the COVID-19 crisis. This is how, again, the APNU/AFC supported and encouraged small business development. The allocation of \$100 million by the Government to small business development is appreciated. It must be used for the purpose intended and that is, supporting the development of small entrepreneurs and not as a guise to reward loyal supporters of the Government.

We were often accused of not providing a favourable environment for the private sector investment. From 2015 to 2019, the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) received 584 applications for projects, of which 280 were executed, bringing a total investment of \$281,982,000,000 resulting in 18,989 jobs being created.

The Hon. Minister, in his presentation, admitted that income levels remained below par. The current private and public sector minimum wage is inadequate to allow a reasonable standard of living, but the Minister gave no indication of how this Government intends to address this issue. The Government has missed a golden opportunity to provide an increase in the minimum wage of all our workers and ensure that we have a decent standard of living.

Our public servants are disappointed. For the past year, the APNU/AFC Government provided continuous increases in public servants’ salaries, which were usually retroactive and accompanied by an increase in the income tax threshold, providing more money in the pockets of our workers. Public servants’ minimum wage in 2015 was \$39,500 and, in three and a half years, the APNU/AFC Government brought it up to \$70,000. This is how a caring government operates. Today, we are told that the PPP/C Government has nothing to offer

the hardworking public servants, except a promise of a \$25,000 cash transfer to supplement the household income in these times of COVID-19. Are we to expect the \$25,000 cash grant as a monthly stipend for the duration of the COVID-19 period? If so, I thank the Government for this initiative in advance.

Our senior citizens are disappointed. They will not receive the \$40,000 monthly pension they were promised during the campaign. They are now being told that they will receive \$4,500 per month, not retroactive from 1st January, 2020, but *to add insult to injury*, they have to wait until 2021. Those less fortunate persons receiving public assistance were not considered under *Budget 2020*. No mercy is shown to the poor and underprivileged. Is this a demonstration of how the Government intends to treat the poor and unfortunate in the future?

Another disappointment to the people is the broken promise of the \$50,000 ‘Because We Care’ cash grant to our schoolchildren. [**Mr. McCoy:** We said in five years.] You did not say that in your campaign. We have another promise now of a \$15,000 cash grant, hopefully to be fulfilled in 2021. Would this cash grant be one-off like the last time? The Guyanese people must know how much this Government cares for our children.

The 2020 Budget, under the theme: *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting our People in COVID- 19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation; Enhancing Welfare*, even though it is an emergency Budget, falls far below expectation and needs revising. For those reasons, I cannot support *Budget 2020* for its passage in this House.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. This is a good time for us to take the suspension for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 12.05 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I understand that we have had some issues again with the meals. I have spoken with the Clerk of the National Assembly and I have suggested some remedial solutions. The Clerk is on his way with the body of his late brother for burial. Let us see, as soon as the funeral is over, if he will be in touch, and we will try to ensure that we can, at that time, expeditiously address the issue of the quality of the food.

For his maiden presentation to the National Assembly, I call on the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, Mr. Hugh Todd, to make his contribution.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation [Mr. Todd]: Mr. Speaker, I will firstly like to join my Hon. Colleagues in congratulating you on your new post, and I do wish you good health and God’s blessing.

Before going to the substance of my discussion, I would like to, firstly, put things into context. Mr. Speaker, I want you to understand that we are not dealing with our equals on the other side. We are dealing with a people who do not share the values that we, on this side, or the people of this country feel or view. They have been well fed by the State for five years, now they are in hibernation.

1.25 p.m.

They will be resting there and trying to create trouble in Guyana, and they will be unproductive in their efforts in trying to move this country forward. I want to make it clear that this is our point of departure. We are not dealing with people who believe in democracy, good governance, respect for the rule of law and human rights. We are dealing with a people who are very, very, destructive to Guyana. We have been doing all of the heavy lifting – post-independence into the era of globalisation – and we are still doing the heavy lifting. It is sad that we have to endure these types of hardships in the 21st Century Guyana.

Notwithstanding the challenges that we face from the other side, based on their unproductive efforts and the fact they are trying to make things hard and difficult and frustrating for us, we have a mandate to represent the people, and we will do that without fear or favour, to the best of our ability, to serve the people of Guyana.

The reason this noble House is so configured is because democracy was restored on 2nd August. That is why we are on this side of the House and that is why the APNU/AFC is on that side of the House; because democracy was restored on 2nd August in Guyana.

What is the record from the other side? They have no record to show – a broken record without any substance. I daresay that they have only had 60% of their time in Office as a legitimate Government. The other 40% they spent hanging on to power, disobeying the rule of law and trying to subvert the will of the people.

We have to understand what we are dealing with. We are not dealing with like-minded people. We are not dealing with people whom we can work with. We will have to guide them and ensure that we can win their supporters because come 2025, that side House will have very few seats. We will take Georgetown, we will take Linden, we will take Nabaclis, we will take Golden Grove and we will take Number Five as well. That is our mandate because we are representatives.

They are oil salesmen and women, gangsters in suits – fraudsters. They have no place in this history of this beautiful country. Let me go through their rap sheet. From the time they took Office in 2015, they began to militarise the State, trying their best to intimidate the good citizens of this country, and to drive fear into each of us. Because we had a responsible Opposition that understood the nature of that Party or the Coalition, we were able to represent the people, and that is why we can stand here today, speaking from this side of the House, in full support of the people of this country.

From the time the Coalition took Office, they went about trying to capture the State. The unilateral appointment of Mr. James Patterson was an attempt to control the Elections Commission (GECOM), and we saw what ensued following the collapse of the then Government. The transparency with respect to the \$18 million signing bonus was hidden from us, the people of Guyana. **[Ms. Teixeira: Inaudible.]** That is fine, I can deal with *pampy* and *lampy*.

There was the lack of accountability. Billions of dollars were unaccounted for; check the Auditor General’s report. Billions of dollars were unaccounted for and that is the nature of that side of the House. A big Government with the largest Cabinet in this hemisphere under that Government. A Government that was pregnant with nepotism and cronyism. Jobs were for their friends and their families occupying offices without any tasks, without any contracts, just occupying space and being paid. It was a sad affair and that is why I am trying to remind the House and the people of this country, that we are not dealing with our equals, we are not dealing with people who believe in development, who believe in democracy – not as a word that you put on a wall but in your actions.

As I continue, look at their actions, their extractive political and economic policies. Look at what they did to the sugar belt, putting ordinary Guyanese citizens on the breadline; unconscionable. Is that the way you treat the working class? Thankfully, on this side of the House, we have a political party in Government that is pro-working class and which

believes in development from the top-down to bottom-up, so that we can have balanced development.

All of what the Coalition did in five years created structured violence. They dismantled our institutions. The disparity became even worse between the haves and the have nots, which led to social ills, broken homes and the suicide rates went up. It was because of that side of the House; they were the ones who destroyed this country. That is why we have been given a mandate to restore this country to its beauty, to its vigour and the life that we enjoyed for 23 years.

It is sad to say that, during the time of the Coalition Government in Office, the people of this country were reduced to mere serfs. They took our rights and our liberties away from us. They took us back to 16th Century England; that is the nature of that Coalition Government. It is a shell that believes in political opportunism and that does not understand how to serve people. They believe that they are masters, they believe that they should decide on every action for the people of this country, so they removed the people from participation. We are the ones on this side who provided responsible leadership in and out of Office, and that is why we have been given a mandate to restore this country to its rightful place; that is why we are thankful to the people of Guyana that they have recognised that the APNU/AFC is no longer deserving of being in Office.

Consider the vision of the Coalition on the other side. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] You follow the drift; you are listening. Think about it, the Leader of the Opposition, in the House, at one time, exclaimed that one of the best projects undertaken and delivered to the people of Guyana was the D’Urban Park. He was excited about that. Now, compare that to the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown, which added value, created jobs and earned revenues. Ask the ordinary citizens of this country, who are desirous of jobs and opportunities to look after their wives and their husbands and their families, if they would want another Marriott or another D’Urban Park. Go and ask them. We are about progress. That is a small comparison because I am using two infrastructural projects, one that earns money for the people of this country and one that is basically a wood stock. That is the nature. That is why I am saying to you that, using that simple example, we can see the difference in the vision between this side of the House and that side of the House. They have not produced any infrastructural undertaking during their time in Office. Everything that they have done was a rollover from our Government. Every major project was a rollover, already hashed out and financed. What did they do? They squandered

the resources. Look at the airport; look what they did to it. They are no good. This is their record. Sitting on that side of the House and trying to play equals is not going to help you.

The first three years of the Coalition government was the hardship period. The taxes, Mr. President, meted out on the ordinary people of this country...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am very honoured that you are calling me Mr. President, but we are in the National Assembly.

Mr. Todd: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The second phase of the Opposition in Office, the remaining 40%, I call that the dark period. This was a period with the darkest days in the history of this country: the violation of the Constitution, the disrespect for the rule of law, the violation of the rights of individuals, the race politics, and the disrespect in regard to intergovernmental bodies, treaties and charters. Those are the outcomes from our Hon. Brothers and Sisters on that side of the House. What they have done in the last two years in Government was to dismantle our political, economic and social structures, bringing mayhem to bear on this country.

The APNU/AFC is characterised by ineffective national policies and strategies, culminating in failed national objectives. Point in case is the Green State Development Strategy – a shell. This led to a very weak foreign policy instrument, poor and ineffective international engagements and a withering of our international presence; thereby, no legacy to show. If one contrasts that with our developmental strategies, we already had three massive strategies that were workable and which helped move this country forward. The Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), the National Development Strategy (NDS) and the National Competitiveness Strategy (NCS) altogether helped to move this country forward from 2006 onwards.

We are here to present an emergency Budget because the APNU/AFC stole most of the year from us. But because we are competent, and because we understand the needs of the people, we were able to hash out an emergency Budget in less than four weeks.

Our Budget is \$1.7 billion and we have some key priority areas that we are working on. Let me remind the House that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lacked presence, lacked efficiency, lacked effectiveness, lacked competency and

lacked suitability in many of the areas, especially in our foreign missions.

1.40 p.m.

Our job, as the new Government, not new to governance, I might add, will restore vigour in the Ministry and put the Ministry back on the regional and world maps.

Firstly, we will focus on Guyana’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. If one could recall, the Granger-led Administration weakened the structures to the point that our sovereignty was fragile. We were exposed territorially because we lacked the capacity to negotiate, win, maintain friendships and partnerships within the region and beyond. We are in a position, now that democracy has been restored, to use the resources available to us to ensure that we put sovereignty and our territorial integrity back in its rightful place. This is so that we could ensure that we keep this country preserved, not for ourselves only but for those to come in the future.

Another area of priority is the strengthening of our multilateral diplomacy that was lacking for nearly three and a half years under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Coalition Government. All the Coalition did was take trips around the world on private jets for fun and photo opportunities. They came back to Guyana with nothing to say, except to say that they attended. Attendance does not help the people of Guyana. One would have had to come back to Guyana with workable solutions that will help to improve our national policies and national development.

The Group of 77 and China is a priority, even though we have limited time available because our chairmanship comes to an end at the end of the year. Nonetheless, we have a menu of measures that we will be presenting to the National Assembly to ensure that we are able to leave our presence in the international arena. We will be focusing on biodiversity and climate change, as well as relief measures following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The other areas that would be addressed between October and December would be the rebuilding and enhancing of Guyana’s bilateral, regional, hemispheric and international engagements. They have been broken. Most of our foreign partners and friends removed themselves from the Government, at that time, because of the political crisis. Many felt that the Government was deemed illegitimate and, as such, most of the diplomatic engagements and international co-operation were put on hold. Mr. Speaker, I

am proud to tell you that the line is long and the days are long, because the international community is queuing to reengage Guyana. This is because they see Guyana as a viable partner in our development of the region and the hemisphere as a whole.

We are also going to embark on aggressive policies and strategies to revitalise and deepen our diaspora engagements. One could recall, that under the APNU/AFC Government, they moved the Diaspora Engagement Unit to the Ministry of Citizenship, under Minister Felix, to politicise the diaspora engagement. What they did was a travesty to the people of Guyana. We could not have benefitted from the intellectual, financial and human resources out there in the diaspora, because they politicised it for their own selfish gains. We are going to normalise it. It is back with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation. We will engage our donor agencies and our partners overseas to ensure diaspora engagement is a key pillar in our development.

Let me remind the House that we have five years of engagement. We have a track record that has been proven to be successful. Our budgets are reflective, effective and apply to each sector and strata within society. We are preparing for massive growth and development. I would also add that I would urge my Hon. Brothers and Sisters on the other side to read our manifesto and engage themselves so that when they come to this House they can have objectives, be critical in thinking and be able to analyse. With that, together, we can help move Guyana forward. If one remains in ignorance and does not embrace democracy, with that state of mind, it would be difficult for us to lift this country forward. We cannot allow ourselves to be caught up in the selfish attitude and behaviour that ensued under the APNU/AFC. We have always stood firm by the people. We have always ensured that the resources are equitably distributed. We have always ensured that our budget is healthy and friendly. We believe in small government. We believe in ensuring the private sector is given the opportunity to make the gains necessary to move an economy forward.

Mr. Speaker, may I clarify for the people of this country? In this current dispensation, regionally and globally, the private sector is the engine of growth. I have to remind the Hon. Members on the other side that we have signed on to the Washington Consensus, accepting market principles, values and democracy – tied together. We are the ones who believe that foreign investment is good for your people and your country. We believe in pragmatic policies. We know that we can empower the private sector. We could have a small and

lean government. We can have a budget that still could work for the people. Unlike the other side, they do not believe in the private sector. The former Minister of Finance labelled the private sector as drug dealers and criminals.

That is insulting and it is shameful for the former Minister to say that, knowing that we have to depend on the private sector to advance our bilateral and regional engagements. Those are the companies that will have to provide jobs, create and innovate, not you. Members on the other side believe that they are all-wise and all-knowing, but they are not. We are mere representatives. We are here to craft policies so that we could ensure that the people could benefit through our good governance and good measures that we provide for our people.

I beg the Hon. Members, on the other side, to follow good leadership on this side. Get your acts together and understand that if you want to make Guyana a better place, you will have to shed those ‘old thinkings’ and understand that you have to embrace policies that are progressive. Members will have to embrace policies that are designed to ensure that people’s lives are better. At the end of the day, people must be able to say that they are better off today than they were yesterday, because of the policies and programmes of the Government. I give you this charge Hon. Members on the other side: if you want to work with us to move this country forward, ensure that you understand what democracy is, ensure that you understand what free market principles are and ensure that you understand which social policies should be implemented to help our citizens. On this side we have made massive achievements in healthcare and education. That was done through our strong/soft diplomacy in being able to build friendships and partnerships for the mutual benefit of both.

In closing, I want to say that this Budget, even as an emergency Budget, mirrors what we have produced over several decades that we have been in Office. We understand the people, we understand their needs and we know how to deliver on policies and programmes. Our track records have proven this.

If I go back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, I want to tell Members that we have already sat and came up with a long-term strategy. We have a strategy for the next five years that aligns itself with our manifesto. The fact that we have added not only foreign relations but international co-operation shows the direction in which we are going. We are going in a direction where we expect, through our policies and programmes, that we will

have massive growth and development in this country. When one looks at the policies and programmes coming out of the Ministry, it is aligned with our manifesto. If one is to look at the manifesto, Hon. Members on the other side, diversification and innovation will lead the movement of this country in the right direction.

I want to assure the Hon. Members on the other side that we, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, will be ensuring that we have the right policy instruments to engage our traditional partners, our regional partners and our extra-regional partners so that the people of Guyana could benefit at every level within the international fora. Multilateralism is important for us because at the Group of 77 and China, there is a good opportunity for us to show who we are as Guyanese and to explain to the world what we see as important to small states. I want the Hon. Members on the other side to understand that we understand our vulnerabilities, our shortcomings and we know how to position Guyana in the international environment using the resources that we have available to us because we are prudent, we are frugal and we understand government and governance.

Mr. Speaker, please accept my presentation and I beg of my Hon. Members on the other side to cooperate with us, not to create mischief, not to be destructive, but to let us work together in harmony so that we can move Guyana forward as a united nation.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Mr. Speaker, as I stand to offer my perspective on the so-called emergency Budget, it would be remiss of me not to join with my Colleagues in congratulating you on being appointed as the Speaker of this House. I wish you well and good health as you preside over the proceedings of this honourable House.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation seems not to be only the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, but he appears to be foreign to almost everything. He appears to be foreign to reality, he appears to be foreign to what is happening in Guyana and he appears to be foreign to Parliament.

I understand that it was his maiden speech, so I will go easy on him. [**Mr. Todd:** That is alright, I can take it.] Thank you. I strongly believe that a responsible Government, which claims to be the Government for all the people of Guyana, must present facts to the nation and should not mislead this

honourable House with fallacy. I say that because I was sitting here listening to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation and I began to feel that it was prior to 2015 that he was talking about – incompetence.

If my recollections are correct, I heard the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources say, yesterday, that there is no local content policy for the oil and gas sector and that they are now working on it. I can recall that a local content policy for the oil and gas sector was completed and launched in January of this year. A quick search on *Google* will confirm that the statement uttered by the Hon. Minister is untrue. Why tell the untruth when it can be easily disputed and proven incorrect?

If one had taken time to carefully examine the APNU/AFC’s manifesto and the past budget presentations, one would have clearly seen that the documents provided had a clear path for an inclusive, green, economic and social growth, a clear path to a ‘good life’ which focused on four pillars, namely: the digital state, the petroleum state, the green state and the educated state. [**Mr. Hamilton:** Is there still a ‘good life’?] For your information, Mr. Hamilton, I am standing here representing approximately 7,000 Guyanese. If you multiply 7,000 by 31 you might very well end up at 217,000 Guyanese, as was claimed, because my Friends over there are not too certain if they are illegal or legal, but time will tell.

If you notice and recognise, yes, a lot of short-term governance has taken place in Guyana. Mr. Donald Ramotar was the President for three years. One could say that the APNU/AFC has been here for five years. Dr. Ali might very well be there for a short term too.

We, in the APNU/AFC, led by Mr. David Arthur Granger, were always planning ahead. It was not only for five years, but we had a ‘decade of development’ plan.

Unfortunately, we were temporarily halted on 2nd August, as a result of fraudulent election processes and results. I will say ‘fraud is fraud’, according to my Friend, the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Anil Nandlall.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think you are now venturing into an area of unparliamentary language. The issue of fraudulent elections has been filed in court. Thank you very much.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be so guided.

I must, at this time, say to the people of Guyana that we, on this side of the House, will not tolerate or uphold anything

that will bring division and disunity amongst our people. I said that to say this, we, the Coalition family, believe in social cohesion. When anything happens to divide us as a people, we will not associate ourselves with such activities. Hence, the APNU/AFC stands firm and resolute against any form of discrimination or reckless governance, as one might say. We have already begun to experience the beginning of the dark days in less than 40 plus days under this new Administration. [**Mr. Hamilton:** Aw!] You are right to say ‘aw’.

Human safety is again a growing concern. Territorial integrity is once again a growing concern. Job security is once again a growing concern. We must take the safety of our populace very seriously, especially the lives of our youth. This is not because the other lives are not important; it is because all lives matter. The lives of our people must be protected regardless of their creed, race, colour, religion or political persuasion.

Our beautiful country has been plunged into a sad situation by the gruesome killing of the two Henry boys, Orlando Jonas and Haresh Singh. I lament with the families and friends of the three young men whose lives were taken, too soon, by evil ones. May their souls rest in peace. This will remain in the minds of our young people for a very long time. Already, many are asking whether there will there be justice for these boys.

We also take very seriously the security of our borders. Kaikan, Arau, Paruima, Eteringbang in the Cuyuni-Mazaruni region; Whitewater and Baramita in the Barima-Waini region; and the town of Lethem in the Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo region are frontier villages. These frontier villages deserve frontline treatment. They are not solitary outposts. These communities are integral to their national defence. They safeguard public health [*Inaudible*] communicable diseases... no borders and already we are experiencing a growth in the numbers affected by COVID-19.

If that toll continues to rise, where are the measures put in place in the so-called emergency Budget to counter the infiltration of this dreaded disease through our porous borders? How many Joint Services men have been deployed to these communities? Are they being misused to shoot pellets at peaceful protesters who are protesting for their human rights?

I am sure any right-thinking Guyanese would have been appalled by the number of policemen who were deployed to my Colleague, Mr. Christopher Jones’ home. Was there a

pandemic in Tucville? Whatever the reason was, there was no need to deploy 30 plus policemen to that location. I beg the Members on the Government’s side to get their acts together. Protect your people and do not drive fear into them.

The PPP small ‘c’, which may be spelt out as ‘Pressuring Poor People continuously,’ is now in the driving seat. Now, it is your opportunity to prove your worth as an inclusive Government, as you claim to be, for all the people of Guyana and not only to your supporters. Take pattern from the APNU/AFC.

I listened to the speakers talk about the measures and projects that are catered for in this Budget. Some of them made me chuckle. I say chuckle because I am happy to hear most of the projects initiated under the APNU/AFC Government will be continued. [**Mr. Hamilton:** Which projects?] For example, in the water sector and under other heads. Therefore, I am happy that the present Administration cannot claim them as their projects, because some of those were our projections in the ‘decade of development’ plan.

Let me now come to... [**Mr. Hamilton:** What are you looking for under the desk?] The Budget presentation. It was in the right place, under the desk. As I began perusing the *Budget 2020* speech, presented by the Minister of Public Works and not by the Minister of Finance, as is customary, it still *boggles my mind* as to why this is happening. Are they planning to appoint a *bring backee*, as my Friend Mr. Ramsaran said, or a *come backee* to this position? I am anxiously awaiting to see who the Minister of Finance will be.

2.10 p.m.

Reversal of value-added tax on Electricity and Water, page 74 of 85 – as I read that paragraph, I am still looking to see how exactly the pensioners – who are the guardians, some of them or most of them keepers of our rainforest which is the beauty of Guyana – standing to benefit from the reversal of VAT on electricity and water. I am speaking about pensioners in Chinowieng, Kaikan, Philippi, Sebai, Konashen, Itabac, Kubaburu, just to name a few of our Indigenous communities. How exactly will they benefit from the reversal of VAT? They have never benefitted from the previous VAT exemption and they will never benefit from this present VAT exemption on electricity and water.

One may ask the question, why? It is because many of our pensioners in the Indigenous communities still rely on the water from the rivers, creeks and springs to do their cooking,

washing and bathing. It, therefore, means that this measure has absolutely no meaning to my grandparents living in those communities. They will never benefit from this measure as long as electricity and metered water is not made accessible to them. The Government has a task to correct its figures. Perhaps, what I can suggest to this honourable House and to my Friends over there is that they be given an allowance to their pension. That will put more money into their pockets.

Another measure that I wish to elaborate on is the measure that is mentioned on page 75 of 85 at paragraph 6.6. I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, it is crucial, now more than ever, for Government to stimulate the economy. I am pleased to announce that our engagements with the local banking sector have been fruitful, and Government will be granting corporate tax relief for the banks for low income loans, which allow low-income households to borrow up to an additional \$2 million at a lower interest rate.”

What alternative measures are in place for the Indigenous brothers and sisters, who are living in their communities, to access loans when they have no collateral to get a bank loan? Moreso, the Government is referring to low-income households. What about the no income households since many of the households in the hinterland have no source of income? We all know that is a fact. Again, I wish to reiterate, take pattern from the APNU/AFC Coalition, who, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), delivered completed three bedroom houses to 25 households in Sebai, 21 households in the Upper Mazaruni, Region 7, and many more in other hinterland regions under the Hinterland Sustainable Housing Programme.

When I was tasked with the oversight of this project in the then Ministry of Communities, I quickly asked what were the criteria used for selection and how only Regions 1 and 9 were benefitting, as though it was only meant for certain people living in certain areas? I was told that it was too expensive to execute the project in Regions 7 and 8. However, I am proud to say, today, that, under the APNU/AFC we made it happen. I implore on the Hon. Ministers, Mr. Croal and Ms. Rodrigues, to continue the project and expand it to the people of the Potaro-Siparuni region. They too deserve homes of their own.

Prior to 2015, there seemed to be no increase in the purchasing power of the populace, which is pivotal to the quality of a good life for the individuals and families. Recognising this, the Coalition Government went ahead andd

increased the minimum wage from \$39,570 to \$64,200 for the first three years in Government and, presently, it is at \$70,000. For 23 years, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic was dragging its feet on the nation’s progress and if one does a comparative analysis, one would clearly see that we had begun working assiduously towards reversing poverty to prosperity.

On that note, I crave your indulgence in allowing me to highlight some of the progress made as we strove to improve the welfare of our hinterland residents. How could one say too little or nothing was done to improve the lives of our Indigenous brothers, when the APNU/AFC made humongous efforts in providing more than 20 communities with potable water in the Rupununi? If one would like to know where: Ruperti, Shulinab, Aishalton, Urumaru, Hiaowa, Tiger Pond, Silver City, Simoni, Aranaputa, just to name a few, and Chinowieng in the Upper Mazaruni. These communities now have persons who have access to potable water, some of them with pipes heading into their homes. Now, many of our pensioners are happy, appreciative and grateful because they can now bathe in their homes.

I must remind the Hon. Members on the other side of the House that the APNU/AFC is an inclusive Government. Whether a person is affiliated with us or not, we will provide for them and we have done that happily. There was so much done for our hinterland brothers and sisters within a short period of time for which they are very much grateful. We, in the APNU/AFC Government, through the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GL&SC) distributed land leases to residents of Kwakwani, Kildonan Noorden in Region 6, 36 of them for the first time. Residents of Port Kaituma and Matthews’s Ridge were also recipients. It was also under this Administration that the first ever Diploma in Land Administration was launched in partnership with the University of Guyana (UG) where 20 persons from the Commission and others from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission and Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA) were offered to do the course. It was also under this Administration that a Regional Disaster Management Centre was established in the town of Lethem. In fact, it is now 95% completed. It just needs electricity and water. Is that not development? What will they call that? We have improved the capacity of our people at the community and regional levels, so that they can better deal with whatever disaster comes into their community.

If I am to continue, one would have heard from my Colleague, former Minister of Public Telecommunications

Ms. Hughes, that more than 70 information and communications technology (ICT) hubs were established in our Indigenous communities and several primary schools are now connected. Of course, there is always a challenge and there is always room for improvement. I would like to assure the nation that we had started and we expect nothing less than for the PPP/C Government to continue, complete and ensure that all of our schools in the Indigenous communities are connected and receive equitable and equal education as anyone else around the country.

In conclusion, I wish to quote from the former competent Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan:

“Budget measures are Private Sector oriented, rather than for the People.”

I wish to offer suggestions and recommendations to this honourable House. I am asking the Government, as I said before, they are in the driving seat, to be an inclusive Government for the people of Guyana. Serve the people in humility, love and serve your country, our beautiful country, Guyana, with dignity and integrity.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

2.25 p.m.

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member.

Hon. Members, can we take a 10-minute suspension at this time? We will be back in 10 minutes.

Sitting suspended at 2.25 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.47 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry for that interruption. We had a prolonged period of power outage. However, our technical staff at the Parliament Office had planned for this a week ago, and we have just relocated closer to an uninterrupted power supply that should allow us to carry on these proceedings.

I would now like to call on the Hon. Member, Minister of Amerindian Affairs, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai to make her presentation.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I begin my contribution to the debate on the national *Budget 2020*, may I add my congratulations to the Deputy Speaker, one of the very first Amerindians to attain such a

position. I want to wish him the very best in this position. I also wish to add to the compliments for the work that the Ministry of Finance, including all those who contributed, in ensuring that in a record time *Budget 2020* is before this House.

Our ‘plan for prosperity’ is a strong signal, which expresses the commitment of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government in ensuring that Guyana is once more a prosperous nation. This is attainable. I say so because the track record of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, over the period that it served this nation, has provided enough evidence that we are capable of ensuring that Guyana gets back on track. I say so because when we were not in Government, I recall, on two occasions, for example, in 1992, we found Guyana’s treasury empty. Without haste, within a decade, there was a serious turnaround in all sectors, and since then Guyana became a very progressive country. In fact, even in 2013, I recall, when many countries were facing economic and financial crisis, Guyana’s *head was above water*.

Therefore, I wish to posit, as we are back in Office after five years – it was a disastrous five years where our economic and social structures and even our people were decimated – that I can commit to this nation that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic will once more ensure that our people are taken out of such distress. We see it is happening already. Even before we could have placed a budget in this House, the hope of the Guyanese people had begun to rise, even in the businesses. I have had discussions with small businesses and only recently, about a week ago, I had discussions with Amerindian youths, and they themselves told me that they are expecting and are hopeful with what they have seen in such a short time. They are now optimistic that the opportunities coming their way are going to be realised. Those Amerindian youths also gave me some guidance with respect to what they expect of this Government and how they intend to proceed in partnership with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and the Government. That was very heartening and a very important message coming from the young people because we have seen how the youths were ignored in the last five years. I, myself, not very young, but energetic still, have seen the disappointment in the youths. When one looked at the leadership level in the Parliament in the last five years, it was only on our side, and I always pointed out to the Member of Parliament from Linden, that he is the only standing youth for that period. The youths were disappointed. Their entire five years was turned over in no time.

I want to answer the call of the former Minister, the Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams, who called for inclusiveness, and for this Government not to practise discrimination. I want to assure the Hon. Member that the PPP/C Government is the one that built social cohesion in this country. It was the People’s Progressive Party/Civic that ensured that harmony lasted for a while until the APNU/AFC took over in 2015. I want to remind the Hon. Member that it was in 2018 that the entire country began to slide because they showed their true colours after the no confidence motion was passed. They were expected as a responsible Government, as a Government that cared for this nation or should have cared for this nation, to do the right thing. What did we see? We saw the disrespect that was paid to our Constitution. We saw the disrespect to and the disregard for the rule of law. Therefore, I say to the Hon. Member that memories are something that live within us for a long time and that it has only been a few years but it seems as though they have forgotten what they themselves were party to when they were in Government. Following in the footsteps of the APNU/AFC Coalition Government is not what we want for this country. It is not what I want for the young people of this country. It is not what I want for women of this country. It is not what I want for the Amerindians in this country.

If a Government can be so resolute to disregard law and order, it sends a strong message to this nation that it does not care about the people. It was because of the act and position that was taken that Guyana began to slide even further. It took international support to force the Government to recognise its wrongdoings.

The Hon. Member also indicated that the PPP/C’s Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation was foreign to many things in this country and that he was foreign to everything that was happening around. I want to posit that whether or not he is ‘in’, the PPP/C party, which now sits in Government, made a very correct choice in the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation. We now have him because we would not have gone in a similar fashion to follow what the APNU/AFC did. It was a total embarrassment to Guyana when the outgoing Minister of Foreign Affairs insulted the international community. They ensured that small developing countries – our Caribbean members from CARICOM – looked on with big disappointment as they considered and whispered about where Guyana was going. In fact, at one point in time, they forgot that they were whispering and they came out with very bold statements against the atrocities that were being

committed on the people of this country with respect to law and order and democracy.

I have a long list of responses, but I want to skip out from responding to them and if I have time, in my last five minutes, I will get back to the responses.

The Budget was crafted in a very serious situation, that of the Coronavirus disease. Here, again, I wish to say to this honourable House that COVID-19 arrived in this country early February/March. From March to August, there was nothing that the APNU/AFC did to contain this virus. In fact, they even had the hardest time soliciting US\$5 million from the World Bank and, yet, they can sit on that side and accuse us of spiking the rates. I want to remind them on the other side, that the former Minister of Public Health held testing kits in her personal space and screened everyone who was suspected of having COVID-19. Until she gave the permission for a test, the Guyanese nation was held at bay.

The PPP/C Government was able to negotiate funding and donations for testing kits and materials to help to stem the transmission, but we are still being accused of not having done anything. I agree that it appears as though the rates are rising, but as my Colleagues before have already said, the rates are increasing because we have been doing the testing.

3.02 p.m.

I am told that there are approximately 200 tests being done daily now. How many did the APNU/AFC do when COVID-19 was discovered? In fact, they did not even have enough testing kits to test themselves. They said that the kits arrived all over the place, trying to justify that it was not an issue, but it was an issue because now we are discovering the extent of the infection in this nation. As a PPP/C Government, we have a responsibility not only to contain transmission, but to support and provide relief to all the families and villages that are affected and we have begun to do that.

Prior to the PPP/C taking Office in August, there were calls for support, but none was forthcoming. In fact, there were 1,000 or a little bit more than 1,000 hampers provided to the affected families. That was one of the biggest criticisms. Even when we, the PPP/C, were not sitting in the driving seat – as the Hon. Member said – we were out there in the fields addressing the families that were suffering. We began the ‘Mask Up’ campaign, when a Government, that was claiming to be very astute and efficient, could not even provide masks to the city. It was not done but, now, it is expected to be done in record time. Well, I will tell you that, while we were in

Opposition, we were masking this nation up. Now that we are in Government, we will further ‘mask up’ and ensure that we care for our people.

I want to also say that our Budget is replete with our commitments to the people. The commitments that we have made are very present. They are evident in the Budget. Therefore, this is a different approach than the APNU/AFC’s approach. If I could recall, in the first 100 days in Office, they did not even accomplish those commitments or promises made. And in the fifth year, they still did not accomplish what they said they would have done. In fact, they criticised the manifesto which we have, but I want to remind them that they did not take a manifesto to the people during the elections; their manifesto remains a blank document.

I will not compare the PPP/C neither would I nor our leaders wish to take guidance or follow what the APNU/AFC has done. I could tell you that all the projects which they are claiming credit for were projects initiated by the PPP/C Government, including the securing and committing of funds for those projects. And now, I could tell them that many of the projects that they took over, which were in progress, took them five years to even reach a 50-70% completion, and that could be reeled out on my hands. The East Coast road – a PPP/C project – which took them five years, is still not completed. The airport – another PPP/C project – moneys were committed, and it has not been rolled out. The West Demerara road – a PPP/C project – moneys were committed and still there are complaints about the road. The failure to complete ongoing projects where there was no need to source financing, which would have taken away some of the time and given as an excuse... There is no excuse for not completing those projects.

Today, looking at the Indigenous development, I want to posit here that the Amerindian Act of 2006 does not limit Amerindians/Indigenous, to say what they want to call themselves. They could call themselves Amerindians or Indigenous; they could call themselves first people; they could call themselves aboriginals or even by the nation from which they came. That is what must be known because it seems as though there is fight over terminology, instead of representing the people and fighting to eradicate the challenges faced by Amerindians, or as you would want to say Indigenous. I have no problem with that. They are used interchangeably. Do not make a petty matter a national matter.

I want to respond to this matter of youth development, Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) and Community Support Officers (CSOs) because it has become very convoluted to the Hon. Members on the other side. I heard all manner of criticisms about the CSOs, that they were political young people running around with red shirts. In the past, I heard that it was a red brigade. In the past, I heard that it was the Hon. Minister who selected those youths. I heard that those youths were providing services that were not comparable to others. I want to sort this matter out once and for all. I would like to say that I have seen former Ministers waving a piece of paper and saying that it was the PPP/C that dismissed the CSOs. I also heard the Hon. Member of Parliament from Region 9 say that it was the PPP/C that cancelled the cheque. If you cannot understand, if you cannot read and if you do not do your research, you will be hooked by the nose and pulled down into the mud. I want to say this to the National Assembly today, to this honourable House, when we left Office in March 2015, in fact, it was the Permanent Secretary and I who received a message that we should not turn up to the office because they had set upon us security forces with guns. That was the message we received; we were not to enter. I know that when you are no longer in Government, you cannot go into your office, but you could go to the Ministry to make representation on behalf of the constituency which you represent but the message was clear.

When we left Office, there was a Cabinet decision that was passed on 18th March, which clearly outlined that January to April salaries for the CSOs were approved. The process was that every quarter payments were prepared and made. Then the new Government took over. The new Government, under a new Minister, had no sympathy for the Amerindian youths. Imagine, they took no concern over the CSOs. They allowed them to work from March to June and refused to pay them. It was in June and I now have the records and I could wave it because I have the Cabinet document. I have the internal memorandum from the officers, who wrote on 27th May, asking the Hon. Minister to pay the CSOs, and the attached Cabinet decision which was approved for them to be paid.

Today, I want to tell this House that, in May, the PPP/C was not sitting in the seat of power. In May, the then Government was in power, so that Government should have paid them. I can see the signatures of two officers: one is sitting in here and the other one was sent home because he happened to not be of the liking to the new Government. Therefore, I would like to, once and for all, say that we were not sitting there, and that the cheque was never prepared by the then Government. The blame for the non-preparation of the

cheque should squarely be placed on the APNU/AFC. In fact, they did not only owe them for April, but they allowed the young people to work until June and disconnected them without three months of payment.

I want to say to this national House that *Budget 2020* is going to provide for the reinstatement of the CSOs. In the initial phase of this programme, in the remaining quarter of the year, we will ensure that a minimum of 40 communities get on board. Realistically, this is what could be accomplished. The Budget therefore provides in excess of \$68.4 million to allow for this to happen. This means that \$68.4 million will be circulating in the pockets and in the villages that so badly need an injection of cash.

School uniform assistance – if a Government can take away support for school uniform assistance from students, then it is a Government that has proven that it is anti-students or that it is against supporting students. Every year, for the last five years, the APNU/AFC Government received a budget of \$89.4 million for school uniforms.

3.17 p.m.

This should be investigated because I have asked the office to provide me with the numbers, so that I would be able to, clearly, represent how the APNU/AFC cheated the children of the hinterland. In 2017, \$89.4 million was budgeted. Do you know how much the APNU/AFC Government was able to expend? It expended \$39 million. Imagine, it could not even procure, get an early award or distribute uniforms in the year that they were provided with a provision to do so. Is that efficiency? Is that doing the right thing? I say, no; it is total failure. It is a total failure to just buy and procure uniforms, follow the correct process, and still cannot get it done within the year.

In 2018, they had gotten the same amount, and guess how much they were able to expend? They only used \$14.92 million. They did not spend out everything. You would not like me to expose you; \$14.92 million was spent. In 2019, the same amount was received. Do you know how much was spent? It was \$3.789 million. A Government and a Ministry with two Ministers who claimed to love Amerindians, who claimed to want to support their development, who claimed to want to ensure that they benefitted from the natural and financial resources, and everything from this country, and there you were sitting on your chairs and not even worrying whether the children were being provided with school uniforms.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have spent all of your time. You will need an extension to continue and conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have heard a lot about information and communications technology (ICT). I want to say that the Budget provides for us to reinstate the correct concept to this programme. We want to ensure and assure this House that the PPP/C Government is going to bring the real programme to this country and to the Indigenous or Amerindian people of this land.

Currently, we are in a pandemic. Many of the lofty facts or untruths that we heard in this House about ICT is not working. My Colleague has a lot of issues with trying to get teaching materials to the hinterland through the internet using the Wireless Fidelity (WiFi) that they had put in which is not working. In fact, some villages cannot even use it because they do not have computers and smart phones. Only when visitors pass by with those types of equipment is the WiFi used. I do not know what the thinking was when this was reinvented as a different concept to what it was supposed to be.

In the Budget, we will be providing additional support to ensure that the hubs that were supposed to facilitate the equipment – the computers, *et cetera* – be furnished and refurbished. Many of them have been abandoned and used for different purposes, so we have to prepare them.

Farmers – Indigenous and Amerindian farmers have had the worst treatment in a long time. The APNU/AFC Government had stopped providing agricultural support to farmers in the hinterland. In fact, there is no more free fastac, acoushi ant baits and tools. Therefore, the Budget intends to ensure that there is full support for the farmers in the hinterland, so that they would be able to stem any disaster in the long-term as it relates to food security. They will be able, in the long-term, to ensure that their food security is guaranteed.

With respect to Presidential Grants in this Budget, we have provided \$280 million, which is an increase. The APNU/AFC

Government took five years, stopped there five years, and never one day thought that it should increase the grant fund for the villages. In this Budget, we intend to provide an increase, so that further circulation of investment fund is injected into the village economy.

I have heard a lot about land titling, but I want to report to this House that it was a disaster under the last Government – a disaster so much so that the former Minister, when he was pressured into answering why there was a pause or nothing happening, reported or admitted that within the five years, he was unable to even title one piece of land to the Amerindians. It is a shame.

HEYS – they always seem to want to justify HEYS as being a success, but when I got into that office what happened? I asked for an update on HEYS and I was told that the first cohort for HEYS had a 70% failure. The second cohort, which is the second phase, but they are calling it a cohort, had only a little bit over 50% success realised. I rest my case as it relates to HEYS. They have been unable to support youths as it relates to training.

In terms of my responses, I said that I will keep some of them for last in case I run out of time. I want to say that the low-income housing project, which they have asked us to continue, the way it was presented was as though it was an APNU/AFC’s initiative. The housing project began under the PPP/C Government. We intend to continue it when new and fresh negotiations take place.

With respect to the land management courses, again, it is not a novel initiative. Land management was done in collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI). Do you know when you go into office and you want to disregard the successes of someone, institution or a Government, you turn your back or eyes away from what had been occurring previously? That is exactly what was just said in this House, that this novel idea of land management all started under the APNU/AFC; it did not.

With respect to the Green State Development Strategy, this has never been a document that was...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am afraid that you will have to wind down.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: In fact, there is nothing such as a Green State Development Strategy. What we have seen in the past five years is the greening of buildings. Everywhere you

go, the Green State Development Strategy’s money has been used to ‘green’ buildings.

I thank you and I ask that this Budget be provided with the full support of this House. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members, I was supposed to have made a little statement before the previous speaker. I did hear quite a bit of comments when the Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams, was speaking, and a lot of the language and the comments could be classified as unparliamentary. Once again, I make the plea to all of you to keep it at a high level and ensure we respect each other.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Speaker, allow me to express congratulations to you on being elected the 12th Speaker of this honourable House. I thank you and I hope that you will be fair and impartial in all your rulings. I have every belief that it can only be done in all fairness.

Hon. Members, I am honoured and consider it a great opportunity to be elected a freshman Member of this Parliament of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. I also want to congratulate my Colleagues, on this side of the House, who have taken up this bold step. I also wish to express best wishes to Ms. Sarah Browne, who is my sister-in-law. Ms. Browne, in this House we represent the interest of Guyanese people, more especially the people of the Barima-Waini region. At home, we are a family; here we must fight and fight we will do. Thank you.

Again, before I commence my presentation on *Budget 2020*, on behalf of the grouping of the APNU/AFC Coalition from the Barima-Waini region, I wish to thank all our hardworking public servants, including the ordinary men and women who worked tremendously, despite the many challenges posed by the PPP/C-controlled Regional Democratic Council (RDC) of the Barima-Waini region. Despite the unsupportive and callous behaviour of the regional officials, the Barima-Waini region has witnessed major transformational development under the previous Administration. I wish to say, but cannot, that this Budget represents a continuation of such great hinterland development.

The Hon. Members of the other side – the Government’s side – are always quick to comment that Indigenous people’s development became a reality under the PPP/C Government and that they love poor people. Well, I believe that after being there for 23 long years, there was no other choice but to start

the development. The question is: was the development enough in 23 years? The developments done in Amerindians communities over the last five years could be equivalent to that 23 years in its Government. It is paramount and an indication of greater focus on hinterland development by the APNU/AFC Administration. Moreover, the decentralisation of many social services is a testimony of a better life for all Guyanese. For example: the establishment of a regional office for the Guyana Revenue Authority in Mabaruma, a central commanding centre for the Guyana Police Force, the construction of a first ever fire station, an environmentally friendly park, a spanking new concrete bridge in Moruka, an upgraded airstrip and the completion of the district hospital at Port Kaituma and the completion of the road from Wauna Hill to Yarakita are just a few highlights of the APNU/AFC Administration.

Education delivery – although stated in the Government of Guyana’s education policy is the provision of Indigenous children with the same educational opportunities offered to students all across Guyana, especially on the coastland, as the rest of the population, this access, I must say, is not equitably distributed.

3.32 *p.m.*

I wish to remind the Hon. Minister of Education that education cannot be equally distributed. It must be equitably distributed because you are putting us in the hinterland communities at a disadvantage. So, in your policy decision-making, ensure that you consider that. Thank you.

The Amerindian communities – Government’s initiatives to provide hot meals, uniforms, free transportation to school for rural students existed only in theory until the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change Administration took Office in 2015 and made it a reality. It has been indicated that, oftentimes, the infrastructure to fulfil these initiatives and disburse the aid, as well as information of the opportunities available, do not even reach many hinterland communities. I wish to beg the Hon. Minister of Education...We demand an equitable, again, I repeat, we demand an equitable distribution of education across Guyana.

A few questions must be considered when implementing projects: What are the implementation details of your project? Are there any mechanisms to ensure that students benefit from such project?

I want to touch a little on the \$15,000 cash grant proposed. When the \$10,000 cash grant was distributed just before the

elections in 2015, I think it was, it could only be considered as a political stratagem. It is and it was a political contrivance just to gain attraction, an attraction it was, but it did not serve them well in 2015. Again, when that money was distributed, one wondered whether it was heritage time. This is because the parents, after collecting the money, were drunk in Kumaka at the Market Centre and I believe that not one book, pen or pencil was purchased with that money for the students. That is my question. What are your mechanisms to ensure that the students benefit? I am not saying that it is a bad project; I am saying rethink your mechanism.

When I was sitting at the General Council of the Guyana Teachers’ Union (GTU), the then Minister and now returning Minister of Education would attend our meetings. When we deliberated for an increase in teachers’ salaries, her comments were, “If you do not like the job, leave the job”. That was very disrespectful to the educated people of this nation who deserve every bit of increase in their salaries. Suppose we had taken your advice and walked out of the teaching profession. Who would you have put there to teach the nation’s children?

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic has made exorbitant and luxurious promises to our Indigenous brothers and sisters. I want to remind my fellow Indigenous brothers and sisters that we must hold the Government responsible and demand what was promised to us. Where is the \$50,000 cash grant that you promised? The Budget is just a stratagem which is designed to attract attention. Another example, the Santa Rosa Secondary School in Moruka has students who travel for miles to get to school. For example: from Karaburi – six miles; from Wallaba – 10 miles; and from Kamwatta – seven miles. These students spend \$2,500 per week to get to school. Moreover, from my interaction with teachers, more than 50% of these students do not have lunch on a daily basis. Therefore, the establishment of a feeding programme or an expansion of the allocation for the dormitory kitchen to cater for these students would have been, by far, a greater initiative of this Government, rather than a \$15,000 one-time cash grant. I call on the Government of Guyana to implement strategies that will ensure that children stay in school.

Over the last five years, Guyana has risen to its rightful place as the best performing country at the Caribbean Secondary Examination Council (CSEC). For that, I must congratulate the Hon. Member, Dr. Henry.

Health Services – most Indigenous communities rely on creeks and shallow home-dug ponds for their water supply. Communities close to mining areas, largely bauxite and gold,

are in danger of their water being contaminated. Many do not have access to safe, potable water. There are many cases of respiratory infections, water-borne diseases and skin rashes in all hinterland areas, arguably due to resource extraction industry activities. I call on the relevant, responsible Ministers to think of their strategies to better the life of our Indigenous brothers and sisters, rather than focusing only on the rich who goes there to exploit our lands.

I call on the Government to continue to upgrade what the APNU/AFC Government has left in Region 1, especially Mabaruma. Upgrade the Mabaruma Regional Hospital so that you will decrease the high rate of emergency medivac to Georgetown. This upgrade, initiated by the APNU/AFC Government, must continue and any caring Government that has all desires for a ‘good life’ for all, will continue any good project, and so, you must continue.

Additionally, the people of Imbotero, that is where I am from, the only community closest to the Venezuelan border...I am sure if you ask where Imbotero is located.. Are you aware? Do you know where it is? Hardly has anyone visited that community. For too long they have been asking for a health centre. They have to travel 20 miles by canoe, paddling to Mabaruma, to get to a hospital. I call on the Minister of Health to ensure that these people’s wishes become a reality.

Agriculture – I want to also tell the Hon. Members of the Government that I have heard their comments. You must understand that Region 1 had a 28% increase in votes for the Coalition Government, the greatest increase in all the regions, so that speaks for itself. If you do not look carefully at the people of Region 1 and Region 9, which had a 26% increase, you will be losing those two hinterland regions. You may not lose it now, but in time to come, you will.

The APNU/AFC gave titles to Indigenous people for lands totalling 3,000 square miles or 3.5% of Guyana’s total land space, while the PPP/C in 23 years, under five presidents, gave 2,800 square miles, which is equivalent to 3.4% of Guyana’s land. What is the comparison?

Between 2016 and 2019, the APNU/AFC also issued grants for Indigenous communities across Guyana in the sum of \$935 million, while the PPP/C, in their stay in 23 years, was just above that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you speak about more grants, the Assembly has to give you a grant of time to continue and conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you may continue to the conclusion in five minutes.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Public Works – Information and Communications Technology has always been an integral part of APNU/AFC’s vast initiative for the development of hinterland communities. Every Government building and office were equipped with WiFi, connecting the once lost world under the PPP/C. It was only three weeks ago, when the Regional Democratic Council was able to virtually present its budget proposal to the Director of Budgets. I want to remind the RDC of the Barima-Waini region that such initiative must be applauded and continued. It is sad that *Budget 2020* lacks technological vision, especially in hinterland communities such as those in the Barima-Waini region. Sadly, it is in a time when a pandemic has forced the world to go virtual. WiFi must and should be installed at all schools across Region 1.

For decades, the people of Moruka begged the PPP/C Government for a new bridge. It was only realised a few years ago. The previous Administration has lifted the bar for hinterland development and now it is a competition for this new PPP/C Government. The PPP/C is well known for its substandard work done across hinterland regions because of the lack of supervision over such projects, which they had to return to from time to time. For example, in Mabaruma, the dirt roads... I want to pause a bit to give an example. The then Minister, the Hon. Mr. Benn, he is not here today, on one of his visits to Mabaruma, was examining the road. This is the road. It was slush, real slush. I was there and the Hon. Minister, while walking, fell. I hope that he remembers that clearly. Under the APNU/AFC Government, this is the photo. This is Kumaka. This one is Port Kaituma – students travelling to the Port Kaituma Secondary School. This was the Port Kaituma road. This is Port Kaituma road now. This was the smoothest road Region 1 had, the Barabina road. It was the smoothest road because it was water. This is now the Barabina road. [*Hon. Member displayed photographs*] If I have to show enough evidence, it will not permit me enough time.

In closing, I want to call on my Friend, the Hon. Pauline Sukhai, now Minister of Amerindian Affairs. Minister, to please urgently, implement a national consultation on this

issue of Amerindian versus Indigenous. It must not only be your one-man decision. Let the people speak. This is a democratic society and this national consultation will determine the solution to this issue.

I wish to close by saying:

“When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle.”

3.47 p.m.

We have to stand firm and associate ourselves against anyone who does not have the interest of Indigenous people’s development at heart.

I want to call on my good Friend, Mr. Collin Croal. during one of his visits recentlyn – only last month...The people of Koriako called last night to say that, three weeks later, they are still without water. You had promised that by the next Thursday, you would have had it fixed. I just want to ensure that I pass this message on to you. They said that the PPP/C has always said that they are committed, but if you take three weeks to be committed for a two-day project, then that is not nice. I will advise you to stick to your commitment the next time.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are certain words that are unparliamentary and we are hearing words like ‘shut up’ being expressed or shouted out in the Dome. Please, again, let us keep our behaviour in the Dome very exemplary. The Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks...

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Speaker, before you move on to the Hon. Member, I know that I am allowed to clarify and make corrections from the floor. Out of respect for the ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, it has to be a Point of Order.

Ms. Manickchand: Out of respect for the Member’s maiden speech, I did not rise while he was speaking. It is my entitlement and I am asking, kindly, that I be allowed to make a correction from the floor.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, on a Point of Order, it has to be something particular to what he said or a Standing Order.

Ms. Manickchand: It is very particular to what he said.

Mr. Speaker: It is not a Point of Correction or Elucidation. You can pass that note to ...

Ms. Manickchand: It is a Point of Elucidation.

Mr. Speaker: We do not take that as a Point of Order where we have to give...

Ms. Manickchand: I am not making a Point of Order; I am asking for a Point of Elucidation that I did not want to make while he was speaking.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am saying that I am not allowing it. Hon. Member Ms. Pearson-Fredericks, you may proceed.

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2020*, first of all, I wish to say thanks to God Almighty, the Great Spirit, for giving me this opportunity, health, and strength to be here in this honourable House. I also wish to say thanks to the Guyanese people, who put their support with the People’s Progressive Party/Civic to ensure that we are in Government once more, so that we can bring our ‘plan for prosperity’ – real prosperity.

I wish to take this opportunity, also, to say congratulations to you on your ascension to Office as the Speaker of the House. May God give you the courage, health, strength and patience to execute your duty in a very good way. I also wish to say congratulations to the Hon. Lenox O’Dell Shuman, who had the courage to accept the position of Deputy Speaker. Congratulations, my son. In our indigenous language, I say: “*Wa chie na chie LoKono Locouchie*,” meaning, “God bless you, preserve you and keep you, my Arawak son”. May God keep you and give you the courage to stand as a great Chief, as our ancestors who have walked before us.

History was created in this House on 1st September. Amerindians throughout the length and breadth of Guyana felt proud and happy when they learned that Mr. Shuman, the Hon. Member, is now the Deputy Speaker. It is for the first time in the history of our country that an Amerindian son will stand in this House, proudly, as Deputy Speaker. However, Colleagues and Comrades, the Hon. Members on the other side of the House did not see it fit. Words like it is an abomination came from Hon. Members across the House, publicly on social media, which is an insult to the Amerindian peoples of this country. Yet, Hon. Members are standing here now and pretending that they love us so much, when it is an abomination for an Amerindian person to be the Deputy

Speaker of this honourable House. I must say that we cannot change history, but we will continue to make changes. This change happened under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic because we supported him so that he can be our Deputy Speaker.

History – 10th September, 1957, the late Stephen Campbell took the Oath of Office. That is why we are celebrating Amerindian Heritage Month. Today, we are all proud of him. We are still proud of his legacy. Talking about legacy, yes, he left a legacy that we are all proud of.

That being said, we talk about unity, love and all of these things but, as Amerindians, after 2nd March, we have faced many derogative words and things that were thrown on us. And so, while the Hon. Member on the other side of the House is calling for unity, I am also saying, yes, we must have unity. Yes, call on your supporters to give us due respect in this House, on the street, and throughout Guyana. We are the first peoples of this country, and, therefore, it must not be said, ‘break down the bridges, go back to your bush’ and all sort of things that I would not like to say in this House.

Let me move on to *Budget 2020*. Sitting here in the past two days, I have heard so many things and so many words describing *Budget 2020*. *Budget 2020* is being brought to this honourable House – our ‘plan for prosperity’. *Budget 2020* has been described by the other side of the House as a “Budget to hoodwink the nation,” “Backward budget,” and the new word that I heard yesterday, from the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, “*Fraud-get*”. I want to know, is it a new word? I am trying to look for where I can find the meaning of that word. We have heard all sorts of things about this Budget, but I wish to say that *Budget 2020* is an emergency Budget. *Budget 2020* should have been in this House before now, if everything had gone well. If Members on the other side of the House, or let me say, if the APNU/AFC had respected the ‘rule of law’, we would have been here before. We would have been here before and presented maybe a better budget.

I also wish to remind the Hon. Members on the other side of the House that the APNU/AFC spent more than half of *Budget 2020* [**Ms. McDonald:** Do not shout so much.] I would like you to hear because I think some people do not have good hearing. You spent more than half of the Budget, and so, now you are calling the Budget all sorts of things, but you, unauthorised and illegal, spent the money and here we are now. We have to perform miracles to meet all of the demands that are now being made. This is *Budget 2020*, we are in September and we have just a few more months. Hon.

Members, I would just like you to look out for budget 2021. That will not be an emergency budget and I do hope that, in that budget, you will not have the opportunity to spend or short-change us on this side of the House.

Let me go to the budget presentation. I would like to say what was said. I would like to say thanks to the Hon. Bishop Edghill, to the team from the Ministry of Finance, to the former President Mr. Jagdeo – Champion of the Earth and to all those who worked diligently in the preparation of *Budget 2020* – an emergency budget, a budget from which the APNU/AFC has already spent half of the money. I would also like to say that our plans for prosperity will move forward under the leadership of His Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali, and Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips. We will move forward, also, with our team sitting on this side of the House.

I would like to focus more on the section that deals with Amerindians. This is because that is what we are here for. I have listened to the young Member who presented a little before me. Yes, he made some very good points, but I wish to remind him that things like the School Feeding Programme – that was their hot meals – was there before. As a government, if you meet something, you are supposed to build on it, extend it further. We will not forget about it; we will try to do better; and we will do better.

4.02 p.m.

You spoke about education – equitable sharing of education. Let me remind this honourable House, and I am happy that we have a young doctor sitting among us, Dr. Tandika Smith, that we have many more across this country who benefitted from educational programmes and scholarships under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. It will continue, so do not be afraid. We will do better because that is our aim. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic is a Government for everyone and the Amerindian people is a very important part of this population. I want to say that is why we are sitting on this side of the House. My Colleague, we are here, and I appreciate you raising those things.

I would like to say to you, Sir, that the road networks did not start under APNU/AFC, it started a long time under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic – all these things. I am not saying that the road was the best under the PPP/C, but it started. You know many of these things. I am talking about pictures. I can bring pictures too because I want to say to the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, the sand road at Lima that is touted as so good, you must go and see it. [Ms. McDonald: Where is the evidence?] I did not know I was in court or I

would have brought my evidence. [Mr. Sears: The entire road was done by the APNU/AFC.] That is not correct, Sir. [Mr. Sears: It is correct.] It is not correct. Anyway, let me continue. Hon. Member Mr. Cox do not be afraid, we will continue because this is what we are all about. We are a Government that is caring for not only Amerindians but for all Guyanese.

Budget 2020, I have heard so many things that have not happened. As I said before, we cannot perform miracles now; no. What has happened? We heard the Hon. Minister speak about the Community Support Officers. We all know what happened. We all know who carried the story and how they wanted it. I would like to say that, the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service project, which replaced the CSOs, was a total failure. In October, 2019, I sat right here in this very building, in this Dome, and I listened to the presentation of the then Minister, Ms. Valerie Garrido-Lowe, who is unfortunately not here. What did she say? She quoted figures for over \$4 billion that was spent on the project. She quoted how many persons were trained. What disturbed me the most, was how many successful small businesses were established under that project. The then Minister said that there were 2,054 successful small businesses under the HEYS project. I travelled the length and breadth of Guyana, every region...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for us to travel along with you in this speech, you will have to get an extension to continue.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, you may continue to the conclusion.

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: Mr. Speaker. I am saying that I have not been able to identify 54 successful small businesses under the HEYS project, including in Region 9, where I asked questions.

Secondly, I would like to turn my attention to land, which is addressed in *Budget 2020*. When we demitted Office, the sum of US\$10.7 million was left there. On 31st May, 2018, the then Hon. Minister, Mr. Allicock, admitted to the media that he was unable to title even one village. Yet, I have heard, in this very House that we must take a page out of Mr. Allicock’s book. Hon. Members, I do not think I want a page

or any of us should take a page out of Mr. Allicock’s book. First of all, let it be known Hon. Member Mr. Henry, that Mr. Allicock sat in this Parliament and he had no voting rights. So, he can say that he did not vote for that. He failed. I want to remind the Hon. Member from Region 2, who made mentioned on the first day about the 2015 APNU/AFC manifesto and I also want someone to bring to the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry’s, attention that they have failed to deliver from their manifesto.

Sir, page 32 speaks about the Indigenous peoples. Under the guidance of Mr. Allicock and Ms. Garrido-Lowe, they have failed to deliver and, yet, we are hearing that we must take a page out of their book. No way, we do not want and we will not take a page out of their book. Under *Budget 2020*, yes, land demarcation and land titling are back, and we will deliver. [**Mr. Sears:** Talk about how you delivered for Mainstay.] Yes, we delivered for Mainstay. I must not say that I am thankful. The work for Mainstay was already done and the work for many villages was completed. I would like to ask what stopped, hindered or held back the hands of the APNU/AFC Government from delivering.

Let me say, Mathematics is a problem. In September, 2019, a publication stated that eight villages would receive their titles soon. As I read that article and I numbered the villages, I only came up with seven villages which were listed, but the headline stated eight villages. I would like to ask now, could any Hon. Member on the other side of the House tell me how many titles were handed out at the last National Toshias’ Conference (NTC)? For those titles, we did the work, and, to my knowledge, it was not five villages but eight were published, seven named, but five were handed out. This is what we are dealing with. We did the work and it was just to hand it out. It took five years and still you could not deliver all that we left.

I would like to say that I have heard several times, in various presentations, from Hon. Members, on that side of the House, that this is a ‘private sector’ budget. May I remind the Hon. Members that the private sector employs people. So, if the private sector does not provide employment and why I am saying this, particularly, is because this budget caters for: forestry, mining, agriculture, reduction of value-added tax and the removal of VAT. [**Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] Yes, I must say it because the Amerindian peoples are involved in mining, forestry and agriculture. We will not only benefit from the cash grant and from other things that are mentioned here, like land titling and education, but we will also benefit from employment from the private sector. Let me say, even

some of us Amerindians have our own mining operations. We will benefit. So, what is wrong with this Budget?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have to wind down.

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: I would like to say in response, the APNU/AFC failed so they got an ‘F’ and that is why they are sitting on that side of the House.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, just before we take the suspension, I just want to make two observations. The first one is with respect to Points of Elucidation. Let us be careful and look at the Standing Orders.

Sitting suspended at 4.14 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.14 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Could we now have the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings?

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaker of this august Assembly, Hon. Members and observers, a very good afternoon to you all. I take this opportunity to join with my fellow Colleagues in congratulating you to the Office of the Speaker of the National Assembly during this Twelfth Parliament and I do wish you well in your tenure in Office. Similar sentiments to the Deputy Speaker, Mr. Shuman, in this Amerindian Heritage Month.

5.14 p.m.

I rise, today, to register my dismay and disappointment at *Budget 2020*. While budgets are often filled with complicated constructs that give some difficulty to the average reader and follower, this Budget made it easy for the masses to debunk the pseudo-economic theories put forward by the presenter of this Budget, who strove very resolutely to follow in the footsteps of the previous Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan. But the Hon. Member fell short and was unable to skillfully or proficiently articulate and deliberate on matters of immediate interest to the beloved citizens of Guyana, let alone indicate to the Guyanese people the Government’s long-term vision for development for all the people of Guyana.

This Budget is full of numbers, but they do not align with the urgent needs of our people. There is hot air blowing everywhere, suggesting that the Budget presenter is out of touch with Guyanese. The Budget is, indeed, defective, deceptive and discriminatory. It has eroded the fresh

approach to the ‘good life’ in a ‘green economy’ that the alternative Government in-waiting commenced in 2015.

This Budget is abominable because it leaks and shakes. It shakes out every concern for the wellbeing of the poor and leaks our funds for education, health and housing. This Budget, when stripped of the verbiage, shows that nothing new has been proffered – there are no transformational projects.

Most of us are familiar with what occurred following the death of Lazarus during *Bible* times. He was resurrected. We know that story. There was Jairus’ daughter. These were people who were sick or died and were resurrected, resuscitated and so forth. We are familiar with that but, certainly, we are unfamiliar with the resurrection of projects such as the Amaila Falls and some of the non-profitable sugar estates. In addition, many of the projects announced by the Budget presenter cannot be completed in the next two and a half months left for this year, 2020, and, therefore, should not have been budgeted for in the first place. In short, Mr. Speaker, I am indicating to you that *Budget 2020* lacks vision, is devoid of interest, lacks clarity and has no strategic approaches to guide and make this nation a prosperous one and Guyana great again.

There is no clear road map to create jobs, achieve macroeconomic stability and to free up resources to alleviate poverty. This doctored 2020 Budget has shown that the financial dial has been returned to reckless spending with little or no accountability.

Page 38, paragraph 4.60 notes:

“...the APNU/AFC Coalition Government’s neglect of some of the most basic public health programmes...”

Really! Is that true? I must say thanks to Ms. Volda Ann Lawrence, the former Minister of Public Health, because the now Minister of Health, the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony, has a good pitch and wicket on which to bat. I know that there is still much work to be done in the public health sector, as is reflected in the Malaria, Tuberculosis and Human Immunodeficiency Virus Programmes, which are on target to reach their goals. On that note, we wish to observe that Guyana is on the precipice of being declared Filaria free and the last round is scheduled to begin in October through November, 2020. Please, Hon. Member, do not take Guyana backward. A good wicket, yes, and a good pitch, as the Ministry of Health is the recipient of a new 10-year Health

Vision 2020 – 2030 programme to effectively address health inequalities and the social determinants of health, as well as a new strategy to address the HIV situation.

We would like to see the continued, timely screening for cervical and colonic cancers and for other non-communicable diseases. With the successful passage of that important Tobacco Control Bill, during the APNU/AFC Coalition’s tenure, we implore the Minister of Health to ensure the establishment of a tobacco council to help enforce the relevant laws.

On our taking the reign of office in 2015, we inherited a suicide rate of 34.7 per 100,000, but by 2017, the rate was 24.63 per 100,000; by 2018, the rate fell even more – 18.88 per 100,000. Thus, the evidence shows that the APNU/AFC Coalition Government utilised the correct approach to lessen the suicide rate and, thus, moved Guyana from being the country with the highest suicide rate per capita. Of course, if you go to Quamina Street, you will see our new Mental Health Department.

In the same breath, I am saying that valiant efforts must be made to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number three – the health and wellbeing of the Guyanese populace. The three main pillars for optimal health, namely, universal access to public health coverage, universal primary health care and preventative health, must be realised. I must hurry on to say that appropriate lifestyles must be encouraged to promote good health and prevent diseases. The reckless road and workplace accidents that have a huge social and economic impact and incur much costs to the Guyanese people must be discouraged. The hardworking families in Guyana can ill afford a reduction in human productivity and financial insecurities, but, certainly, would want the ‘good life’, as was championed by the former President of Guyana, Brigadier (Ret’d) David Arthur Granger.

On page 57, paragraph 4.107, this Government boasts of partnership with the Eye Care Guyana organisation, which continues to provide much needed glasses to the Guyana populace, and accounted for the increase in the complement of about 13 new Optometrists who entered the healthcare system within the last year.

In this *Budget 2020*, there is no increase of funding to the Eye Care Guyana project which was brought under the Ministry of Public Health’s Programme on Disabilities after the funding was exhausted in 2019. There is also a decrease in funding to both the National Commission on Disability and the Ptolemy Reid Rehabilitation Centre.

Page 77 of 85 at paragraph 6.13 states:

“Government is removing the corporate tax on private health care as well as VAT on medical supplies.”

However, in the same vein, valiant efforts must be made by the Ministry of Health to police the drug supply chain to ensure efficacy of the medical drugs and supplies, while, simultaneously, seeking to avert the presence of fake drugs on our market.

The health of this nation has always been at the forefront of the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. We were able to establish health units for men and the elderly. There was the completion of the Kingston bond while the Diamond bond was upgraded. There was the construction of living quarters for health professionals at Kamarang and Lethem. There was the completion of the Port Kaituma Hospital District Hospital, just to name a few.

As much as I have outlined some major developments in health during the APNU/AFC Coalition’s tenure, please permit me to turn my attention to the Coronavirus disease pandemic. In such an unprecedented time, health advocates and specialists have recognised that there is a conflict between utilitarianism and libertarianism, a struggle involving the imposition of mandated social distancing to protect public health, while promoting impassioned efforts to diminish constraints in the interests of individual liberty and economic renewal. It is a time, also, when healthcare policymakers should focus on ethical issues such as health privacy.

On identifying the index case of suspicion for the COVID-19 in March of this year, 2020, the APNU/AFC organised, galvanised and mobilised all sectors of the Government to provide ministerial action plans, containment measures, micro and macro interventions and recommendations, along with exit strategies as to how to mitigate the effects and impact of the Coronavirus. There was mandatory virtual office functionality during the lockdown period.

The National COVID-19 Task Force (NCTF) quickly came into full gear by the former Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Veerasammy Nagamootoo. Weekly meetings were held to coordinate efficient and effective containment measures, identify gaps and offer tangible solutions to the imminent crisis. The intense training provided jointly between the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Ministry of Public Health was very useful in building the capacity of health professionals and practitioners and allowed for the

efficient and effective management of the health sector in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Center for Disease Prevention and Control, the first of its kind in the Caribbean, was built in record time to allow for the quarantine and isolation of susceptible and vulnerable individuals, at home and abroad, who did not have access to such facilities in a private setting.

The APNU/AFC Coalition Government managed the COVID-19 crisis in a timely, methodical, strategic and structured way. One would have thought that good sense would have prevailed, and that the new Government would have endorsed this initiative with open arms and build on the foundation that was already laid by the previous Government.

5.29 p.m.

The former President, Brigadier (Ret’d) David Granger, had recognised the dilemma and said:

“The trans-national public health challenges have become frequent and fatal and, with the increase of globalization, there has been an increased incidence and violence of communicable diseases.”

We know if it is not Zika virus, it is the Chikungunya virus or some other thing. So, the infectious disease unit is a welcomed idea and we should really work together as a team – T E A M – together everyone achieves more. We are all Guyanese and we can work together to P U S H – push until something happens.

The COVID-19 cases stand, as of yesterday, at a whopping 1,958, with 598 active cases, 74 new cases, 58 deaths and 1,302 recoveries. The Minister of Health claims that he has a plan. Yet, the APNU/AFC is saying that the Minister of Health is solely responsible for the steep rise in cases seen – an increase of 438% in cases and an increase of 280% in deaths. We will reinforce the point that the buck stops squarely at the feet of the Hon. Minister. Guyana has a case fatality of 3%, which is almost similar to the United States of America (USA) – and one knows what their population is when compared to ours which is just three quarters of a million – and a positivity rate of 17%. By the way, the case fatality really tells the degree of severity, whereas the positivity rate tells of the prevalence of the existing disease. The positivity rate should really be about 5%, and ours is 17%. The Guyanese people would want to see the epidemiological curve flattened and plateaued soonest, even

in light of the claim that more testing of symptomatic patients is being done.

There needs to be an aggressive campaign by the Ministry of Health to ensure that there is contact tracing for the Coronavirus in all 10 administrative regions. There must be a more strategic and targeted approach to address this immediate concern of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the constant rise in cases of COVID-19, the Government may find it difficult to streamline public health, to downsize teenaged pregnancy and may even find it challenging to reduce mother-to-child transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Does the Mental Health Department have adequate finance and is there a leap of faith shown so as to cope with the unintended pregnancies due to the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic?

During this COVID-19 pandemic, there must be a coordinated response, as health continues to be decentralised. There must be the stepping up of testing, tracking and treatment of COVID-19 patients in the 10 administrative regions. The regional bonds must be stocked with the requisite resources, personal protective equipment (PPE) and gear and the standard test kits. Of course, the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is the standard test that the World Health Organization (WHO) has signed on to and has approved. We know that should be made available. Sensitivity and specificity of those tests are very high.

It is noted on page 40, paragraph 4.66 that a mere \$17 million is placed in *Budget 2020* to commence the construction of a cold storage bond in Region 6 to ensure that vaccines supplied to that area do not lose their potency. What is a mere \$17 million? There must be a paradigm shift in the way things are done in the country as it relates to health, as a nation, because the health of the nation is really the wealth of the nation. Public healthcare must be repurposed for COVID-19. Hence, the Government must forge ahead with the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) hospital initiative, which includes the retrofitting of health structures to make them more resilient and linking structural and operational safety with green interventions.

Advocates of the core programmes at the Ministry of Health must spare no effort to have childhood vaccination programmes and health services for cancer screening, family planning, non-COVID infectious diseases not halted, interrupted or neglected. I quote from Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, World Health Organization’s Director-General:

“As we prepare for vaccines for maybe this deadly disease, immunization is one of the most powerful and fundamental disease prevention tools in the history of public health... Disruption to immunization programmes from the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to unwind decades of progress against vaccine-preventable diseases like measles. We cannot afford any misstep to occur even as we wait the rollout of a possible vaccine, lest the people distrust us and reject acceptance of any vaccine programme and potentially undercut all the excellent science and expense that preceded it.”

As I conclude, the Guyanese people look forward to a caring and compassionate Government. The APNU/AFC Coalition Government recommends that there be health systems strengthening to provide vital information, resources, empathy and support to the most vulnerable population. We further recommend to the Government the need to work on electronic streamlining, capturing and managing of data on patients and contacts.

Having said all of that, this Budget fails to address the needs of the Guyanese people. This Budget needs to be returned to sender. It is well known that the Budget came from an illegitimate Government that stole the elections from the APNU/AFC and has nothing of value and substance to offer. We will have to press the delete button. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add to your list of congratulations this afternoon and, also, congratulate the Deputy Speaker, Mr. Lenox Shuman, Hon. Member. I would also like to extend good wishes and congratulations to all the Members of Parliament (MPs), who are here today to debate a Budget that offers much to all of Guyana.

When we are here in the National Assembly, it is serious business. When we are here in the National Assembly, our voices do not only reverberate in this Chamber, but it goes out to everyone who is listening. They are listening and when you trivialise major occurrences in their lives, when you dismiss the harrowing period of five months, when the people had to cope with the pandemic and its repercussions, cope with the economic hardship because of mismanagement and incompetence, to say to people that you did it, you fixed it and you addressed their concerns, is nothing short of ludicrous. I stayed away from saying reprehensible.

The last Hon. Member said that the Budget is filled with numbers. I know that Mathematics is not the strong point of those Members. I know you do not like numbers, but a budget must have numbers. What else would it be, if not filled with numbers? The point is that they are good numbers and these numbers have been allocated to various critical and key areas of this country.

I would like to, at this point, say thank you to the staff of all of the Ministries who worked assiduously and dedicatedly, especially to my Colleague, Minister Bishop Edghill, and those who worked to give us a Budget in record time. A budget is an important thing because it guides the trajectory of what we want to achieve. It details to all the country what vision the Government has. I stand here and I say, very humbly and sincerely, there is vision. People are impatient; people have high expectations of this Government. In fact, I am impatient. I understand their impatience because what they would like to see is a reversal of the misfortunes that dogged them for five long years and to see the return to this country of all of the prosperous opportunities that all Guyanese enjoyed.

When we stand here as Parliamentarians or we take our seats, it is a privilege; it is not an entitlement. To stand and deliver, one must be honest enough to tell the facts as they are and to offer the truth. This is important to every Parliamentarian sitting here, and if we fail to honour the oath that we have taken in this early time in Parliament, then *I shudder to think* of what the population can expect.

Today, we are right in the middle of the debate and I think, like much of the country, there is an expectation out there that there must be maturity, there must be political will and there must be a desire to support any initiative that would benefit people. There are many initiatives in this *Budget 2020*. Why is it an emergency Budget? It is because you contributed to it being an emergency Budget. It is simple. I listened very intently to all of the presentations and I was looking for constructive recommendations to any Member of this side so that we could act on them and we could say, let us discuss it further. That is what a budget debate is about.

I want to say here, too, that I have an ‘open door’ policy to all of Guyana and my doors are open to any one of you. This is the Guyana that we should build, not be counter-productive and counter to developments and initiatives that would benefit all of this country.

I want to say, today, to all those of you who are here, if we move away from what the people of this country expect of us,

then we would have failed them before we even started. To bring acrimony, rancor, divisiveness and irresponsible statements to this hallowed House, this august Assembly, does you a disservice. It does your constituency a disservice. The question that you should be asking yourselves is: what can we bring to the table to move our constituencies upward and to elevate their lives? That is what I would have loved to hear today and every day. I did not hear it.

The Coronavirus disease is real, and much was said about how we deal with COVID-19. It is not only COVID-19. Many things have been raised about what we should be doing, how it should be done and what we did not do. We just got here. It is not even 100 days.

5.44 p.m.

You were there for five years. So, from all of these things, you have clearly told us today what your inadequacies are. You have shown us where the gaps are. You have told us, clearly, that you have failed the people of Guyana. Thank you. They do not need reminding; they live it every day.

Do you know what bothered me when I got to the Ministry? Like many of my Colleagues on this side of the House, we walked this country, we packed hampers, we shared hampers – thousands of them – and we understood that people in this country were suffering. People in this country did not have food. People of this country could not feed their children. When I got into the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, it was emphasised to me more because women come and all they are asking for is food for their children. Do you know what they say? They say, “I do not usually beg but I am forced to beg now.”

Every time that they say that, I say to myself, never again will we allow people to threaten the fabric of democracy, attempt to rig an election and remove the dignity of our women folk and our families when plainly there has been an exposure of the poverty people are experiencing. For anyone to deny this reality, they are not being true to themselves and when we are not true to ourselves, we have lost the essence of what we are here for.

Service to humanity is a privilege. This Ministry of Human Services and Social Security is geared towards offering service to the most vulnerable in our country.

The Budget, as it stands now, allots various sums to major programmes within the Ministry, including childcare, social

service – which attracts the largest percentage of the budget – and also administrative costs. What did I go there and find?

Every Minister stood, and rightly so, to tell you what they inherited. It is important that people understand what we went in and met, where we are starting from and from what we have to extrapolate ourselves. It was nothing but an abyss, a mess or whatever you want to call it.

I have to take my hat off, though I am not wearing one, figuratively, to the staff of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security because they did much with very little.

The childcare programme and many of the other programmes were virtually starved of technical resources. People were brought into the Ministry, yes, but at the lower levels. Technical expertise was desperately needed: childcare psychologists, social workers with specialist degrees to deal with PTSD; and, for my Colleague on the other side, PTSD is post-traumatic stress disorder. Those are badly needed in this Ministry.

What is planned is reorganisation and restructuring of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and I am not doing it on my own whims and fancy.

Let me tell you, here, Hon. Members, that studies were done in conjunction with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and those studies sat on a shelf. Do you know what those studies dealt with? They dealt with social protection and expenditure, social safety net reforms, poverty assessment and strengthening of institutions and organisations. Nothing was acted upon. That is going to change; we will act on them and things will start happening.

In fact, I have already met with the heads of my programmes within the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and they had a number of programmes that were just waiting for approval in order for them to be brought to the people of this country, to alleviate their suffering and hardships and to tackle critical, serious issues like domestic violence and gender-based violence.

I want to say that, very soon, before the end of this quarter, a survivor’s advocacy programme will be rolled out in regions across this country, where women will have the support that they need, from the moment of reporting to the conclusion of their cases. People will be trained to offer that technical support. This is dealing directly with a serious issue in our country, that has escalated because of COVID-9.

In addition to that, partnering with the United Nations and the European Union, on the ground-breaking Spotlight Initiative, will bring over US\$4.5 million to this country to tackle violence that affects women and girls. Imagine that was waiting and not dealt with because persons were too busy holding this country to ransom. This will be launched by next month. That is how urgently we need this in this country. You talk about emergency and I have just said two things.

In addition to that, there will be \$150 million dedicated to frontline workers. Within the Ministry, \$22 million is designated for essential workers to provide childcare services. I feel this is necessary. We have a lot of our working force, women and men – primarily women – who have to leave their children unattended. This will be offered to both public and private sector workers for children below the age of seven, but I am hearing that this Budget has nothing.

I go further to say that there are many other ground-breaking programmes that target the most vulnerable, the disadvantaged, the underprivileged and people who are differently-abled.

Even though we say Human Services and Social Security, this Ministry has become aligned with women. Would you believe that nothing was done at the Guyana Women’s Leadership Institute? This year, before the end of the last quarter, two programmes will be rolled out that will benefit at least 200 women. What are we doing for women? While we are dealing with their immediate needs of providing food for them and their children and feminine and dignity care packages, we are also ensuring that these women have an opportunity to be part of the working world and to be financially independent. This is looking at women holistically.

This is taking people off the bread line. This is ensuring that, if they need to get out of a potentially violent home, they have the opportunity to do that. **[An Hon. Member: Inaudible.]** This is a House in which heckling is allowed but on serious issues like this, which deal with vulnerabilities, I am shocked that Members will treat it in such a cavalier manner.

Mr. Speaker and Members of this House, we need to ensure that these initiatives are supported. Why am I saying that? It is because it is not only going to benefit this side of the House or that side of the House. These are going to benefit all of Guyana. What a difference from what was in the Ministry when a programme called Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) – and everybody

knows about this – was moved from the Ministry of Communities to the Ministry of Social Protection. With a signature, people got large sums of money, without even having to apply. I leave it right there.

I believe in systems-based governance, and the Ministry will move in that direction, not ministerial discretion and *ad hocism*. No. There will be systems where people can have equal access and opportunity; systems where the red tape that frustrates people will be removed; systems where people have direct access to me, by the provision of a virtual desk, so they can interface with me and all of the key staff members, as well as to come and let us know what is going on.

I appeal to the members of the public to ensure that they work in tandem with the Ministry and all the officers so that we know what is happening on the ground and we can deal with it if there are issues with alacrity and effectivity.

Our childcare programme continues to offer much needed services to the children of this country. The head of that programme, Ms. Greene, has spent many of her years at the helm of that and she has offered guidance in this area.

I was happy to go to the Children and Family Centre to engage with the children, but more than that, there is building on all of this; expansion of our child advocacy centres, so that there is a one-stop shop, where children in extremely difficult circumstances can have their needs dealt with. This is because of partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that offer us the opportunity to spread our wings and to get into regions.

This Ministry is extensive and, in addition to childcare advocacy programmes, we will be looking at the month of children, where we will be hosting a virtual children’s rally, so that we can continue to engage with our children even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Training did not happen in any major way in the last year. Why is that so? We have virtual platforms. Why were these not used? Those are things that will happen in this last quarter of the year; there will be training of the staff, retraining, if necessary, and scholarships. I will ask my Colleague, Minister Sonia Parag, that scholarships be provided for people, so that we can fill all of those technical vacancies that exist there. It is needed.

In addition to that, there are institutions that have been badly neglected. I was appalled when I went to the Night Shelter

and saw the conditions that the indigent and homeless have to deal with.

There will be new programmes to refurnish, renovate and give that place a lift, so that when people go there, they can be treated like people. We do not remove people’s dignity because they cannot afford or they are impoverished. I believe that dignity is something that should never be stripped from anyone. As I stand here, I am happy to say that there has been an expression of interest from a very exceptional, service-oriented group to partner with this Ministry and together we will change the Night Shelter. It is looking at the indigent, the poor and the homeless; giving them another chance at life, not just packing them up in shelters, but training them, getting them back into the working world.

Looking at the differently abled, I met with the Deaf Association of Guyana (DAG). They said no one had bothered with them for a lot of years. I am bothering with them now. These are the things that we need to accept that the previous Government did not do. They is going to be done. So, I say to you, instead of being disparaging in your remarks, instead of treating this Budget as if it has nothing to offer, work with us and let us make people’s lives better.

I have always believed that when people take the low road, one should take the high road. This is what I am asking that we do.

No one and no community should be oppressed and suppressed. This is where this Government will work tirelessly to ensure that all people have equal opportunity and access to everything within our power to provide. [**Mr. Duncan:** Stop firing them.] I have not fired a soul. Come and check. I believe in honesty, integrity and transparency. Once people demonstrate those qualities and have excellent work ethic, why should I fire them? They should not have a problem with those things, and they must turn up to work. You cannot want to be paid and not work.

Do you know why I am going to raise this point? I have heard a lot about discrimination today and I looked at the Deputy Speaker. He is a part of the Opposition and he gets no support from the Opposition. So, sometimes charity needs to happen from within before one talks about discrimination.

5.59 p.m.

It is necessary for us to demonstrate to this country that all of the people in this country matter. The shenanigans that people have had to endure in the last five months, they should never

had have to endure in this country, in my beloved Guyana – never. The pain, the hurt and the hardships, do you know where I saw them? I saw them at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. People have suffered psychologically. This country has become fragmented because of what went on there. Instead of spewing spurious and irresponsible statements, be responsible Parliamentarians and represent your constituencies fairly and objectively.

I do not want to see the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security create a dependency syndrome where people are only waiting for handouts. All of the ‘good books’ advocate that we should teach, we should train and we should empower people so that they can help themselves. It does not matter which book one reads.

Pension and the delivery of pension is important. We are in a peculiar situation where we are reminded to socially distance, take all the preventative measures and we are going one step further that would lead to many other phases. We are delivering to 3,400 pensioners their pensions directly to their homes. It has never been done. We are encouraging pensioners to utilise the banks. We are coming up with alternative venues, so that pensioners do not have to trek far distances to get their pension and, in the hinterland, we will be partnering with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development to have mobile units take pensions closer to where people live. If this is not progress and if this is not vision, then tell me what is?

We are looking at young people. Young people are pivotal. *Talk is cheap* and will always be cheap, if not followed by targeted action. The targeted action will be looking at those vulnerable young people, many of them who display disruptive behaviour. We are going to be expanding our family enhancement programmes in the various regions, which would be accessible to anyone who would like the service and where our trained counsellors would work with disruptive youth and their families to ensure that they are engaged, reformed and that they are able to make positive contributions to the country. We also would like to equip them with basic skills, so that they could find employment. This will be the move forward dealing with young people through the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. I would like to say that we are not providing for two or five persons, but hundreds of persons across this country will benefit.

Important legislation like the Sexual Offences Act and other legislation which deal with domestic violence and gender

policy have been ignored. Like many other things, they sat on a shelf and as soon as I got into office, these issues were brought to my attention. We will be working to have those in this House, so that we can have comprehensive reviews of existing legislation, and also new legislation, to target peculiar issues that fall within the ambit and purview of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security.

To really understand what people need, there will be a comprehensive review, which is called the poverty assessment map. A database system will be launched by this Ministry to capture those who will be beneficiaries of what we can give to them in their time of need. In addition, Guyana Legal Aid Clinic falls under this Ministry and I know the Attorney General has spoken to me a lot on this matter. We will be partnering on this initiative to expand it, to improve it and to ensure that people have access to legal services.

As one could see, the Ministry is very expansive and deals with many serious issues. The Ministry deals with the vulnerable population and critical issues that speak to the welfare and wellbeing of the people of Guyana. I have no doubt, if together we confront the good, the bad and the unacceptable and we work... [**Mr. McCoy:** The ugly.] No, Mr. McCoy, I am not talking about the ugly today. I am speaking about the good, the bad and the unacceptable. It is only then that we can offer, fairly, to this country what it is the people really want.

I urge the Members of the Opposition to stop saying, ‘you, we, them and us’. No, let us say ‘this Guyana’. We like to say ‘one people’; let us be one people. We like to say ‘one nation’; let us be one nation. You are here because you said that you want to help people, well then, help them. The avenues are opened to them from all the Members of this House – every one of them. Do not go out and be irresponsible and tell people this offer was not given to the Opposition. It was and it will be repeated. You will be reminded. [**Mr. Duncan:** Talk and action are two different things.] I would respond to that ‘talk and action’. We have *hit the ground running* and, in little over a month, the number of things that we have manage to achieve, please, I do not want to make a comparison. I think the people will do it for me.

I have not even mentioned the removal of VAT. It is interesting that we say that nothing is there in the Budget. Well then, you know what, refuse the \$25,000 when it is offered. Refuse the VAT and pay the VAT on your bills. Why would you want to penalise the elderly when they can benefit

now from free water? Why? If my good Friends and Colleagues on the other side continue to be defensive of perfidies and everything that they had people endure in this country, then they cannot blame people if they never trust them. Trust is a very important thing. Respect is another important component. One cannot just buy those off the shelves; they have to be earned and I do not know what they have earned in that level.

This movement forward from 2020 to 2021, from this Budget to a new budget, should be seen as the journey of healing, a journey that we take together. Stop dividing people. I am a frank person and I *call a spade a spade*; stop dividing people. Our country’s psyche has been damaged. The coffers have been next to empty and, in a limited fiscal space, a Budget like this is being presented. I spoke extensively about how the vulnerable population and the poor can benefit and I hear the cry, why the private sector? I say it because it will provide jobs – come on. That is obvious, but sometimes you have to state the obvious.

When we speak in this House we have to be careful what we tell people. The mother who cannot feed her child knows what she feels. The father who is off the job and on the breadline knows what it is like not to take home money for his family. I visited those families and it broke my heart and, like the Opposition too, I will call for justice because no young person should lose their lives in such a gruesome way. I was not afraid to go because I understood the angst and anguish of those parents and grandparents. It is not easy to lose your children and to lose them in that way. No one should have to bear that. So, to say that justice is something that will be denied, I think we need to let that proceed to the point where justice is served.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you would need to proceed for an extension.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be happy to proceed for that extension.

Mr. Speaker: Someone would have to move it for you.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given another five minutes to be able to continue her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Dr. Persaud: I have said much and much more can be said about the Budget and about how it will benefit women, men, children, and even those from the migrant population. In fact,

migrant’s assistance of \$3,800,000 will benefit 300 migrant families. This will be done in collaboration with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). What I want is to give a commitment to this House and to the people of the country that every effort will be made to assuage any suffering, to alleviate any hardship and to address the concerns of their welfare because I believe that I have been fortunate, blessed and privileged to be placed here. So, now I can be an ear, a voice and a support for the voiceless and the underprivileged. **[An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*]** At least, I am not afraid to say it; whether I say it here or on television, my message is the same, Hon. Member.

It is interesting to listen to what transpired. I want to tell this nation and all of the Members that a new wave of transparency, accountability, progress, care, concern and prosperity is about to hit the country of Guyana. Do not be left behind. Get on the wagon. Join the procession. Join this movement as we take Guyana forward with our ‘plan for prosperity.’

I commend this Budget to you, Members of this honourable House and I say to you, each time we meet here let us endeavour to be part of a solution and not make a problem magnified because of our inability to be productive, but rather our predilection to be counter.

Members of the Opposition, if we have proclivities and fetishes, let them be positive, so that they can engender positivity and hope and they can move people from the state of despair and hopelessness and from the demoralised state that they were in towards understanding that, now, things are going to change, the country will be transformed and the PPP/C Government is here. We are team and we will work for all the people of Guyana.

I thank you so much. *[Applause]*

Ms. Singh-Lewis: *Salam.* I bring the salutation of peace to you, Mr. Speaker and the honourable House. I would first like to congratulate you, as my *Brother in Deen* and the Speaker of this noble House. You may be aware that this is my first time serving as a Member of Parliament and my expectations of the Speaker reside in your acceptance speech.

I stand here as a humble and grateful Muslim woman representing A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change in this Parliament. Might I say, the first Hijabi in this honourable House, which is a demonstration of our Guyanese diversity.

6.14 p.m.

Take a look around on this side of the House. You will notice that our women represent 42% of our contingent and for this I congratulate and thank the former President, Brigadier (Ret’d) David Arthur Granger, for his commitment to acknowledging and demonstrating gender equality.

I rise to add my voice to the denouncement of this Budget, which I believe is best described as disappointing. The Budget presented, in my opinion, is a reflection of a late-for-school approach disguised under the term ‘emergency’. Contrary to what this Government would have us believe, this Budget is not a good thing because it lacks vision even in the short-term. It is deceptive and discriminatory in form. I suspect its presenter, Hon. Member Juan Edghill, must have been attempting to make up in form what this Budget lacks in substance. This may explain the extensive length of time spent on its presentation and his attempt to discredit the transparency and accountability of the previous Administration. We did not expect better.

I made a bold statement which is that the Budget is discriminatory in form. Permit me to explain. It is stated that the Budget is pro-poor and people centred. In other words, it is PPP/C. In reality, it is only for one set of people. It is not a lie; check the evidence by the sums allocated for Guyana Sugar Corporation Incorporated alone. *Ow man* what happen to public servants *eh?* I wish to advise the Hon. Minister of Labour that it is not too late to stand up for your brothers and sisters in the public service. We will help you to make representations for them.

How dare this Government claim that the Budget is inclusive when it lacks vision and is devoid of clarity? You cannot advocate a macro-financial policy as people-centred, when the Budget intentionally disregards or omits any programmatic action that specifically addresses a progressive process for us to enhance social interaction, integration and harmony, within and across social groups in Guyana. This will result in reinforcing stronger families and communities and improving our national values, in order to sustain social, economic and cultural wellbeing and enrich livelihoods for all of Guyana.

This Government is not serious about the people of Guyana and their wellbeing. They have paraded in the West Berbice area talking about peace, harmony and unity. I have heard it mentioned in this honourable House when, in fact, they have not only completely dismantled the Department of Social Cohesion but, as if to emphasise their utter disdain for the

very concept of national unity, they have fired the entire staff of that Department. I would know because I am one who suffered this at the hands of this Government. This is not me tell you a *nancy story*; a whole department was fired. Ask the Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson. This kind of behaviour, in my opinion, is reckless. Shame on the PPP/C. Are we to believe that this Government has replaced social cohesion with social division?

Permit me to inform the National Assembly that fluff is not going to cut it. We will call the Government out on all these fluffs. The Government is not only reckless and deceptive, it is also uncaring and, of this, they ought to be ashamed. This Budget ought to have had a structured programme to offer to the people of Guyana so that we can work towards a unified Guyana, address our diversities and ensure that they are embraced and be able to resolve our conflicts, so that we would be able to network with stakeholders and empower them, and be able to promote equity and decision-making processes, which would benefit all of us and not one set of people.

May I please enlighten the Government Ministers who went to the West Coast, Berbice, not so long ago, and offered lip service of peace and unity? In the words of my teacher, Ms. Paulette Henry, from the University of Guyana and a Berbician by right, she said: “Natasha, peace is not one-sided, it requires evidence of action to promote equality and respect”. I hold the Hon. Vindhya Persaud to the issues of peace, respect and equality for all Guyanese. There is absolutely nothing in this Budget that you could point to with the objective of it being a vision for Guyana.

Let me share some evidence of what vision of real leadership is all about. Under the David Granger Administration, we saw, in May, 2015, the formation of a Department of Social Cohesion with a mandate to promote peace and harmony. In April, 2017, we saw the development of strategic plans in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Hon. Vindhya Persaud, you have asked for us to reach out and I am saying to you that the evidence is there. We have a strategic plan, it is dated 2017-2021. We were halfway of implementation. We started the monitoring and evaluation and, of course, the Government threw it out, but we need a structured approach for building harmony and unity in this country. It does not have to go out, we can work on it. This is something that we can do together. This was done so as to demonstrate a structured approach to building the moral

fabric of our society and to demonstrate to the world that social cohesion is not a farce, as someone once indicated in this honourable House.

The Department trained over 500 persons at the local level – the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, Municipalities and regional administration. There are groups to embrace and appreciate their diversity in our multi-cultural society.

We partnered with major stakeholders in the harmony process and, very strangely, we partnered with the Ethnic Relations Commission to offer the said training. Good people like Mr. Neaz Subhan and Pandit Deodat welcomed this training and declared it a really great initiative. We cannot, in good faith, sit here and accept less. Fluff and gaff with comrades is not going to cut it if this Government is serious about unity and peace for Guyana.

The entire country is bleeding and we need affirmative actions and evidence of action, not just fluff, gaff, photo opportunities, and press conferences; that is not going to cut it. The David Granger-led Administration was deliberate in building our national identity and repairing the moral fabric of our society. We gave the people hope when we ensured that the programmes targeting women development, especially our female single parents, were implemented in all 10 administrative regions. Many of our women were trained in local government, a programme dispensed by the Guyana Women Leadership Institute located at Cove and John. Maybe, the Hon. Vindhya Persaud needs to go back and check with her staff because training in local government was done at the Guyana Women Leadership Institute located at Cove and John. You will not be allowed to come to this House and speak untruth to the people. We will set the record straight and that is what I am attempting to do tonight.

The Sustainable Livelihood Entrepreneurial Development programme provided opportunities for young entrepreneurs to start their own businesses all across this country. For the first time, young people could become self-sufficient, instead of looking for a paltry handout from the Government every month. Through the SLED programme, over 3,000 persons benefited across the 10 regions.

The Hon. Minister of Public Works claimed, in his Budget presentation, that, over the last five years, human services were badly managed and poorly executed. My religion teaches me to speak the truth always. If only he can claim that this sector was mismanaged, then anyone who makes that claim is a stranger to the truth. The programmes and projects speak for themselves.

Let me help the Hon. Member understand what people-centred development plans were produced under our Government. A brand-new modern childcare and family centre was erected in 2016 in Sophia for our less fortunate children and supporting families. I have gotten feedbacks that when the Hon. Minister visited, she was quite surprised to see how modern that facilitate is. That is a good thing and you are taking good things from us. We hope that you will maintain it at its current standard.

The implementation of transparent structured programmes for people with difficult circumstance benefited people from all the 10 regions of this country. Some 160 persons were trained to implement programmes for the Sexual Offences and Domestic Policy Unit. Because of the tremendous and dedicated work and the great stewardship of the former Minister, Ms. Amna Ally, Guyana has been selected as one of six beneficiaries in the Caribbean for the Spotlight Initiative. Hon. Vindhya Persaud, a total of €4.5 million is expected to fund this programme. I am very glad that you said that you are going to continue with it. Homes were activated to take care of vulnerable women who were traumatised by domestic violence.

In the area of juvenile delinquency, we strengthened the Family Matters programme which is presently operating in five communities in Regions 4 and 6. This programme provides specialised counselling services to families of youths, ages 10 to 17 years. These are the youths who are most vulnerable to crime and violence.

The David Granger-led Administration gave the people of Guyana hope when we ensured that the programmes which targeted women development, especially our female single parents, were implemented in all regions. How can they say this is a people-centred budget?

Let me address the elderly. When we took office in 2015, pension stood at \$7,500. We, the APNU/AFC Coalition, brought it to \$20,500. This new Government now brings it to \$25,000 and the pensioners are not even going to get it until 2021. What a shame, when you promised the pensioners \$40,000 and you are now going to give them a meagre \$4,500 increase. To the People's Progressive Party/Civic, that is a broken promise and what a shame.

6.29 *p.m.*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it would be a shame if we do not give you an additional five minutes to conclude. Could someone so move?

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you could continue to your conclusion.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would not want it to be a shame. This Government is demonstrating how visionless and uncaring it is, even as we know, and it acknowledged that senior citizens are more at risk during this COVID-19 pandemic. Why are we allowing this Government to be so disrespectful to our senior citizens? The Hon. Vindhya Persaud would not address those kinds of issues because it is not in the Budget. Could the Government not make this increase retroactive? It would have been a nice little bonus for these senior citizens during these troubled times. The Government does not have that kind of vision. Hence, I say that it is visionless. I am asking, could the Government not make the increase retroactive? That is just a meagre sum compared to what they are going to give everybody at GuySuCo. Could the Government not have a little bit of care in their hearts for the senior citizens of Guyana? I am asking for the thousands of pensioners.

The Guyanese people should be concerned about how this Government is treating them, not only the senior citizens, but all of us. Is it just a knock off? There is no raise for public servants, nothing for senior citizens and police only getting half of what was promised. This is troubling.

This Government was in Opposition for five years and I expected it to have had a well thought out plan, but what we have witnessed here is a disconnect from the Green State Development Strategy and a great void filled with old cars and used tyres. Need I remind this honourable House of the time when blown out substandard tyres were among the leading cause of fatal vehicular accidents. One does not need formal schooling to realise that older vehicles are not just an additional strain on the environment, but they are also of great danger to limb and life. While the chassis might be a faster turnover for auto dealers as proclaimed in the *Guyana Times* newspapers, it also brings death to hapless motorists and passengers. Not all development could be measured by profits and gains. Our country grieves as we recognise that this ‘plan for prosperity’ sets us back five years in the past, instead of moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to tell you and this honourable House that I cannot, sincerely, agree with this Budget even in the short-

term. Even as it says, ‘emergency’, I cannot agree with this. This is a sad time for the people of Guyana. I would like the people of Guyana to know that there is a silver lining. Let not your heart be troubled. The Coalition will be back.

I thank you very much. I wish to extend happy belated birthday to the Hon. Deputy Speaker of this House. *[Applause]*

Dr. Westford: Mr. Speaker, please accept my congratulations on your assumption to the esteemed position of Speaker of this National Assembly. Also, I would like to congratulate the Deputy Speaker, Hon. Member Mr. Shuman. Let me also welcome and congratulate all of the new parliamentarians who have entered this august House. I hope you realise that you have accepted the herculean task and I hope that you are prepared to do what it takes to represent the persons who expect guidance from you.

I join my Colleagues in adding my contribution to this PPP/C *Budget 2020* entitled our ‘plan for prosperity.’ Yes, there is a silver lining; a lining of prosperity. This prosperity is not only for one category or one facet of our community, it is for all of us. I say ‘us’ because even we, who are in this House, will benefit from that prosperity. All of our people: our families, our friends, all Guyanese will benefit from it.

Before I continue, let me extend congratulations to the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, for his eloquent and commanding presentation of his first national Budget. Congratulations are also extended to the technical staff of the Ministry of Finance, as well as the other line agencies without whom the speedy compilation of this Budget would not have been realised.

Over the last two days, we have heard umpteen descriptions of classifications of this Budget, mostly by Members of the Opposition. Some said it is not people friendly, some said it was designed for the private sector, while others said that it will increase the riches of some and pauperise the majority.

Just a few minutes ago, we heard the Hon. Member, who just spoke, say that it has nothing for the public servants. Just this morning, no lesser person than the former Hon. Minister of the Public Service also voiced those very concerns. It makes me wonder, are the public servants a new class of aliens who have arrived in this country? The public servants are Guyanese. Like every other Guyanese who will benefit from this Budget, they will also benefit.

The Hon. Minister of the Public Service, as well as the Hon. Minister, Bishop Juan Edghill, outlined, in detail, all of the benefits that will be accorded to every Guyanese, including the public servants. They are members of this country; they are members of our society and our communities. They are not a separate *kettle of fish*. They are Guyanese like every other person and they will benefit equally. They will benefit from the tax reliefs, from training and from scholarships like every other Guyanese in this country. Why are we singling them out?

All of these ill-informed statements, especially by the Opposition, could only be described as the rantings of persons who are either severely mentally challenged or blinded by their zealous political fanaticism.

The reality is that, as the saying goes, *a tiger never changes its stripes*. Imagine the very Hon. Members who sit here and criticise this Budget and speak about democracy... We saw how the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams was very ‘worked up’ when she was speaking about democracy. These are the very people who, by their selfish uncaring actions, denied the citizens of this country for five long months, the right to choose who they wanted to govern them. Yes, Mr. Speaker, our citizens were denied, in a timely methodical manner, the right to have a Government of their own choice to protect their livelihood. That was democracy under attack. Five long months of stress, anguish and frustration. No wonder that, during this protracted waiting game, the incidents of spousal and child abuses spiralled upwards as the Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud will tell you.

This 2020 Budget is a people’s Budget. It caters for every sector, every facet of society, every man, woman and child, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, age or political affiliation. I wish to inform Hon. Member Holder, that this Budget is designed to benefit, and shall benefit, all Guyanese. I totally agree with the Hon. Member, Mr. Sears, when he also said that the people of this country do not and will not countenance squandermania. Truthfully, we now know that karma is alive and well, as it is because of the very wanton acts of squandermania that he and his Colleagues have been relegated to the opposite side of this House.

The veteran trade unionist, Hon. Member Coretta McDonald, vehemently stated that this Budget is not a working-class Budget and that one needed to have a philosophical view of it. Kudos to you, Hon. Member. You could have all the views you need. Let me reiterate that this Budget is one that will

benefit everyone, whether they be working or non-working-class citizens.

The Hon. Member spoke at length about monitoring the 50,000 jobs that will be created. Jobs that will benefit all of the people; the bauxite workers... She spoke about occupational safety and health, the Regional Democratic Council workers and the state boards.

6.44 p.m.

It is unbelievable but true that, throughout the entire Hon. Member’s speech, there was not one mention of the word ‘teachers’. One would ask why this was so... [**An Hon. Member: Inaudible.**] I am trying not to answer you, Hon. Member. ...especially since the Hon. Member holds the mantle of being the General Secretary of the Guyana Teachers’ Union. The fact is, after a protracted struggle between the teachers and the then APNU/AFC Administration for improved benefits, the Guyana Teachers’ Union made a right-about-turn and left the teachers out in the proverbial cold.

The betrayal of Jesus by Judas for a mere 30 pieces of silver is well documented. One would never have envisaged that our teachers would have been made to suffer a mirrored betrayal by none other than the esteemed General Secretary of the Guyana Teachers’ Union. It is well documented, Hon. Member, that former PPP/C Administrations have always... The Hon. Member, Ms. McDonald, who is not in the House, I am noticing, can vouch for that. It is there for all to see in her speeches that she had made to the teachers. She said that there were better conditions of service that were offered by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic than were ever offered by the APNU/AFC Government. That came from her very lips on several occasions, Hon. Members. It is documented that all of the PPP/C Administrations have always negotiated exceptional benefit packages for teachers. We promise that we will continue that trend with or without the meaningful participation of the Guyana Teachers’ Union. No longer must our teachers, our primary educators, be deemed greedy or selfish during their quest for improved conditions of service; never again.

Our health workers at all the levels must be commended for their dedication. I take this opportunity to thank them for their service to country. We, in this honourable House, as well as the nation at large, owe them a depth of gratitude. They have worked, and have continuously done so, tirelessly, and beyond the call of duty throughout this COVID-19 epidemic.

Our disciplined services must also be commended for their steadfast role in enforcing the COVID-19 regulations – not as one of the Hon. Members mentioned, sent only with pellets to threaten the society. The important and increasing demands on these workers dictate that, if they are to function effectively, they must be appropriately equipped to perform their roles. With this in mind, adequate resources have been allocated within this Budget to the relevant sectors. I urge my dear Friends, who are on the Opposition side of the House and who came pre-programmed not to accept the Budget, for their own benefit and the benefit of their communities at large, to have a look at it; just read it. Do not be blinded, as I said before, by that zealous political agenda.

While the Hon. Members of the Opposition are dabbling in semantics about what classifications to attach to this Budget, our citizens are becoming increasingly infected with COVID-19 and some of them are even dying at alarming rates.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we will have to dabble in a bit more time for you.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence for five minutes more for my Colleague to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Dr. Westford: The Hon. Member on the opposite side said, when he spoke, that during the APNU/AFC’s reign, the Coronavirus was not running and that it has now started to run. Hon. Member, please be informed that it could not have seemed to be running because nobody was being tested. The more you test, the more you will find if it is there. Those who have eyes to see, let them look and they shall find it. That is what we are doing. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible.*] Hon. Member, have you not been tested? You are lucky that we are here and you were tested. *Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise.*

Our citizens lack opportunities for employment or are losing their jobs because of this very virus. Food prices have spiralled beyond the reach of many of these persons and they cannot afford to service their bills. It is, therefore, imperative that the relief measures enshrined in this Budget are implemented with alacrity.

One must look at current circumstances, one must look at projections in trends for the future and one must look at how decisions of the past will impact on the decisions for the future. The People’s Progressive Party/ Civic Governments have always had outstanding success with its programmes

and policies designed to protect the disadvantaged and the most vulnerable in our society. By improving monitoring and evaluation methods, we will ensure that these programmes remain effective and relevant. We will review our social sector programmes, in consultations with civil society, to ensure that they are channelled to those who need them the most, and not what has happened in the previous Administration – distribution to friends and families. This Government believes that in order to pull itself out of the difficulties which the previous Administration has put this country through – corruption and rampant squandermania – the collective efforts of all our citizens are required.

We are facing dubious times as a nation. This is not time for grandstanding and stand-up comedy shows, the likes of which we saw during the presentation by the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan. This is the time for serious business; this is the time for nation rebuilding. We all pride ourselves at being intelligent and that is fine, but a wise man once said that intelligence leads to argument while wisdom leads to settlement. Let us all, therefore, in this honourable House, aspire to attain more wisdom than intelligence. Let us demonstrate to our citizenry that we, in this honourable House, are capable of positively leading, not misleading and inciting them along the wrong path.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, mentioned social cohesion. Her words were that, based on the events of the last few weeks, it is clear to everyone that the PPP/C is not interested in moving forward. What is this? No one from the PPP/C was seen at Berbice instigating or inciting racial violence or strife. We were promoting peace and harmony, and calling for justice for the victims. Why do we want to place the mud on the faces of other persons? Social cohesion had been the mantra of the APNU/AFC Government. Let us in this honourable House behave as leaders. Let us teach our people the right meaning of social cohesion and encourage them to practise it.

On 2nd March, 2020, the people of Guyana rejected the APNU/AFC-styled politics of deception, betrayal, greed, arrogance, waste and, more so, mismanagement. They rejected officially sanctioned corruption, squandermania and discrimination. They rejected immortality, inequality, nepotism and cronyism. The people, thus, voted emphatically and unequivocally for equity and prosperity for all. They asked for and they deserve progress, harmony and social peace. The people, by their own will, chose the PPP/C as their preferred government to lead them into a prosperous, happy future. All of our citizens must be assured that this

PPP/C Government, their Government, is committed to: dedicating all of its energies towards protecting them; strengthening their democracy and the rule of law; incentivising growth and job creation; enhancing their welfare; creating a society that is bereft of racial discord and moulding a country where everyone sees themselves as one people and one nation, all working together to realise one destiny. I, therefore, commend this Budget as one that will obviously change all of our lives for the better.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. We now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon for his maiden presentation.

6.59 p.m.

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture [Mr. Ramkissoon]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and the General Secretary of our party and our Vice-President, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, for giving me this opportunity to become a Member of this National Assembly, to serve in the capacity as Parliamentary Secretary attached to the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Hon. Member in the Opposition, this morning, tried to define democracy for us. The Hon. Member ought to know that democracy does not mean hiding your Statements of Poll (SOPs). In Region 3, the region where I came from, there were 355 SOPs for the Regional Elections and 355 SOPs for General Elections. Ask my Colleagues who are sitting in this National Assembly if they had not seen the 355 SOPs for Regional Elections and the 355 SOPs for General Elections. Democracy is not falsely accusing the citizens who voted of being dead and having migrated. Democracy is not denying the will of the people, as expressed by their votes on election day.

The Opposition, on a daily basis, kept randomly and arbitrarily accusing voters of being dead and having migrated. I was on the team in Region 3 with the Hon. Deodat Indar, the Hon. Dr. Tandika Smith, and the Hon. Priya Manickchand. We all worked on the ground and found that many of those same persons, whom we were told were dead or migrated, had voted. We found them in the communities. Is that what democracy is about?

First of all, in parliamentary democracies around the world, it is the first time, perhaps, we will know of a budget that is being debated, but the Parliamentary Opposition spent more than half of that budget already. It is, perhaps, the first time in the history of parliamentary democracy that we are confronted with such a situation. Is that how democracy is defined?

It would be improper on my part if I do not speak on the recent past. Approximately 1,905 days the people of Guyana endured the extreme hardship of the APNU/AFC. The APNU/AFC’s campaign promises were never delivered. They were flushed instead. The APNU/AFC’s 100-day plan is yet to commence. They had roughly 1,905 days and, yet, it did not start. Where was the ‘good life’ in the ‘green economy’ that was promised? One of our Hon. Members said that, perhaps, it meant to paint government buildings in green, so we are having a green economy.

There were hardships where the quality of life was severely compromised for all Guyanese, and there was the squandering of State assets and resources. Let us never forget the introduction of over 200 new taxes and fees, the firing of persons in targeted communities and the lack of employment opportunities. What was the solution given to us? It was plantain chips, cook-up rice, guava cheese and fish and chips. That was the APNU/AFC’s answer to Guyana’s future.

When the PPP/C Government left Office, it left the agriculture sector with clear indications of great expansion and diversification. There were several systems in place for farmers and agro-processors to expand their operations. After the elections of 2015, when the APNU/AFC Government took Office, they implemented a number of harsh measures which discouraged persons from investing in this sector. These measures also caused many persons, who had over the years invested millions of dollars, to scale down their operations due to increased land rental fees, drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges as well as imposed taxes on key agricultural machines.

When the PPP/C was in Office, prior to 2015, in addition to crops such as rice and sugar, which had been traditionally produced, greater attention and emphasis was placed on the cultivation of crops such as oil palm, coconuts, green vegetables, ground provisions, fruits and flowers. Today, non-traditional crops are playing an even greater role in Guyana’s economy, ranking as one of Guyana’s highest agricultural export earners. This emergency Budget will begin to address some of the weak areas this sector developed

over the past five years. Although a significant amount of these products would be utilised locally, the greater proportion would be destined for a tourist haven of the Caribbean and the niche markets of North America and Europe.

This expansion and diversification of the agricultural and the manufacturing sectors have been greatly assisted by tax incentives provided by the Government, by the market intelligence made available to the producers by the central authorities, by the expansion of the information technology base in the country, by the help provided by the Government in some cases in the actual marketing of the products, and by the research and extension services of the National Agricultural Research Institute (NAREI).

Prior to the 2015 General and Regional Elections, the livestock population of the country was significantly increased and its quality much enhanced. As a consequence, not only was Guyana self-sufficient in meat and milk, but a considerable amount of our beef production was exported. This come about because of improvements in the quantity and quality of feed supplies through the local production of energy based protein feeds, through the extension of the areas available for pasturage, mainly by improving the productivity of the saline soils to the north and the acidic soils in the interior through genetic improvement of the livestock and through greater attention to animal health.

Perhaps, of the greatest significance, however, was the boost which the sector received through the opening up of new areas for agriculture. This was made possible by the improvement and expansion of our country’s infrastructure, the provision of adequate social services in these new areas and the preparation of land-use plans and programmes, with the specific objectives of diversifying the agricultural base and increasing production.

Given the current state of sugar in Guyana, it would be remiss of me not to reflect on the efforts of the PPP/C Government, prior to 2015, to maintain the sector before the previous Administration closed four estates. The now Opposition promised to keep the sugar estates opened. However, it deceived the people.

By 2020, sugar become more competitive because of: higher field productivity based on improved farm practices and improved genetic varieties; the utilisation of additional areas of land, mainly in Skeldon, Albion and the Rose Hall areas; and enhanced sugar recovery through the replacement of existent obsolete mills by the largest state-of-the-art factories

which, in addition to giving higher yields, exhibit significant scale economies. Special benefits were obtained with the construction of a 350-tonne cane per hectare factory at Skeldon, the rationalisation of the industry through the merging of some of the estates and some operations, the utilisation of diffusion technology at two sides and the co-generation of power from both the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) the and Guyana Sugar Corporation’s own bagasse.

It is no secret that the industry has been facing financial challenges as the demand for sugar globally has shifted. Persons have become more health conscious, the demand for table sugar has decreased and this has ultimately influenced the cost of sugar production. Instead of exploring ways to diversify the industry, the previous Administration chose to close estates, ultimately putting thousands of persons on the breadline – a government that promised all Guyanese the ‘good life’.

Sugar must not be measured in financial terms only but, also, in terms of economic and social implications. Sugar sustains drainage and irrigation systems in the various coastal areas. Sugar was the integrating force within the sugar estates and adjacent communities. If you destroy sugar, perhaps, you will destroy those communities in themselves.

7.14 p.m.

Strategic industries like sugar and bauxite cannot be measured in terms of cost benefit analysis alone; other factors like the social impact are equally important. Just think for a moment of the loss of contributions to the National Insurance Scheme.

Under the watch of the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic, the rice industry too flourished. There were clear indications of increased productivity through better farming practices, the use of improved varieties which increased mill recovery, through the modernisation and rationalisation of most of the mills, and by achieving greater efficiency in the use of water. In addition, because of the assistance provided by the Government in the obtaining of market intelligence, there would have been a more diversified international market for Guyana’s rice, although the major importers remained the Europeans.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your maiden speech could be longer if someone would move an extension for you to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that the Hon. Member be given another five minutes to conclude his maiden presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Ramkissoon: For agriculture in Guyana to reach its full potential, it must be strategically repositioned and must rest on the twin pillars of the global competitiveness of agricultural products and a balanced development of rural areas and communities. This Budget acts as a stepping stone for those aspirations. We have to work to correct the outdated and inefficient agriculture, health and food safety systems and do extensive work to correct the inefficient land and water distribution and management systems, and the weak and non-integrated information and intelligence system.

Please allow me to zoom in to Region 3. One of the farmers’ main concerns is the access dams. Over the past five years, these dams were basically ignored, and it cost farmers additional moneys to have their produce transported to the markets. Added to this, there were no machines allocated to areas such as Philadelphia, Vergenoegen, Barnwell, Pouderoyen, Nismes, and so on. This was due to the neglect by the former Administration. What was the result? Our farmers suffered. Also, in Region 3, we found that four bulldozers are down and only one is operating at this moment. We will now have to work to expend moneys to bring these machineries *up to scratch*. Some of the major farm-to-market all-weather access roads, such as in Vreed-en-Hoop, La Jalousie, Leguan, Wakenaam, and Clay Brick Road were poorly maintained, and farmers were left to do self-help to fix these.

If I am permitted to turn to Canals Number 1 and 2, those Canals are in a very poor state. They cannot provide the necessary drainage services to the farmers. We visited these areas recently and found that they were poorly maintained, even though millions of dollars were awarded to a contractor for cleaning them. The contract was taken away from the residents and direct beneficiaries and was awarded to one with no knowledge of those canals. We will fix this. We will continue to work to maintain all of the drainage and irrigation canals in Region 3 and other regions across Guyana. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, will surely provide details of this in his deliberation to this honourable House. We will ensure all drainage kokers are fixed so that farmers can feel safe, and their hard work and crops will not go *down the drain* when it rains. This is our commitment to our people and we will stand by it.

In closing, please allow me a moment to touch on the Coronavirus disease. This pandemic has a negative impact on agriculture around the world and it is no different here in Guyana. We already have programmes in place, through the Ministry of Health, to ensure that our nation is kept safe during this time. However, at the level of the Ministry of Agriculture, we will pay special focus to our farmers to ensure that they follow all guidelines as they produce to feed our nation. Our teams from agencies such as the National Agriculture Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA), the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB), and the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), are geared to ensure that, whenever they are in the fields, they also provide guidance and awareness to farmers to ensure that they are safe. This is just the *tip of the iceberg* of what we are doing and will be doing. We wish to assure this nation that at no point will we ignore our farmers.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and all the Hon. Members of this House, for listening. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member.

Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on Thursday, 17th September, 2020.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Assembly stands adjourned to Thursday, 17th September, 2020, at 10.00 a.m.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. Thursday, 17th September, 2020. Good night.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.22 p.m.