



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

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2023) 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

62ND Sitting

Thursday, 2ND February, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.15 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent – on leave]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (17)

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

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

+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
Ministry of Finance,
Main & Urquhart Streets,
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+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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Ministry of Agriculture,
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Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,
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South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

[Virtual Participation]

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

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
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Kingston,
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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.,
(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
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[Virtual Participation]

+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

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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,
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Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,
*Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister,
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Georgetown.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

Other Members (14)

Hon. Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,

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East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,

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

148 Lethem,

Central Rupununi,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),

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No. 66 Village,

Corentyne,

Berbice.

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

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John Street,

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Hon. Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,

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

Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,

Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

Lot 340 East Street,

South Cummingsburg,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

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Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

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

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New Amsterdam.

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Georgetown.

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East Bank Essequibo.

Hon. Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
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Robb Street,
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* Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
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South Cummingsburg,
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[Absent – on leave]

* Hon. Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
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[Absent – on leave]

Hon. Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,
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(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

Hon. Mr. Aubrey Norton, M.P.,
Leader of the Opposition

Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,
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Campbelville,
Georgetown.

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

[Absent]

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

* Non-Elected Minister

Hon. Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P.,
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Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,
*Lot 48 Atlantic Ville,
Georgetown.*

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

Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P.,
*Lot 7 Freeman Street,
Castello Housing Scheme,
La-Penitence,
Georgetown.*

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

Hon. Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P.,
*Opposition Chief Whip,
Lot 609 Conciliation Street,
Tucville,
Georgetown.*

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

Hon. Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.,
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Hon. Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P.,
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Georgetown.*

[Virtual Participation]

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

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

Hon. Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P.,
Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme,
East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.,
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South Ruimveldt Park,
Georgetown.

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

Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,
Lot 842 Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

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

Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,
Lot 151 Durbana Square,
Lamaha Gardens,
Georgetown.

[Virtual Participation]

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

Hon. Mr. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P.,
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Sivertown,
Wismar, Linden.

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

Hon. Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.,
Lot 18 Public Road,
Johanna Cecilia,
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).

[Absent]

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

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

Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,
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Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,
Plantation Belfield,
East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,
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Lot 169-170 Stanleytown,
West Bank Demerara.
c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)
Church Street Mahdia.
Lot 4 Public Road,
Stewartville,
West Coast Demerara.

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

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

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

Officers (2)

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

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
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Mr. Tafari David,
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Reporter (a.g.)
Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Review of Tape

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are reviewing a tape provided by the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes. There is a team who is reviewing the tape to establish the claims that were made during her presentation.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper and Reports were laid:

- (1) The Value-Added Tax (Amendment of Schedule II) Order 2023 No.10 of 2023.
- (2) Facility Agreement dated December 30th, 2022, between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the Bank of China Ltd., for an amount equivalent to Euros 160,852,464.00, to partially finance the New Demerara River Bridge (NDRB) Project.

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

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, may I have the floor?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you may have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I rise to register my dissatisfaction, displeasure and disappointment in the behaviour of some Members in the House.

Mr. Speaker: Just one second, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, I just want to say, for refresher purposes, that there is a establish procedure. If there are persons who want to stand and make a presentation under some of these heads, leave must be given by the Speaker and there is a timeframe that we have established. It is a practice that the leave comes within a certain timeframe so that we can hear what is being said. The National Assembly, Parliament, is not a place where Members just stand and say what they want to say. There are established rules and procedures that we have to follow. I intend to ensure we will keep the rules and the orders that are on the books. Hon. Member, let me hear you; go ahead. I would not give leave on the floor to Members just like that.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, I rise to register my dissatisfaction,

displeasure and disappointment in the behaviour of some Members in the House. Sir, while I understand that heckling is allowed, it can be done in a respectful and decent way. On Monday last, our very own Dr. Letitia Wright visited the National Assembly and during her brief address she admonished us to be peaceful and exhibit love to each other. We are considering the Estimates and, in our presence, we have professionals from the Public Service and online there is the entire globe watching and listening to us. Members behaviour can only be described as ludicrous and distasteful. This morning, present amongst us are young people who are the future of tomorrow. Opposition Members, on this side of the House, have ensured verbal abuse, untruths...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think you have made the point that you would like to see behaviour conducive to the National Assembly and an example to the nation. Thank you very much, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: Therefore, could I continue?

Mr. Speaker: You have made the point; thank you very much.

Ms. Ferguson: Well, I will make it on social media.

Mr. Speaker: Please do. I think that is the sort of behaviour you have actually asked us to observe and before we... Hon. Member Mr. Jones, you may have the floor.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. On the same note of Personal Explanation, you mentioned earlier about the videotape that is going to be reviewed. The Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, has since withdrawn the statement and issued an apology to the Minister of Education, Ms. Priya Manickchand.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, it is working. What you have just observed, seems to be working.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome to students of Camille's Academy

All sides, before we continue, I must apologise to Camille's Academy and the students. There is a teacher here with Camille's Academy; I think we will have two set of students. There will be 30 students, I think, for the first hour and then another 30 students. Ms. Camille is from my alma mater also Charlestown Secondary School, and she always wanted to be an educator so thanks for coming, Camille's Academy, Soesdyke.

Farewell to Mr. Scipio

As we are on making a few announcements, I forgot to mention that we have lost one of our brilliant staff – not to death – to another job. He is a young professional who has kept the live stream going excellent with the software. He is Mr. Alanzo Scipio and we have lost him to the CARICOM Secretariat. He is now the Assistant Public Relations Officer of CARICOM so we want to wish him well. I wanted to put that on record. He has done extremely well. At least I can vouch for the two years that I have been here. Good Luck, Mr. Scipio.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

Motions

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2023

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2023 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 16, 2023, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73.02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each

Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2023 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2023, of a total sum of seven hundred and twenty-one billion, five hundred and twenty-nine million, and seven hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars (\$721,529,734,000), excluding sixty billion, three hundred and fifty-one million, two hundred and twenty-nine dollars (\$60,351,229,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2023 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of thirteen billion, eight hundred and six million, five hundred and seventy-seven dollars (\$13,806,577,000) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2023.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$208,944,156,942, equivalent to US\$1,002,130,249, to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for

the financial year 2023 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now resolve ourselves into Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: The next agency is the Ministry of Health. Hon. Members, before we consider the Ministry of Health, at the start, we had an intervention earlier from the Hon. Member, Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, with respect to an education head - Nursery School under the Ministry of Education. It had said that particular allocation was for Regions 1 to 10 and Georgetown. We have checked and we have checked with the Ministry of Finance. Everyone was right in this case and there was no one who was wrong. The heading has Regions 1 to 10 and it has been used before to make allocations that can supplement other areas. In this instance, the Minister was right; it is for the Georgetown schools.

The observation made by the Hon. Member, Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, is on point but the other part of her observation was, there will need to be an amendment because we have tackled Nursery Education in the head under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. There is no amendment to be made here. There are two separate allocations, which is the one that was raised with respect to Regions 1 to 10 an observation must have been there and keeps repeating itself budget after budget. Next year, maybe, the planners could put a little top-up on just in case we need to go throughout the whole country. Thank you, for your observation, Hon. Member.

10.29 a.m.

Agency 47: Ministry of Health

Current Expenditure

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$3,028,741,000

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Under Programme 471, Policy Development and Administration, the expectation of the populace in Guyana is for the Ministry of Health to effectively and efficiently provide financial management to the populace so the health facilities can deliver quality care to the citizens of Guyana. Looking at the

staff details, the chart of accounts, we see an increase of six persons. A closer look at the chart of accounts from line items 6111 to 6117, reveals that there is a decrease in the number of workers at the level of administration, except for line item 6113, Other Technical and Craft Skilled, which remains unchanged for 22 staff members and line item 6116, Contracted Employees, where there is 100% increase. Could the Hon. Minister tell this Assembly the percentage of departments which have fully staffed complements and if there are vacancies to be filled?

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. For the section here and the different headings, there might be some slight variations in the number of persons who were employed last year and those who are going to be employed or continue employment this year. Those variations are catered for and we feel that we can competently manage the Ministry with the numbers that we have in 2023.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: Could the Hon. Minister give the designations and the remunerations of the top five employees?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Hon. Member. Is that what you are asking about – the top five? Among the top five persons in this area would be the Ministerial Advisor, Permanent Secretary (PS), Director of Materials Management Unit (MMU), Director General and National Director of Pharmacy Service.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chair, I asked for the designations and remunerations.

Dr. Anthony: Hon. Member, the Ministerial Advisor is in receipt of a payment of \$866,000; the Permanent Secretary, \$751,000; the Director of Materials Management Unit, \$648,000; the Director General, \$635,000; and the National Director of Pharmacy Service, \$432,000.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6222 – Field Materials and Supplies: The revised allocation for 2022 was \$17,632,000. However, there is an increase of approximately \$4 million in this line item. Could the Minister indicate to us what are some of the field items and supplies to be purchased under this line item?

Dr. Anthony: Under this line item – we have as the Hon. Member rightly said – an increase of \$4 million which will be used for 30 pallets at the Central Supply Unit (CSU). We have another 30 pallets that would go to the MMU. So, we could split it – \$2 million for the MMU and \$2 million for the CSU. The other amounts that we have there are for...At

the MMU we have to get protective gears and boxes to store things. Under this item as well, we are covering the Ministry's Management of Information System Unit (MISU), so we also have gears and utility coveralls for the persons working in that unit. For the General Administration Department, we have also set aside \$4.9 million for things such as umbrellas, safety gear and so forth. For the Finance, Accounting and Auditing Department, we have set aside about \$1.1 million for things such as plastic storage containers, batteries and so forth. The Office of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) would receive things such as umbrellas, flash drives and so forth. For the Human Resources (HR) and Personnel Department, we have set aside \$600,000 and again, this is for similar gear. We have a number of other offices who would receive similar things.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: there is an increase of \$7 million to this line item. Could the Minister state which buildings are to be maintained and where are they located?

Dr. Anthony: The increase here is approximately \$6.9 million and maintenance would be done on the Food Policy Division. We will be doing some general maintenance work there. We have \$1.9 million set aside to do the old administrative building. We need to do some drainage work, guttering and such things on the building because we notice leakages. Basically, this line item would cover the maintenance of the head office's building, the MMU and the Food Policy Division. These are the three main categories of buildings.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6284 – Other: There is a steep increase in this line item. The revised 2022 allocation was \$410,293,000 and now it has risen to \$754,192,000, which is the proposed allocation for 2023. It is an increase of approximately \$344 million. Could you disaggregate this figure and let us know what are items required for this operating expense?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Hon. Member. Under this line item, we would be doing a number of things. This includes the Ministry's Management of Information System Unit, which is going to get a number of software, including one from India called CoWIN (Covid Vaccine Intelligence Network). This is going to be used for not just Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccinations but all vaccines. That is something that we have been working on for quite some time. Under this line item, we also have sums of money set aside for the information systems that we are using at the MMU which includes the Management

Accounting (MAC) system, the licensing fees and so on for that. We also have set aside sums of money here for the administration, which includes waste disposal, courier services and so forth. We have a sum of money that has been set aside for us to buy a new Nortel Meridian system. This is a telephone system that the Ministry would be using. We also would be buying a new software from Delta Dynamics Incorporated called Facility Management Software which would also be included here.

Under this line item, as well, I think everyone now knows that last year June, we signed an agreement with Mount Sinai to provide consultancy services to the Ministry of Health. Those services would include the improvement in the efficiency and management of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). Apart from that, it is to help us develop new oncological and cardiovascular services. We are also looking at upgrading national guidelines in terms of diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and so forth. They have been helping us do the electronic health record system. A provision has been made here for that consultancy.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): What types of training are earmarked to be done in 2023 that would require an additional \$10,771,000 and which category of staff would benefit from such training?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Hon. Member. For the \$10 million we break that down for Continuing Medical Education, especially for allied professionals. These categories of people are now required to do Continuing Medical Education (CME). They have not been doing that, but we are making that a requirement for them to get their licences. I think that is a very important step. We have set aside another sum of money here for the Pharmacy Assistants Training Programme. These assistants are being trained in terms of pharmacy. There are also a number of Occupational Health and Safety training that would be done for various categories of staff. We also have to do training for our Encoders to be up-to-date with the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), so when they are coding birth certificates, death certificates and that sort of thing, they are up-to-speed.

In addition to that, we have set aside a sum of money under the Office of the CMO for Continuing Medical Education for doctors. Every year, we want to offer X-number of CMEs to doctors, especially those who are serving in the interior of Guyana. We have set aside money for training the Health

Statistics Department in the use of certain software. We have also set aside money for the training of employees in the Human Resources and Personnel Department. We have set aside money for the training of Nurses and Midwives under the Office of the Chief Nursing Officer. Again, it is now a requirement that Nurses who would be registering must have Continuing Medical Education. As a Ministry, we want to answer x-number of Continuing Medical Education so that anybody can come and access those CMEs. Those are some of the things we have on the training.

10.44 a.m.

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$3,028,741,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$210,645,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 1216200 – Ministry of Health - Buildings: Could the Minister tell this august body if when receiving this local financing of \$160,645,000 if the building and bond would be completed?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, could you repeat the question, please?

Dr. Cummings: I am asking, under the project code 1216200, there is money allocated there for the completion of the building and the bond.

Dr. Anthony: Under that heading Mr. Chairman, there is \$74 million that has been allocated for the completion of Ministry's head office and we know the history of that. Since we have extended the construction time for the building, we have to also extend the supervisory contractors time, so some of the moneys are catered for in that. We have \$74.1 million for the construction and \$5.2 million for the supervisory constructors.

Dr. Cummings: Project code 2405600 – Land and Water Transport: There is a sum of \$20 million that has been allotted for the purchase of a vehicle. Could you give us the specifications for this bus? What is the intended purpose for the use of this bus?

Dr. Anthony: This bus is really being procured by the Materials Management Unit. We have a number of staff who would travel from, let us say Georgetown to go to Diamond and we have been providing transportation for them, so instead of renting or contracting somebody to take them up

every morning and bring them back in the evening, the Ministry has decided it would be more economical to buy a bus and operate that bus. This is provided for us to buy a 30-seater bus so that we can move the MMU.

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$210,645,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Current Expenditure

Programme: 472 – Disease Control - Communicable Diseases – \$6,618,002,000

Dr. Cummings: Valiant efforts are being made to reduce the incident and prevalence for infectious diseases. Looking at line item 6116, Contracted Employees, could the Minister tell us the number of persons who have been contracted via the donor agencies? Of course, we know the Tuberculosis (TB), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Malaria programmes are donor funded. What are their remunerations? What are the top three positions?

Dr. Anthony: Under Contracted Employees, the top five would be the Medical Officer who receives a salary of \$491,003 per month; the National UCT Coordinator at \$339,000 per month; Key Population Officer at \$241,000 per month, a Microbiologist at \$200,000 per month and a Surveillance Officer at \$200,000 per month.

Dr. Cummings: Through the Chair, that is for the regular establishment, but for the donor agencies, the Global Fund for example.

Dr. Anthony: The challenge that we have here is that with the Global Fund, we currently have a project in HIV, Malaria and TB. The Global Fund has been phasing these programmes. Over the last couple of years, the Ministry has been bringing the staff who were previously employed under the Global Fund into the Ministry staffing structure. We have a few people who are employed under the Global Fund who are all now absorbed under the Ministry. The bridging funding that we have going forward is mostly for studies that we have to do and conclude, so there is not any substantive money to fund anybody under the Global Fund.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, if I can follow-up, at the Palms Geriatric Institution there is the Leprosy Clinic, I noticed in the year of 2022 the Ministry managed to diagnosis and treat 27 clients with Leprosy. The Ministry has managed to set itself a target of 62 in the year of 2023. I know this unit has been doing disease surveillance at the regional and even the national level. Do you think you would

be able reach this goal of 62 as the programme performance indicated? Do you have sufficient staff members to diagnosis and treat patients with developmental disabilities?

Dr. Anthony: Indeed, our main service for Leprosy is at the Palms Geriatric Institution and, right now, under this Budget, we are actually investing a lot of money to upgrade the services that we provide there. We have included a special laboratory and other equipment so that we can make more efficient diagnosis. The numbers that you have mentioned are estimates. Guyana has, over the last couple of years, achieved elimination at the national level. For the World Health Organization (WHO) purposes, elimination is considered less than one person per 10,000 so we have achieved that at the national level. However, we have a couple of regions where we see it is more than one per 10,000 and, therefore, we have targeted those regions with the specific programmes so that we can reduce that to the one or less than one per 10,000. The drive that we have right now is to bring that down so that Guyana can be considered as having eliminated Leprosy from the country. That is our goal. We have by the WHO standards to achieve that by 2030. We are hoping that we can get there by 2025.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings: The figure stands at \$318.458 million an increase from the revised 2022 figure of \$235,358,000, which has been an increase of \$73,100,000. Could the Minister tell us which buildings are being rented in this programme? Where are they located? Could we have a disaggregation of the various figures?

Dr. Anthony: The buildings here include the rental for staff who are working at the Infectious Disease Hospital, because there are staff who we have coming from out of town. Since we have been bringing them down from Linden for example, we have been renting houses to put them there so that they can go to work. It caters for that sum of money. It also caters for a building that we are renting for our surveillance staff so the Surveillance Unit is housing a particular building, so we continue to pay that rent. We are also paying for rental of a storage bond. This is a bond that we have rented for pharmaceuticals and under this heading we have been paying for that.

Dr. Cummings: A follow up: What has become of the building in Quamina Street? I thought the nurses would have been using that; are they not? We had renovated the building in Quamina Street to rent to maybe staff and so

Dr. Anthony: That is basically for the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and it is mostly for doctors.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6222 – Field Materials and Supplies: Could the Hon. Minister give us a list of the field supplies to be purchased under this line item? In 2022 the revised amount was \$83.334 million but for 2023 there is a steep rise of \$220,996,000a whopping increase of \$137 million. What is responsible for this increase?

Dr. Anthony: The increase of \$137 million is really for the procurement of insecticides impregnated bed nets. We will be buying 73,000 bed nets and we will have another 58,000 hammock nets. These would be distributed to communities in the interior such as: Regions 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10. It is really to help us control Malaria.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6223 – Office Materials and Supplies: There is also an increase of approximately \$6 million; could the Hon. Minister tell the Members of this Committee what are items to be purchased and where?

Dr. Anthony: We have budgeted this to buy labels for the National Public Health Reference Laboratory. Labelling samples, especially COVID-19 test and other types of tests that would be done there. That is what is projected that the labels would cost for about 50,000 laboratory labels.

Dr. Cummings: Prior, you had mentioned rental of buildings for staff but, in line item 6241, Rental of Buildings, there is also rental of buildings. If I am correct, could the Hon. Minister tell us which are the buildings to be rented for this programme? Where are they located? What are the required sums for these buildings?

10.59 a.m.

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, one of the buildings are located in Bel Air. The one housing the surveillance staff is in Middleton Street. Then, there is another one in Kitty. They are looking for the addresses, so that I can give them to you.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6284 – Other: Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate this line item as there is an increase of \$14,870,000?

Dr. Anthony: This line item caters for rental of equipment, support for the mass drug administration (MDA) programme, providing machines to do fogging and so forth. It is disaggregated: \$42.9 million is going to the Infectious Disease Hospital, \$3.1 million for filaria, \$2.5 million for the Health Emergency Operation Centre (HEOC), \$2.3 million for the National Public Health Reference Laboratory (NPHRL), \$1.8 million to the Vector Control Department, \$1.3 million for Tuberculosis, \$1.2 million for the National

AIDS Programme Secretariat (NAPS), \$1.2 million for the Veterinary Public Health Unit, \$400,000 for the Epidemiology Unit, and about \$100,000 for administration.

Dr. Cummings: Regarding the Entomology Unit, I thought by now we would have gotten a building for that. I think we were doing some work there. Also, you have dismantled the HEOC. Do you have a substitute for that? We had the HEOC for the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), and you have dismantled that. Have you replaced it with something else?

Dr. Anthony: The Entomology building is still on Thomas Lands. We have been looking for suitable sites to possibly construct a different building for that department, but that is not in this budget.

In terms of the HEOC, it remains functional because we still do have cases of COVID-19. As of today, there are about 15 persons, over the last 24 hours, who tested positive out of 255 tests that were done. There are about 133 people with the COVID-19 active, and there are 12 persons in the hospital. We still have cases, and therefore we still have to maintain the system to ensure that we can coordinate the different hospitals and so forth.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, I just want to let the Minister know that we are going to an oil-rich country, we are building maternal hospitals and so on, but gene sequencing could probably be in the next budget. I have not seen anything for gene sequencing for the public health laboratory.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, is gene sequencing included or will be later?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is something that we are working towards. I am very happy that the Hon. Member mentioned that. In fact, last year, we had a partnership with Harvard University. Through that collaboration, we have brought down a gene sequencer, which is housed at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory, and we were able to use that sequencer to do plasmodium falciparum. We have sequenced the plasmodium falciparum, looking for gene mutation that can hold for resistance to the current medications that we are using. Fortunately, we have not found any such mutation, but we do have a sequencer at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory now. That was because of this collaboration. Of course, we want to extend that. We have spoken to the guys at Harvard University, and we are going to, in some cases, be able to have the reagents to repurpose it so that we can do sequencing for variants. That is something

that we are working at. Our staff at the reference lab have been trained. They went up to Harvard, they spent six weeks there, they got good training in terms of how to do sequencing. We have capacity. When you said that, it is not a far stretch for us to start expanding into these areas.

Ms. Ferguson: Line item 6272 – Electricity Charges: I note, for last year, we had a budgeted sum of some \$55 million and then we had a revised amount of one hundred and twenty something million. I note, for 2023, you are now seeking \$ 78,491,000. Is this figure adequate? And what occasioned the decrease, while it is welcoming?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Hon. Member; very astute observation. This really is to pay off some arrears that we had from previous years. We were able to pay that off, and now the amounts that we have here would cover our annual amounts. This is a realistic number.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control – Communicable Diseases – \$6,618,002,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 472 – Disease Control – Communicable Diseases – \$2,399,700,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 1216200 – Ministry of Health – Buildings: Provision is being made for an X-ray room. Where will this room be located? And do you have sufficient X-ray technicians to serve this department?

Dr. Anthony: Basically, the tuberculosis department has been asking for an X-ray unit for a number of years. They want their patients to be able to get their X-rays right on site to prevent the patients from being lost to follow-up and all of that. This provision is really to install an X-ray unit right at the tuberculosis clinic so that patients can have access to medical imaging right in the unit. This \$9 million is to do the room so that we can do the installation of the X-ray unit. The unit is already bought, so we are now awaiting retrofitting the room so that we can install this.

Dr. Cummings: Project code 2509000 speaks to the purchase of medical equipment. Could the Hon. Minister list the medical equipment to be purchased, as same has not been specified in the legend and where would this new equipment be located?

Dr. Anthony: It is a very long list of equipment that we will be buying. I will just say that some of it, for example a CD4 machine, would be placed at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory. As I said before, we are buying a lot

of equipment for the leprosy clinic, so there are a number of analysers and items that they require. Basically, most of the equipment would go to the National Public Health Reference Laboratory and the new laboratory that we are setting up for the leprosy clinic.

Dr. Cummings: Project code 4405200 – COVID-19 Response Programme: The International Development Association (IDA) is a very meticulous financial institution. Do you have a plan for this initiative, and how will it be rolled out? Could this committee be given a copy of the response plan, if you have a plan?

Dr. Anthony: We have a loan with the World Bank. Under that loan we have procured a number of things. This year, we intend to procure equipment and reagents for our laboratories so that we can strengthen what we are doing at the Guyana Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) and the National Public Health Reference Laboratory. We will be adding equipment at all the regional reference laboratories. We will also be doing work with our cold chain. They will be getting refrigerators and other items that they need through this programme. We have a very comprehensive list of hospital equipment, and this would be going to all the different hospitals to ensure that they have capacity to be able to treat patients with COVID-19, but the equipment can be used for other ailments. Once it is a critical patient, we would be able to treat them. This is going to help us to do that.

We have also set aside money for transportation. We are buying a number of all-terrain vehicles (ATV) for remote communities under this programme. We have set aside a sum of money for surveillance, so as to improve surveillance across the system. We have also set aside some moneys to do promotional activities to get people to come to our vaccination drives and things like that.

In terms of some of the equipment that we are buying, we note where there has been a gap in terms of biosafety cabinets, so we are buying six new biosafety cabinets; we are buying six new gene-expert machines; we are buying some bronchoscopes, so if we have to intubate, we can intubate people properly; we have blood gas analysers; we have haematology analysers; we have biochemistry analysers, and so forth. In terms of some of the equipment for the hospitals, we have anaesthetic machines; we have autoclaves; we have infant bronchoscopes, cardiac beds, cardiac monitors, hospital beds, defibrillator machines; digital X-rays, we are buying four of those; portable X-ray units, we are buying six of those; examination beds, we have 15 of those; Internal

Care Unit (ICU) beds, we are getting 20 of those; infusion pumps, 20; laryngoscope, 8; spirometry machines, 5; oxygen concentrators, 12; portable foetal machines, we are getting three of those; portable ultrasound, six of those, and so forth. There are a number of equipment that we are getting for the various hospitals under this programme.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control – Communicable Diseases – \$2,399,700,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

11.14 a.m.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$3,702,685,000

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, you would agree with me that infant mortality is an important marker of the overall health of the society. In fact, it is a guide as to life expectancy of the country. This programme is an important programme as it covers the full continuum of essential health services, not only infant mortality but child and maternal mortality. In the light of expanding programme and to address the inequities, Minister do you think there is adequate staff to provide quality care to men, women and children? There is a reduction of 33 employees. Once again, do you have vacancies?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, very much, for that question. One of the things that we will be doing is strengthening our primary health care services. We took a step last year of looking at each level of service and what are the interventions we want to offer at each level. We have come up with about 216 interventions at health posts and at health centre level, which includes maternal and child health services. What we are doing now is retrofitting the physical facility. We have done some of that work last year. We will continue to do some this year. We are buying the necessary equipment to be able to do that.

In terms of human resources, we are also expanding and training more people. For example, in Regions 1 and 9, we now have at every health post or health centre, at least two Community Health Workers (CWOs). They have been trained over the last two years and that type of expansion is going to continue. We are working very hard to launch a registered nursing programme online. as soon as that opens, we expect that we should be able to get about 1,000 persons applying to do registered nursing. This will be a three-year programme and every year, we are hoping to attract at least 1,000 into that programme. Overtime, we would be able to

get the relevant human resource that we need to operate the system.

We are also training in pharmacy, pharmacy aid and there is a whole host of other programmes that we are working on simultaneously. We have decentralised some of these programmes so that we can get people from the respective regions to be trained. We understand that we have some human resource deficit, but we are actively working to address that. These are the ways in which we are doing that.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, before I go on to line item 6116, Contracted Employees, it would be remiss of me not to ask this policy question because as you are aware maternal deaths is a topical issue. In 2000, it was reported that \$12.4 billion was allocated for paediatric and maternal hospitals, among other health care investments. Could the Minister tell us how much of that money spent on the paediatric hospitals so far? Could you also share with this National Assembly, what work has been done on the project and how the contractor was identified to undertake this job? Could you also tell us what is the status of the design and the other works on this hospital? Since you have a design in mind, could you tell us how many beds the hospital will have? Could you say how the hospital will be financed? Could you inform this Assembly of the projected final cost of the hospital including equipping it? Could you say when the hospital will be completed and what arrangements are being made to put in place to ensure that the hospital will be properly and adequately staffed?

Dr. Anthony: Indeed, we are building a maternal and paediatric hospital. That hospital would have 256 beds. We have just recently concluded the detail design of the hospital. We had a team from the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) Paediatrics Department, who provided a lot of the technical inputs into what should go into the paediatric section of the hospital. We also had a number of the consultants from the Obstetrics Department of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation participating in the technical design of the Obstetrics side of the hospital. This hospital is being built by VAMED Engineering. It is an Austrian company that has done more than 1,000 hospitals around the world. Hon. Member, one may recall the Austrian Government and the Government of Guyana in 2018, signed an agreement and through that agreement, a number of facilities were earmarked for development. Under that agreement that was signed, I think by the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, one of the facilities that was earmarked was the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.

When we came into Government, we reviewed the agreement and we decided at the time that we wanted to build a maternal and child health hospital and we amended that agreement. It is under that agreement that we are building this maternal and child health hospital. In terms of the financing, we are using the United Kingdom (UK) banks to finance this hospital. It is at a very concessionary rate. Therefore, through this arrangement of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), we have been able to do this quite successfully. We have started the work on the hospital. As I said, when you are doing construction, you first have to do the design phase. The contractors were given six months to do the designs. This contract was signed sometime in June last year. They have now, more or less completed the designs. While they were doing the designs, they have also started doing site preparations and so the site is now prepared. Very shortly, we expect that they would be able to start putting down the foundation and start building the hospital. This hospital is slated to be completed by early 2025. From the time of signing, I think they had 36 months in which to complete this hospital, fully operational. It is not just the hospital, it is everything in the hospital – all the equipment and everything must be fully functional. It is a turn-key project.

In terms of staffing that would be required, right now we are working on the types of people we would need for this facility. This is a facility that we have never had before, the types of specialists that we will need. Some of them we do not have right now. We have to start by either recruiting people or identifying persons who we will recruit and bring them to Guyana, to be able to work in this facility. While we are doing that, we are also looking at the doctors and nurses that we have in the system and see whether we can send some of them for training. We have a collaboration with McMaster University. Through McMaster, we have been sending quite a number of persons to do fellowships, especially in Paediatrics and so forth. This year, we have a number of persons who would be going up to McMaster to do fellowships in paediatrics, in interventional radiology and in obstetrics. We also have a partnership with Northwell. With Northwell we will be sending a number of persons to do work, in terms of obstetrics. With various international partners, we are hoping that we can train a lot of our local doctors, so that they can become the specialist that would be operating at this paediatric and maternal hospital.

As you can see, this is going to be a sub-speciality hospital, so we will need a lot of these types of specialists. Those that we do not have, in the interim we will have to hire those persons so that the services can be provided. One thing that I

think you should also note is, this hospital would have a cardiac theatre, which is very important. We do have a backlog of paediatric cardiac cases. This hospital will have a specialised cardiac theatre where our backlog that we currently have, we would be able to work on them. In anticipation of when this hospital would be opened, we have been working since last year to acquire equipment and all sorts of things to restart the paediatric cardiac programme at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. Hopefully, we will be able to operate on the first 20 or so children that have various types of cardiac problems, this year. We are hoping that we can continue that programme, so when the hospital opens it is a natural flow, where this team that will be at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation now, will go across to the hospital. We have started this type of planning.

With nurses, again, we have some specialised training that we are working on. We have some partnerships with universities in Canada, to get some of our nurses specialised in the areas that we will need them to be in the new hospital. We have a partnership, as you know with Brazil where a number of nurses have gone there to get further training. That is going to continue because we will continue to have this type of partnership.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Before you take the next question, just clear up something for my mind. I thought we were dealing with current. What you described, seemed to have been a capital project. Is it included here? Is it?

Dr. Anthony: No.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, I did not want to stop you but let us ask questions pertaining to this particular head. I am sure there are opportunities in other places to go and ask questions pertaining to Capital. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was deciding whether it was capital or policy, but it is okay.

Mr. Chairman: We have a lot of information in the legends and in the volumes that will guide us.

Dr. Cummings: Line Item 6116 – Contracted Employees: What is the reason for the increase of \$88,565,000. It has moved from \$215,977,000 to \$304,542,000. Could the Hon. Minister indicate to the Members of this Assembly, the remuneration package and the designations of the top five employees from this line item?

Dr. Anthony: The top five persons under this category would be dental surgeons. A dental surgeon would now receive \$555,008 per month, a prosthodontist at \$450,000 per month, a maxillofacial surgeon at \$450,000 per month, a co-ordinator for health strengthening at \$432,000 and one staff nurse at \$351,000 per month.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6112 – Senior Technical: Could the Hon. Minister state the top five persons, their remuneration packages and their designations? What is the reason for the increase from \$185,390,000 to \$207,685,000?

Dr. Anthony: The top five here would be the Director of Primary Health Care Services at \$660,000 per month, an Orthodontist at \$450,000 per month, we have a prosthodontist at \$450,000 per month, a senior dental surgeon at \$450,000 per month and a Maternal and Child Health Officer at \$400,000 per month.

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services - \$3,702,685,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

11.29 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, before I move to the next head, we have 12 programmes to come and 30 minutes to deal with them.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$118,945,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 1216200 – Ministry of Health – Buildings: Provision for maxillofacial clinic and vaccination bond, payment for retention at a cost of \$21 million. Is the bond located at Kingston? Where is this new bond located? There was not much detail in the legend.

Dr. Anthony: The bond is at Kingston. There is an upper floor that is being constructed.

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$118,945,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$25,480,435,000

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: There is an increase in the number of contracted employees. The number of 610 employees could have filled the vacancy

in 2022, to a tune of \$1,694,013,000, as compared to 795 employee vacancies to be filled in 2023, to a tune of \$2,710,133,000. There is an increase of 185 persons. Could the Minister state the top five personnel that make up this category of healthcare workers, their designations and emoluments?

Dr. Anthony: The top five here would be the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the New Amsterdam Public Hospital at \$993,000, a neurosurgeon at \$899,000, a Regional Health Officer (RHO) at \$848,000, a consultant for obstetrics at \$749,000, and another consultant at \$732,000.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$25,480,435,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$19,073,900,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 2405600 – Land and Water Transport: For the purchase of ambulances, vehicles, boat, engine and motorcycles. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the cost of the various items? The number of ambulances to be purchased, the location, the number of vehicles to be purchased, specifications *et cetera*?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Hon. Member. Under this project code, we will be buying one minibus. We have budgeted approximately \$7 million. Two double cab all-terrain pickups. We approximate the cost at about \$9 million each. That would be \$18 million. We are looking at five motorcycles at \$2.3 million. Two all-terrain ambulances at \$32,000. We also have all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and ATV accessories. Eleven ATVs at \$23.1 million. We have one boat, and a boat engine. That is \$2.5 million.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$19,073,900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$2,135,331,000

Dr. Cummings: Standards and Technical Services, line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: There is a drastic increase in contracted employees. Moving from 4 employees to 65 with a concomitant increase from \$19 million being the revised amount in 2022, now to \$143,215,000. Could the Minister tell us what is the reason for this drastic increase? Could the

Minister give us the designation and remuneration packages of the top three employees?

Dr. Anthony: A number of persons came on as contracted employees. I do not have the sum here but there are quite a lot of people who came on as contracted employees. That is why there is an increase. The top three, we have a superintendent of pharmacies, that person receives about \$679,000, a food inspector at \$219,000, and an administrative officer at \$166,000.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): In 2022, there was a revised sum of \$24,122,000, and there is now a budgeted sum of \$41,900,000. Could this Minister let this August body know what is the reason for the increase in this line item?

Dr. Anthony: The increase amounts to about \$17.7 million. What we intend to do is a number of trainings in terms of laboratory services, quality of laboratory services *et cetera*. We are working to get accreditation so our staff needs to be at a certain level. We will be spending \$12.9 million for training in our laboratories. We will be spending \$3 million to train persons at the food and drug administration, and \$1.3 million for the National Blood Transfusion Services. There is specific training that they have to undergo so that they can keep their accreditation with the Association for the Advancement of Blood & Biotherapies (AABB). The rest of the money would be spent on quality assurance. We will spend some additional money on the National Blood Transfusion Services, regional support services, government pharmacy and the food and drug administration.

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$2,135,331,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$260,200,000

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$260,200,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$806,412,000

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6294 – Other: There is an increase from \$18,960,000 to \$29 million, an increase of

\$10,040,000. What is the reason for this increase and could the Minister tell us what constitutes Other?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Mr. Chairman, this year we will be spending \$29 million. The sum of \$23 million will go towards the buying of hearing aids for persons who require them. As you may know, as of last year, we started to give these hearing aids free of cost. Before that, persons had to pay \$65,000 for a hearing aid. Now, they are going to get it for free. We are also going to be spending \$4.2 million to buy wheelchairs for persons who need them. This year, we have introduced another thing, that is, to buy offloading footwear for patients who are diabetic. A sum of money has been allocated for that. We have a sum of money for walkers, clutches *et cetera*. That is what this \$29 million will be spent on.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6112 – Senior Technical: There is a decrease in the staff complement from 43 to 39, with an increase from \$95,844,000 to \$108,778,000, an increase of \$12 million. Could the Hon. Member give the designation and emoluments for the top three employees?

Dr. Anthony: The top three here would be the Director of the Disability and Rehabilitation Services Department, who is receiving \$660,000, an optometrist at \$350,000 and a physiotherapist at \$245,000.

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$806,412,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, kindly give me one moment. I am asking the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly if he could come forward a bit as we welcome the other 30 students from Camille's Academy, Soesdyke.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$60,000,000

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$60,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

11.44 a.m.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 478 – Disease Control - Non-Communicable Diseases – \$742,600,000

Dr. Cummings: This is a very important department, as almost 70% of the budget comes under Non-Communicable

Diseases (NCDs). When we were in Government, we formed an NCD Commission. I do not know what has become of that. Is it still operable? It is not stated under the line items, and I cannot find it in the Legend and the appendixes at the back. Where is that allocation? Is there still the NCD Commission; is there a building, a person in charge; and where could we find where persons are being paid from?

Dr. Anthony: The Commission is operational, but you missed it. It is under Programme 1.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I will allow you to go back if you want to ask him a question.

Dr. Cummings: It is okay.

Mr. Chairman: Is it okay?

Dr. Cummings: Yes. Line item 6221 – Drugs and Medical Supplies: Could the Hon. Minister please tell us why such an increase from \$160,032,000 to \$391,400,000? This corresponds to a whooping increase of \$231,368,000. What are the drugs and medical supplies to be purchased under this line item?

Dr. Anthony: The line item for drugs and medical supplies will be line item 6221. Is that what you are asking about?

Dr. Cummings: Yes.

Dr. Anthony: There are a couple of things that we are doing. One, we started this programme last year, the Healthy lifestyle, Evidence-based treatment protocol, Access to essential medicine and technology, Risk-based management, Team care and-Task Sharing, System for Monitoring (HEARTS). We are rolling that out to more health centres now. The medication required for that particular programme is much different from what was generally being used. We will be using \$79.3 million for that particular programme. We have also set aside \$22.6 million for the prevention of cervical cancer. Under the previous programme, we did not go into that, but we have rolled out the doing Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (HPV) vaccination through that programme. Here we will be doing Visual Inspection with Acetic Acid (VIA), HPV screening and so forth.

We have set aside \$82.7 million for insulin. There are a number of diabetes patients that require insulin. Therefore, we have to buy and supply them with insulin, including 183 children who will also receive insulin because they have Type 1 Diabetes. We have \$6 million set aside for persons with kidney disease. We have set aside \$12.9 million to do respiratory management. There are some patients now that have long Coronavirus Disease (COVID) with the challenge

of breathing and some long-term challenges. They will require special attention which is spirometry on a regular basis. The physiotherapy department will work with them so they could get some improvement with their breathing.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6282 – Equipment Maintenance: A revised sum of \$3,383,000 was budgeted for in 2022, but this sum has increased to \$22,172,000. Could the Hon. Minister state what equipment are to be maintained under this programme?

Dr. Anthony: The equipment here is basically to do with the office equipment that they have in their office, so we have set aside some money here for air condition (AC) units, refrigerators and things like that. It is a small sum of money.

Programme: 478 – Disease Control - Non-Communicable Diseases – \$742,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 478 – Disease Control - Non-Communicable Diseases – \$152,000,000

Programme: 478 – Disease Control - Non-Communicable Diseases – \$152,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, would you like to say something?

Dr. Anthony: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Did we miss the Health Science Education programme?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, we did. We missed the Health Sciences Education programme for capital expenditure. Did we miss both the current and capital expenditure?

Hon. Member: Yes, we miss both.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. We are now on pages 246 and 247.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$1,643,097,000

Dr. Cummings: The Hon. Minister boast that there will be more training for healthcare workers but there are not adequate staff to carry out this training. There is a decrease in the senior technical staff from 27 in 2022 to 19 in 2023, a reduction of seven employees as seen in the Chart of Account, line item 6112, Senior Technical and 6116, Contracted Employees, respectively. The performance indicator suggested that there is a goal of 14 to one in terms

of the student-tutor ratio. It is targeted for 2023. How does the Hon. Minister plan to build this capacity in healthcare workers when there is a shortage of staff?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, very much for that question. The people who have currently enrolled as tutors and so forth will continue. We will probably recruit some more as we expand the programmes. We are also now using a lot more of the capacity that there is within the system and that is the doctors and senior nurses who could all work as tutors because they are doing both the theory and practical. We intend, as we expand training, to get a lot more of these persons involved. For example, let us say, in Region 6, we have been involving more of the medical staff to be part of the teaching programme, similarly, in Linden and in other places. One of the reasons why we were able to decentralise some of these programmes is because our medical staff are now also doing some teaching.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): A revised \$265,080,000 was allotted in 2022, but there is an increase of 107%. Is it due to an increase in the stipends for nursing students or is it to assist them with their partial recovery of health learning material? What is the reason for the increase at line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships)?

Dr. Anthony: We spoke about this. One of the things that we will be doing is moving the current registered nursing programme from a classroom space to an online space. We have been working on preparing the materials. We have most of the materials prepared. We are now going to migrate that material to the online platform, so some of the moneys that are allocated here are to do that migration to maintain the system where people are going to come and get registered. When they need training and, so forth, they will need to go to class online. That platform will be stable and would be there. We are partnering with Coursera to be able to offer it on their platform. We know that they have been doing this globally and they have all the know-how of how to make sure people continue learning in that virtual environment. Some of the moneys that are here cater for that migration of the programme.

Dr. Cummings: Line 6292 – Dietary: There was a revised amount of \$61 million in 2022 but, in 2023, there is a whopping increase of \$528,120,000. Could the Hon. Minister state what is responsible for this increase?

Dr. Anthony: Again, in terms of dietary, we have a lot more programmes now and we have decentralised them. For example, we have set aside \$216 million for the programmes

that will be run in Regions 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9. In Region 9, for example, there is another programme that we will be running for nursing assistance. They will require dietary. We have a whole list of different programmes. For the people whom we will be bringing in for training, we would need to provide them with meals.

Dr. Cummings: Could you lay it over for us, please?

Dr. Anthony: We can.

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$1,643,097,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$641,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 1216200,

“Provision for nursery schools and payment for retention.”

This is to the tune of \$620 million. Could the Minister please tell the Committee where is the location of this construction?

Dr. Anthony: Under this heading, we have set aside some moneys to complete the generator hut at the New Amsterdam Nursing School. We are also completing some work that was started at the New Amsterdam Nursing School which is going to be about \$119 million. We have set aside moneys to do a number of facilities, including one at Anna Regina, which is to build a nursing school in Essequebo. We are also going to retrofit some of the existing facilities. This is because, when we move to the online environment of learning, one of the things that we will also need is to have simulation centres where persons will be able to come in and do the practical component of nursing. A lot of these centres are there to offer that simulated environment where people will learn, so that is why we are building this facility in Region 2.

Dr. Cummings: Project code 2508900 – Office Furniture and Equipment: The sum of \$21 million has been allocated for this project. What are the furniture and equipment to be purchased and for which nursing school or schools?

Dr. Anthony: Under this heading, there are two desktop computers, 15 power backups, six laptop computers, seven multimedia projectors, one photocopier, one multipurpose printer, six line conditioners, one executive desk, five office desks, eight executive chairs, two metal cupboards, 50 combination chairs, 19 metal bedframe and those come with

mattress, one podium, three water tanks, one refrigerator, one industrial oven, stabiliser, floor model commercial food blender. There are a whole host of other things here.

11.59 a.m.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Members. That exhaust the time that we have for this agency.

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$641,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us all thank the Hon. Minister and his staff for a very informative and efficient presentation. Thank you very much, Hon. Members. Hon. Members, we have the Ministry of Home Affairs, Agency 51 next. I am asking the staff if they could put an additional two seats in the front row for the Ministry of Home Affairs as the Hon. Minister, Permanent Secretary and the leadership of our security services get in place. As they do, could we turn to pages 260 and 261?

I am reminded of a famous saying, I think it may have been a United States (US) President. He said, when you stand between your audience and a meal, you must be sincere, be brief, and be seated. Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, I heard you did a lot of work, and you are going to be very concise and precise. I trust the Minister will too.

Agency: 51 – Ministry of Home Affairs

Current Expenditure

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,380,785,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Hon. Minister, I refer the Minister to line item 6116 – Contracted Employee, there is an increase of 39 contracted employees. Could the Minister indicate to the House, how many Advisors fall within this category and the designations, emoluments, benefits, and the skill sets of the top five employees?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: I want to thank the Hon. Member for her question. I am elated that she is still my shadow. To answer the question, there is one Ministerial Advisor at \$520,000 a month, \$10,000 duty allowance, and \$10,000 entertainment allowance. The top five, of course: there is a Permanent Secretary, Director of Juvenile Justice, Business [*Inaudible*] and Quality Assurance Officer, Head of

Strategic Managing Department, and Administrator of the Utility Services Unit.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, according to the performance statement, one of the Ministry's strategies is to formulate, implement, and monitor national security policies. Could you indicate the staff complement and their skill sets that will deal with this?

Mr. Benn: The formulations and the relationships, the engagement in relation to national security policy is done at different levels in the Ministry, bringing together the skill set from the police, fire, the prison service and, also, the specialised departments in the Ministry.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I thank you, Minister, but the question is very specific. I am asking for you to indicate the staff complement. That simply means the number and their skill sets. I understand that it is being drawn from different agencies. It is a simple question.

Mr. Benn: I did indicate that it relates indeed to the strategic management departments, both at the Ministry and at the agencies. In terms of total complement and not adding specialists in the various areas of those departments and agencies, and, also, those of the Ministry, it would number perhaps over 50 persons.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: That is an answer I am comfortable with. Again, according to your performance statement, you are seeking to reintroduce reformed prisoners into the community. Could you indicate how many of your staff are trained specifically in social reintegration, the period of their training and whether these trainings were done locally or externally? According to this initiative from your Ministry, how many prisoners have benefited?

Mr. Benn: I am not sure as to the thrust of the question. In relation to the overall vision, mission and changes in our transition that we are going through, we are talking about increasing the peace in Guyana. That in total represents full engagement at all levels in the Ministry and in the forces.

In respect of the prisons, recently we had what we call a Fresh Start project which we have introduced and launched, where prisoners are being trained, educated and given the tools of the trade for when they exit the prison so that their reintegration in society would be better. They would have the ability to earn an income, they would not be left adrift and disdained, and would, of course, earn an income and be useful both for themselves and their families, and do not create any harm for their community, their families or themselves.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Minister, it would be assumed that there is a concept paper *vis-a-vis* this issue. Could you tell us based on that, what do you preserve to be the requisite skills needed to reintegrate people into our society?

Mr. Benn: As I may have said before in the Parliament, we are building a new prison complex at Lusignan. At this new prison complex, the prison headquarters will be relocated to Lusignan. A prison school is being built. A school to make up the training and education they might have missed at various levels coming up to whatever standard they are at. There will be trade shops at a vocational centre for training in various skills so that when they leave, they will sow mechanics, electrical, furniture making, animal husbandry – we want to be big on that because we want them to use the opportunity for getting into planting and other things. I want to thank the Hon. Minister Zulfikar for giving us some of the introductory materials – shade houses and other things – to get them more involved in doing things with their hands, and to move their focus away from other things which sometimes happen in the prison system.

Mr. Norton: I asked a specific question. If one looks at countries like Finland, *et cetera*, that have these programmes, there are certain skills that are needed. For instance, let me give you one example. Apart from psychologists, what are the other skills you see as requisites and needed to effectively achieve your objectives?

Mr. Benn: It may be under another programme, but we have a Psychologist already. We have Welfare Officers who are trained along that line in respect of welfare issues, not only for the prisoners, but also for the Prison Officers. We are working hard at expanding the types of training and information and reformatting the way we intervene in respect of these issues. I think, recently, in respect of prisoners, we released 10 persons under what we call the Fresh Start project, where they were trained in specific work disciplines, skill sets and given tools, leaving the prison to reintegrate. Yes, this is a new thing for us, but we are working hard at it. Our strategic management department created an introductory format, and we are rolling this out in this year.

Mr. Norton: I assume that something like this has a concept paper. Is the Minister prepared to lay in this Parliament the document that outlines the clear objectives, the stated outcomes, so that we could view it, and have a mechanism by which we judge the efficacy of it?

Mr. Benn: We will lay it over.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: According to your indicators in your performance statement, 29 visits are targeted for this year by the Parole Board. However, there were zero visits for last year. Could you indicate why no such visits were done for last year? I am fully aware that visits were suspended due to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), however, we have been back to normalcy. Additionally, could you indicate the status of the Parole Board? I have been informed that the new board was appointed in 2020. The life period was one year which means the board has come to an end.

Mr. Benn: In relation to the visits, you did give an answer to the first part – COVID-19. Then, in respect of the movement of prisoners, there was not an opportunity, properly, to keep full meetings during the time. We had a resignation of the Chairman of the Parole Board. There will be reappointments made shortly.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, I am not sure if you have answered the question on the status of the Parole Board, is it operational? Is it functional? Like I said, I have been informed that the new board was reconstituted in November, 2020. It was constituted for a term of one year which expired in 2021.

Mr. Benn: The Parole Board is functional, and it had a meeting last week.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: The Minister is saying that the board is functional, does that mean that the current board's life was extended? If it has been extended, could you provide the date of the Gazetted order and the composition of the current board?

12.14 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister before you answer. I need to remind Members that we have to ask questions pertaining to the allocation. I have been allowing some flexibility, but now we are going into matters which should have been taken care of during the general debate. A question could have been framed, does this allocation have enough money so that it would not hamper the work of the newly constituted board? Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I have given the floor to you. Hon. Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Benn: Thank you Mr. Chairman. We will give the information on the Members of the Parole Board.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may have the floor.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to comment that...

Mr. Chairman: You have to ask a question on a line item, if you give a comment, I will invite a comment from the other side.

Mr. Norton: I do not have a problem with that, but you made a comment and I wanted to clarify.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Norton: You are saying, Mr. Chairman, that it must relate to the line item. But if there is a line and cost for the board and you ask if the board exist, does it not make it relate? That is my concern.

Mr. Chairman: The issue was answered, and I allowed some [*Inaudible*] but then when we are asking about past performance of the board and past composition of the board... We have had some entrees into history prior and we are now trying to be more efficient with our time. Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you may have the floor.

Mr. Ramjattan: I noticed that there has been a \$60 million or a little more than \$60 million increase under Other, line item 6294. I do not see any explanation in any of the volumes for that. Could you tell us what it is all about or disaggregate?

Mr. Benn: If I give a breakdown of the issues under line item 6294, Other, it relates to Increase the Peace initiative, \$50 million; it relates to top-up payments and operational expenses for the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU), some \$60 million; operational expenses and community policing, a sum of \$130 million; there is a Ministerial Taskforce on trafficking in persons, \$15 million; there are moneys for the Forensic Laboratory and the Juvenile Holding Centre; stipends for the Juvenile Justice Committee; moneys for the Firearms Board; the Ministerial Tender Board's stipend; the general administration for the New Opportunity Corps (NOC); and further stipends for the Tender Board Evaluators. The strategic management department will accrue \$450,000.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thanks for that disaggregation. What I noticed in the local organisations, there is a \$15.727 million, and, under page 474, a sum of \$11,230,000 is going to the National Road Safety Council in our local organisations. In view of the very many accidents on road – vehicular accidents, I noticed that \$11.2 million has been consistent

over the years. Do you not think they should get some more for some other workshops, rather than stick only to the same number of \$11.2 million?

Mr. Benn: The \$11 odd million has not been consistent over the years. It used to be \$3 million, that is what we inherited. We increased it to \$11 odd million last year. This is road safety of course. It is true that we need to do more support in respect of road safety issues. We have been working hard on it, particularly after COVID-19. I may remind Hon. Members that, for the first time in the history of our country, we have reduced road deaths to below 100 fatalities for the last two years. Below 100, I am not going to call the numbers when... the honourable predecessor. But, for the first time in 16 years, even though we have increased cars on the road and even though we have increased travel miles on persons traversing the roads, we have reduced it and we intend to reduce it further for this year.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I refer the Minister to line items 6271 and 6272, Telephone and Internet Charges and Electricity Charges. There is an increase of about \$5 million and \$26 million, respectively. Could the Minister provide a brief explanation on these increases? Emphasis is on the word 'brief'.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I think there may have been some accounts which were not paid and which we inherited. We have acquired new buildings in respect of issues for telephone and electricity uses. They relate to the main office, of course, which has been expanded. The Juvenile Holding Centre, the Forensic Laboratory, the Immigration Department and the NOC for telephone. It also relates to new bandwidth and issues for telephone and for the electricity charges, again, those places in respect of increases.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you, if I can turn our attention to line item 6241, Rental of Buildings. I note for last year, we had an approved sum of \$19.1 million and a revised of \$10 million. I note for 2023, the Ministry is now requesting some \$24 million. Could the Hon. Member provide us with the locations of the buildings – that is one? Two – provide us with the disaggregated amount for each building that is being rented? Thank you.

Mr. Benn: The increase in rentals caters for rental of buildings to house the victims of trafficking in persons unit at Hadfield Street. There are moneys for the Ministerial Advisor – rental, there are moneys related to the Immigration Support Services and the various other rentals in relation to the work of the Ministry.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member failed to provide the disaggregated amount which represents the total of \$29 million and change for the areas that he has just shared with the honourable House.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I do not know if you failed but you have not provided it as yet.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member, rental of building for the Advisor to the Minister, \$1.8 million; rental for the Immigration Department which has expanded, \$4.8 million; rental for the Junior Juvenile Justice and the Trafficking In Persons (TIPs) Department, \$8.4 million and then \$9.5 million for rental to house for victims of trafficking in persons.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I ask for some guidance from the Hon. Minister pertaining to line item 6116, Total Wages and Salaries. Does this line item cater for the Advisor to the Minister of Home Affairs?

Mr. Benn: Yes, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. I think I indicated this before.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, could the Hon. Minister provide to this honourable House with the remuneration package for the Advisor to the Minister of Home Affairs in terms of his salary and other benefits?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I called out the very sums before here. I mean you might need some hydrogen peroxide or something, I can call them out again, but we talked about being brief. I repeat, Ministerial Advisor a sum of \$520,000 with \$10,000 Duty Allowance and \$10,000 Entertainment Allowance and that is repeating.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, just one follow up? Would the Minister please lay over the description of his job – the Ministerial Advisor – in terms of what is his job description? I just want to confirm, Sir, that we are paying that amount of money for someone who is an expert advisor, especially with home affairs.

Mr. Benn: We will Mr. Chairman and Members, lay out a description of his job.

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,380,785,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$261,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I refer to project code 2169110, which deals with community policing. In February of 2022, the Minister is on record stating that we would create 175 new ones – that is in relation to community groups this year, that was in 2022. Could the Minister provide an update on the creation of the 175 policing groups? Could you also give us the location of these community groups?

Mr. Benn: We did this last year, but I will do it again. The name of the groups, Region 1 Moruca, Kwebanna, Wallaba, Manawarin, Kamwatta, Mora, Haimarakabra, Waramuri Mission, Rincon, Karaburi, Parakesi, Santa Cruz, a total of 11 groups with 243. These are the new ones, Ma'am. I could lay them all over because I have several pages of the new ones.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: In relation to the provision of equipment and furniture, I am more interested in the equipment, not the furniture. I do not want to hear about the cabinets, the refrigerators, *et cetera*. This is in relation to project code 2608200.

12.29 p.m.

Mr. Benn: I just want to suggest but for a few additions, all of the equipment, except for new changes is what we inherited. If you want it by department... [**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** Could you just lay it over?] No, let me just call them out. For the Information Technology (IT) Department, there are uninterruptible power sources (UPS), four laptops, badge printing materials, and managed switches. There are air-conditioned (AC) units for the Administrative Department. Of course, you do not want to hear about chairs and so on. There is the expansion of the telephone system with \$2 million for that. There is a scanner and shredders. [**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** (*Inaudible*)] I have two pages of it. For the Immigration Support Services, there are desktop computers, filing cabinets, money counting machines, the balance of payment for equipment and furniture, and microcentrifuge. [**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** (*Inaudible*) no, lay it over.] Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member asked for the information. She said that she did not want to hear about the furniture.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you are doing a great job. I heard what she asked.

Mr. Benn: I am trying to answer.

Mr. Chairman: Anything else in the form of a heckle, I do not hear.

Mr. Benn: There is a solid phase extractor, camera for [*inaudible*], ultra-pure water systems, Canon ImageRunner Advance printer, ultraviolet (UV) camera and lamp and Vertex Techno Solutions mix and mini servers for the IT Department. There are long-range walkie-talkies, fire pumps, closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems and so on.

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$261,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$19,699,819,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I refer the Hon. Minister to line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships). There is an allocation of \$140 million and I am on record to state that this is commendable. Wherever there is an investment in human personnel, I have absolutely no hesitation in supporting it. The Minister, in his budget presentation, said that crime is a serious problem, they are embracing a more emphatic approach and will adopt less lethal efforts. This, again, is very commendable. Could the Minister indicate the number of officers who will be trained to embrace this emphatic approach and the specific departments that will benefit – the spread across the country? Will this training be conducted locally or internationally? Will you also be partnering with international human rights bodies to assist you?

Mr. Benn: I want to thank the Hon. Member for her question. I want to correct the article that you are probably reading. I said, “empathetic” not emphatic. It is empathetic. [**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** It is the same thing.] It is empathetic. With respect to training, I am glad that the Hon. Member supports our interventions to provide more training, career development and skills for the Guyana Police Force (GPF). I could briefly call out some of the training interventions. There is the initial training for Special Constables. There are conversion courses for Special Constables and, of course, recruit training. These are at the various police colleges in Georgetown, Berbice and Essequibo. There will be Criminal Investigation Department (CID) introduction courses at Nations Incorporated. There are Drill Instructor courses, computer training, Portuguese courses, domestic violence and child abuse training, forensic video analysis training, immigration training and cyber security training. There will be training for the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU), of course. There will be Incident Command Systems (ICS) training, crime

intelligence training, Certifying Officers' course, Station Sergeants' course and management courses.

I would say that there is a conference going on over the next two to three days with respect to the middle management of the Guyana Police Force. There is an Elementary Prosecutors' course, a newly promoted subordinate officers' course, a junior officers' course, a skill-at-arms training, public order and anti-crime training, tactical training, traffic seminars, radio communication training, voice procedures training, social intervention training, community network training, disciplinary procedures seminars and trafficking in-person (TIP) training. There will be Microsoft (MS) Office training for police professionals in the Administrative Department. There will be Introduction to Human Resources Management, Occupational Health and Safety, Basic English and budget preparation courses at the University of Guyana's Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE). There will be critical thinking training, ethics and the police officer training, team policing training, stress management training, conflict and situation analysis training, community relations training and audit training for financial and materials systems. There will be professional certificate programmes at Texila American University. There will be a Prosecutors' course at Nations Incorporated. There will be cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid multi-year courses. There will be Diploma in Public Safety and Security Management and a course in cyber security at the University of Guyana. There is a total of \$139 million for training.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Could you indicate, Minister, how many of your ranks will be trained on the provisions of the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act, more specifically as it relates to the categories of vehicles authorised to use flashing lights and sirens? We will all agree that this is a sore and perennial problem. I am sure that you would want to have this situation rectified. Could you also confirm whether you intend to bring any sort of legislation or regulation to exempt Ministers of Government from this category? Clearly, they are in breach of this regulation.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister, very empathetic.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member for the question. Over 1000 traffic officers will be trained and certified with respect to issues relating to traffic. On the question of lights, it has become unfortunate that through some stores in the city and other places – which we are working on – police lights are available for sale and people put them up and misuse them. There are a few situations for

senior officials and also Diplomats, whereby we have reciprocity in relation to the use of lights for emergency purposes. This is for them to get to situations which require meetings or respond to emergencies.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, the Minister referred to reciprocity. Could he tell us the countries with which he is reciprocating?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, basically all members of the diplomatic corps – at that top level – are required to have a light both on the vehicles of the Ambassador and High Commissioner and perhaps on an escort vehicle. We have to tweak the legislation to take into account the changed situations. We have more traffic on the road and people cannot get where they want in time when there is a situation. We have to deal with that issue.

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

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I know you are anxious, but you know that I have to acknowledge the Minister's response and then recognise you. You are on the floor now.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, the Minister said they were reciprocating. That presupposes that a number of countries asked them and they are reciprocating. If the Minister said that, then he should be able to say to us which countries requested these and are reciprocating. To tell us all the countries would not help us. For instance, there are embassies that I see moving around without lights.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chair, I said that we reciprocate. It is necessary and important for the security and safety of the diplomats and the high plenipotentiaries to our country. Those ones which have lights are the ones which requested them. Those who do not use the lights are not using them. We have to do things sometimes on the flow to make sure that people are safe, particularly, high plenipotentiaries to this country.

Mr. Norton: I accept the explanation but could the Hon. Minister say to me in terms of reciprocation, do our Ambassadors to the United States and Canada have that same...?

Mr. Benn: I will request that information from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, in relation to tweaking the legislation, would this cater for your colleagues and other

persons? I am asking this specifically because I am a daily road user and it is a sore problem for me when I am on the way to drop my children at school, there is absolutely no emergency and these vehicles just put on their flashing lights and push me off the road.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I might have to use a light now to get us back on track. This matter has been raised a number of times during the debate and here. There is a Standing Order with respect to repetition. So, we have actually heard from you. At this time, please ask your next question pertaining to the head directly.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Sir, with due respect, it is a follow-up based on the Minister's response that the legislation will be tweaked. So, my question specifically is, will the legislation be tweaked to accommodate the Minister, and other Ministers of Government and when?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the Hon. Member for her question. It appears as though this is a personal issue for the Hon. Member. Yes, the legislation will be tweaked to accommodate the appropriate users of the lights and...

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I wish to turn to page 227 of Volume 2 where the indicators are. It states here:

“Percentage of court cases lost due to poor evidence provided by the police force”

In 2022, it was 44% and now you have set yourself a target of bringing it down to 1.9%. Could the Hon. Minister tell us what measures will be taken in one year to bring this down from 44% to 1.96%?

Mr. Benn: Hon. Member, my understanding is that it was reduced by 19% last year. If indeed it states 1.9%, it would simply be a possibility of an error or a misread of the statistics.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, let us assume that it is 19%; it is still a large gap. The Hon. Minister still needs to tell us what measures they will take to bring it from 44%. I am even willing to give you 25%, not 19%. What are the measures you will take to bring it down?

12.43 p.m.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman and Hon. Members, I read a detailed list of the training which will be imparted to our Guyana Police Force. The Guyana Police Force is what we inherited. We inherited a Guyana Police Force, and I will say in this place that the efficiency, loyalty and professionalism of the Guyana Police Force was in question at a particular

time. Now that we have removed that doubt, we can talk about improvements. We talked about the reduction in traffic fatalities. I said on the floor of this House that we have reduced serious crimes in Guyana of an order of 20% two years in succession, and we will reduce it further this year. This is why we have an increase in the budget and this is why, even as we speak, we have training going along for the middle management of the Guyana Police Force and we just talked about the \$130 million simply for training of the officers. I spoke yesterday at the conference for these policemen and reminded them that they are peace officers and that we want to increase the peace in Guyana. We want to reduce domestic violence, disorderly crime, homicides due to drugs and other issues and also issues related, perhaps what happened yesterday, to drugs smuggling and drug running. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I enjoyed the penchant for going in the wrong direction, but the Minister said that education and training will be done. Could the Hon. Minister tell this Committee what are the other factors that contribute to this high lost in cases due to prosecution and how is it the police force and the Ministry plan to remedy it?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, yes, I will indulge, nevertheless. I spoke about the prosecutors' course, and I spoke about training for the CID in the listing. The police force can improve and will improve if we focus on its service and protection motto and if we have identified, of course, and they understand that the empathetic and respectful approach to the people and to the public, who pay them, is carried out. We know the problems are poverty, youths in the difficult circumstances and all of those issues, which is why we talk about increasing the peace and treating people better. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Did they investigate (*inaudible*).] I will not speak to any investigation about any Member in this House, including Mr. Mahipaul, the Hon. Member.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much Hon. Minister. Hon. Deputy Speaker has his hands up for a long time to ask a few questions.

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Chairman, I crave your indulgence for short preface. I want to welcome all the students who are here. I am really happy that they have put some weight on the shoulders of my colleagues on this side and brought some degree of sobriety....

Mr. Chairman: The question is, do we have enough money in this estimate to provide lunch?

Mr. Shuman: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I will get to that. I am happy to know that their presence has brought the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to the House. I refer to line item 6264, Vehicle Spares and Service. I wish to ask the Hon. Minister how much of that sum allocated on that line item is dedicated towards equipment for Indigenous communities?

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Benn: In respect of moneys related to the regions which are mostly populated by Indigenous Guyanese, we have brought in new all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and we brought new pick-ups. I think Lethem in Region 9 got two vehicles a few days ago. Other than that, there are also additional equipment which have been brought in and are being brought in pieces in relation to the Community Policing Groups (CPGs). In respect of the hinterland region, such as Region 1, two pickups were recently sent there; Region 7, three pickups were sent; in Region 8, two pickups were sent; Region 9, two additional pickups were sent, and Region 10, two new pickups were sent, along with ATVs and motorcycles.

Mr. Shuman: It seems as though I touched a few nerves somewhere along the line. In relation to line item 6272, Electricity Charges, there is a tremendous amount of Police presence, and we are grateful for them in many Indigenous communities. There are many communities where Police Stations and Outposts are operating and are not being charged electricity charges and water charges. I am curious to know if those things have been brought to the Minister's attention and if it has, how much of that sum allocated on that line item has been allocated to cover those expenses in those communities?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the Hon. Deputy Speaker for the question. Basically, it will cover the payment for electricity bills for all divisions and stations for the Guyana Police Force, including Zara Centres, which we are setting up in relation to the new police stations. We will cover our expenses in relation electricity and telephone charges.

Mr. Shuman: Let me commend the Hon. Minister for his stewardship in the sector because I know at one point – and I was a victim of it – they seemed to have been adrift. The country would know, very specifically, when components of the force has been weaponised to subvert the will of the people. In relation to that, I look at line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships) and one of the things that I have lamented is the lack of diversification in the police force. I am therefore asking the Hon. Minister, how much of that

allocated sum is dedicated towards recruitment, training or scholarships in the Indigenous communities? We know that sometimes they have difficulty accessing those services.

Mr. Benn: We have identified diversity, amongst some other services, as a core issue of the Guyana Police Force. As a core issue, we recognise that if police go to certain communities, they should have an understanding of the communities which they are providing service and protection to, there should be better engagement between the policemen and the persons of the community. Even if they go to an Indigenous community, they should learn a few words of the languages of the people whether it is: Patamona, Wapishana or any other language. I am pleased to say that we have just graduated 37 new recruits, grandaunts to the Police Force, mostly from Region 9. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** (*inaudible*).] Yes, Indigenous. We will expand this service because we are better secured when we respect each other more and when we like or even love each other more and our various cultures and we understand it better.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I return to page 227 for the indicators. At indicator 3, it states that the percentage of crime solved with the assistance of the public is 2.83. Firstly, could the Hon. Minister tell us, based on their analysis, what were the problems they had that caused them to have such a low public participation? Secondly, having recognised that is it so low, you now put it to increase to 18.15%. Could the Hon. Minister outline the strategic actions that will be taken to achieve this objective?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I was just advising the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to link that to the line item. Maybe it is Other. I do not know.

Mr. Benn: It is line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships). Mr. Chairman and Hon. Members, we keep saying and we keep pointing out that the poor engagement between the people and the police has a lot to do with the way the police force still carries on colonial structures in the relation they relay to people. I am not going to say what happened in the police force when I said that there was an issue in doubt in this country two years and some months ago. The mistrust that they have will be overcome by what we call a transformative policing, collaborative policing. This is where we have youth groups being setup at police stations and also with the Community Policing Groups and where the police have better engagements to get actionable intelligence from the communities.

In many instances, because the communities are small, people are afraid to speak out because they are usually

threatened, be it verbal or abusive. We saw some of that yesterday. There are threats of attacks and sometimes threats to burn down the house and to kill you. I did say that a lot of our problems are disorderly. I say again we have gone through a period where things have fell down and we are fixing it now. I want to request the Opposition, particularly its Hon. Leader, to engage with us on this issue because the problem with policing has to do with when the police are attacked, physically and by political operatives. They are criticised and the critiqued at every level. I am not a denizen on the social media, but I see a lot of it. If we want to increase the peace in Guyana, we have to have better respect and engagement on the core issues. I said here before we had a situation where an Hon. Member of this House was chasing people with a cutlass in a village. I am saying the quality of our discourse, not only in the House but on social media and in the spit press, is what puts us all risk. It is our responsibility, on both sides of the House, to meet at a position where we recognise that peace has to be guaranteed by the peacemakers who are the policemen, the guarantors of peace and the peace officers. There will be no progress, or even prosperity, if we continue along the line where we attack each other in a negative, virulent way. I am asking for the help of the Opposition in respect of that.

12.59 p.m.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, may I say, *en passant*, that peace goes with justice. That apart, the Minister puts the problem in our colonial era. He has not solved any of the colonial era problems but is telling us that he is going to reduce it. Could the Hon. Minister tell us how and what strategies he will use? That is the question.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, I crave your indulgence. The Hon. Minister made reference, which is the second occasion in which a Government Member made this reference, to an Opposition Member chasing someone with a cutlass. The Member has since written, and I requested the Minister provide the evidence.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, I will check the transcript. The Hon. Minister said, "an Hon. Member of this House". I do not know that the Minister said "Opposition"; he said "House".

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition said that peace comes with justice. Fundamental to everything that we do, both here and in relation to the

engagements with our people and our political aspirations and wishes, is the question of our democracy. If our democracy was being undermined and we had to fix it here in this building... That is the fundamental question of justice. The country demanded justice when our democracy was being undermined. That is where justice in this country, according to the Constitution, has to be afforded to each and every citizen, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity and everything.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have now exhausted the time...

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have now exhausted the time...

Mr. Norton: But he has not answered the question that I asked.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have now exhausted the time for this particular agency. I will now have to put all of the heads that are remaining.

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$19,699,819,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$3,185,000,000

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$3,185,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$3,224,873,000

Programme: 513 - Guyana Prison Service – \$3,224,873,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$2,338,000,000

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$2,338,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$2,111,131,000

Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$2,111,131,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure**Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$1,115,000,000**

Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$1,115,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure**Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$242,041,000**

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$242,041,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure**Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$8,000,000**

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$8,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure**Programme: 517 – Customs Anti Narcotics – \$637,959,000**

Programme: 517 – Customs Anti Narcotics – \$637,959,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure**Programme: 517 – Customs Anti Narcotics – \$100,000,000**

Programme: 517 – Customs Anti Narcotics – \$100,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, on your behalf and on my own, I thank the Hon. Minister and his staff for taking us through the estimates. The House will now resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we suspend for lunch, thank you for the greetings, but still remember we are in the House. Before we break for lunch, I had generously given Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, an opportunity to address the House without prior seeking of leave of the Speaker. I saw the Hon. Member did, as acknowledged, and went to social media. I have a problem with criticisms of the Speaker in the media. One of the problems the Hon. Member failed to do was to state in the article the generosity of the Speaker in allowing us to speak out of order. I think she will have an opportunity to correct that. Let us break for lunch and be back in one hour.

Assembly suspended at 1.06 p.m.

Assembly resumed at 2.19 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will return to Committee of Supply to complete consideration of the Estimates.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, could we invite the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his team from the Ministry of Finance? Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, if you would allow the Budget Director to spend a few more minutes with me, I want to ask her something.

[Mr. Chairman in aside with the Budget Director.]

Thank you very much for your patience. Before we take the Ministry of Finance, the Budget Director, in her usual meticulous way, has found some...

An. Hon. Member (virtual): *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Chairman: Those who are online, could you mute your microphones? Hon. Members, we had circulated earlier this week a few pages from the Budget Director: pages 549, 667, 670, and 713. I am just bringing your attention to circulate these in the volumes that you have. They do not impact on the totals or on the front part of the budget. It is just to correct some jumbling of the entries. They got jumbled, but this now puts everything in its right place. All the numbers remain the same, except now they are in the right place. It is the *Mahipaul syndrome*.

Agency: 03 Ministry of Finance**Current Expenditure****Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$34,765,618,000**

Ms. Fernandes: Line item 6141: I notice that from 2021 to 2022 the increase in allocation for that line item was 60%. Now I am seeing that the increase from 2022 to 2023 is 23%. Could the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance explain to the House why this is so? What catered for the proportionate difference? What exactly is the Hon. Minister foretelling with this 23% increase for the 2023 allocation.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]: Thank you very much, Sir, and let me thank the Hon. Member for the question. It would be recalled that line item 6141 was the line previously styled, some years ago, “Revision of Wages

and Salaries". For the last few years, it has been styled "Other Employment Costs". It is in fact a line item under which a number of costs associated with the Central Government's wage bill are met.

2.26 p.m.

These costs include provision for revisions of wages and salaries that might arise in instances where there are promotions, provision for new recruits... It would be recalled, in fact, that some of my colleagues on this side of the House were asked about provision for new recruits. I recall, Minister, Dr. Persaud, was asked a question about that and she made the point that provision for new recruits is made elsewhere. In the respective Ministries, as I believe the Hon. Member would know, we only budget for vacancy positions that are filled as at the time of the conclusion of the Budget. This line meets the cost of any new recruits, the cost of any salary revision that might arise, as I said, by way of promotion, declassification, salary adjustment, *et cetera*. The other employment costs shortfall that may arise for one reason or another, and of course this line also makes a provision for the annual salary increase that will be paid in due course. This has been the practice, I hesitate to say since time immemorial but, certainly, since I have been familiar with the utilisation of this particular line. In this case, in this year, the practice is no different. This line makes provision for those costs. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Fernandes: I am going to ask two questions together, a follow-up on the response versus the Hon. Minister saying that, based on the percentage increase of 23%, there is not much being expected when it comes to salary adjustments and other wages and salaries that may be catered for. I am saying that the proportion increase from 2021 to 2022 was significantly greater than the proportion increase from 2022 to 2023. Sir, you did say in your presentation last year that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government does make way for a consultation with stakeholders and so forth. I want to be a little more specific this year. Could the Hon. Minister say who are the stakeholders that they will be consulting with for the 2023 wages and salary increases?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, this Government prides itself on its consultative approach to governance. We remain closely engaged with all of the major stakeholders, including organised labour, the private sector and, indeed, a direct engagement with citizens, through an on-going and continuous series of outreaches, allowing an opportunity for us to hear directly from citizens. As you would note, for example, His Excellency the President has taken the Office

of the President directly to the people. Today he is, in fact, in Region 6 deploying this Office of the President – direct engagement with the people of Region 6. The Government will be doing that under His Excellency's leadership across all 10 of the regions of the country. We are fully committed to engagement with all stakeholders including, as I said, organised labour, but of course, other stakeholders who also have a very valid and legitimate interest in these matters. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I am concerned, if I can say the least. I want to ask the Hon. Minister if he is indicating that consultations now have been shifted from a structured, organised approach with engaging those structured, organised, recognised bodies, to actually having persons go out there and claim where there is absolutely no process to verify the consultations and whatever is said and asked for by persons out there? I believe that will be a concern of the entire country, if that is what is happening. Could the Hon. Minister say if that is the process the Government has embarked on, instead of actually going to the structured unions? You are actually saying now that you are dealing with people.

Dr. Singh: I thought that I was sufficiently clear in my earlier answer, but I would be happy to reiterate what I said earlier. We remain closely engaged with all of the organised entities that represent or, indeed, that purport to represent various stakeholder groups, whether this be organised labour or the sectoral representative bodies of the private sector, *et cetera*. That engagement continues. I am referring to engagements with all stakeholders. This Government remains firmly committed to maintaining our rich engagement with all the bodies that represent or indeed that purport to represent, as I said, various groups of stakeholders, various groups of interested parties. But this approach is complemented by a more fulsome direct engagement with the citizenry. My emphasis really is on the word 'complemented' rather than 'substituted', Sir. Thank you very much.

Ms. Lawrence: To the Hon. Minister, the same line item. I am asking, Mr. Chairman, for the Minister to layover, if he could provide an estimate of the following sub-components: that is, the provision for salary increase, bonuses and other incentives; the provision to meet the cost of new employees in the budget agencies; the provision to meet salary adjustments of employees due to promotions and also to meet shortfalls in employment costs in budget agencies. Thank you for laying that over.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, regrettably, I would not at this stage be able to do that because this is, as indeed the rest of the Budget, managed in a dynamic way. As the year progresses, promotions occur, new recruitment occurs, adjustments take place. You would note, for example, that His Excellency the President and our Cabinet announced a series of salaries adjustments to particular categories of workers at the end of last year – members of the Disciplined Services and certain categories of workers in the health sector – as the first phase of salary adjustments. This is managed in a dynamic way. Over the course of the year, we will continue to be monitoring developments in the various sectors, assessing how these will impact on the requirements for financial provisions, making financial provisions, as the need might arise. I, regrettably, at this stage, would hesitate to provide some sort of hard allocation that states this pocket, this pool of money, is for new recruits, this pool of money is for promotions, and this pool of money is for some third or fourth category of call on this lump sum allocation. That level of disaggregation, for it to be provided, regrettably, for it to be treated as cast in stone, I believe, might create a somewhat misleading impression, because the allocation is managed, as indeed is the rest of the Budget, in a dynamic way, as the year progresses.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Minister. Minister, could you kindly tell me what figures you used or what formula you used to arrive at this more than \$19 billion to cover all of the things that you have just spoke of? What did you use? You would have been using some percentage to arrive at what you have today.

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Mr. Chairman, this is not done in a simplistic way, that you calculate, for example, I will recruit five people and employ them. This is done from multiple perspectives. It is done firstly from a bottom-up perspective. We have an initial sense at an agency-by-agency level, of what the employment needs are right now, what the gaps are right now and what the financial requirements might be to meet those needs or fill those gaps. A bottom-up approach is adopted agency by agency. We anticipate, maybe, another 100 doctors, another 100 teachers or another 100 nurses, just using purely hypothetical numbers. That is done from a bottom-up approach.

There is also a macro approach that is adopted from a top-down approach, to keep an eye on the size of the central government's wage bill relative to GDP, the size of the central government's wage bill relative to the total budget and what is affordable in that context, what level of growth in the central government's wage bill would not be

inflationary. That is done from a top-down approach. We do several iterations of this until we arrive at an optimal allocation to the total central government's wage bill and for the amount which can be provided for here. Then, as the year advances, we manage that allocation in order to ensure that it is executed in an optimal fashion. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say, for line item 6242, which buildings are being maintained here?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. Of course, the Ministry of Finance has a number of locations. Our primary location is at, of course, Main and Urquhart Streets, as is known. The bulk of this allocation, in fact almost all of this allocation, is for the Main and Urquhart Streets location. We do also have other installations, for example, the Valuation Division on Camp Street, which will also constitute a call on this allocation. It is principally for the Main and Urquhart Streets location, which is our main office, but some of it will also be used on Camp Street. In fact, we do also have subtreasury locations in the 10 regions. While the regions often assist with that accommodation, from time to time we might need to support by maintaining our presence in the subtreasuries, our physical premises in the respective RDC buildings.

Ms. Fernandes: Line Item 6264 – Vehicles Spares and Services: Could the Hon. Minister say how many vehicles are being catered for under this line item?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir; 21 vehicles.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister now turn to line item 6272, Electricity Charges over the period 2021 to 2022? Sir, some \$23.65 billion was transferred to the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL), from the Treasury, to meet arrears for various government agencies. Another \$4.062 billion is being requested in this Budget. Could the Minister say to the House how much of this amount represents a subsidy to GPL Inc. and how much is to meet arrears. That is my first question.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, in the first instance, this represents the clearance of electricity arrears. It would be recalled in fact that, when we came into Office, there was a stock of arrears that we inherited, which we have been trying to clear and we have been making progress with clearing. There are indeed some entities in the public sector that are incapable of meeting the cost of their electricity. I think the most prominent one that comes to mind is the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI). Their revenue has historically – this is not a new problem – been inadequate to meet the cost of their electricity bills.

2.41 p.m.

The central Government has historically supported the finances of the GWI by either paying their electricity bill or a significant part of their electricity bill. That continues to be the case. Thus far, what we have been paying, in fact what we have anticipated paying in 2023, represents clearance of arrears and keeping us current in respect of electricity charges. I should add that the Hon. Member asks a very important question. That is to say, the question in relation to the finances of the GPL and the extent to which the GPL is being subsidised. Of course, we do support the GPL particularly on the capital expenditure side. Central government supports a lot of the financing of the capital expenditure for the GPL, which the Hon. Member would be aware of. In fact, we considered some of those investments when the Office of the Prime Minister's estimates were being considered. In this instance, this is really to pay electricity charges. I could not possibly miss the opportunity to reiterate that, notwithstanding the spike in fuel costs borne by the GPL, we have taken the position that we will not adjust the electricity tariffs. We have maintained the electricity tariffs, notwithstanding that the GPL is carrying much higher fuel costs.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I believe this is not the first time we are clearing arrears for agencies. So I would like to know what mechanism the Minister is putting in place to ensure that budget agencies do not relapse?

Dr. Singh: Here again, it is a perfectly valid question from the Hon. Member. I would say that what you are dealing with here is perhaps a bit of a *mixed bag*. Indeed, there are some agencies that have not been paying in a timely manner. In that regard, staff at the Ministry have been working very closely with the respective agencies to ensure that, in the first instance, they meet their obligations. The Hon. Member is correct in identifying that agencies should pay their bills in a timely manner. I could not agree more with the statement that is underlying the question that was posed by the Hon. Member.

There are some entities that have a challenge with their capacity to pay because they simply do not generate, like I said... Forgive me for highlighting the GWI example, but they are probably the most illustrative example. The GWI is a good example of an entity whose revenues simply do not suffice to meet the cost of their entire energy cost. The entity is not the only example, but it is an example of an entity that one would have to take a much more comprehensive look at the finances of its operations to address this issue. I think, in

some sense, the Government's support of an entity, such as the GWI, to pay an electricity bill, really can be considered a Government subsidy to support the cost of delivering water to the people of Guyana. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, could you turn your attention to 6231, Fuel and Lubricants? Even though fuel prices were higher in 2022, the Ministry did not fully utilise the budgeted amount. In 2023, the Ministry has budgeted \$10.9 million as compared to the revised 2022 figure of \$6.78 million, even though prices in 2023 are expected to be lower than in 2022. Hon. Minister, could you kindly tell us what average price for fuel did the Ministry assume in its projections? Is the Ministry budgeting to expand existing activities and at what cost? What new activities will the Ministry be undertaking in this financial year? Thank you.

Dr. Singh: I would be happy to share with the Hon. Member. We make a variety of price assumptions regarding fuel for various purposes within the budget. We make assumptions about the average price of crude oil, for example, for the purposes of revenues into the Natural Resource Fund (NRF). We make assumptions about the movement in prices for refined fuel product for the purposes of the fuel bill for respective agencies. I would be happy to share those with the Hon. Member offline. Here again, in respect of a most appropriate question, the Hon. Member is right that in 2022 we did not exhaust our voted provision. The Hon. Member will note that in 2023 we were insistent that we should not budget more than we had budgeted in 2022. One will note that what we have provided is the same amount, not more than we have provided in 2022. The principal objective here is to ensure that we are able to scale up our monitoring. As one may know, we have a bigger budget, we have a larger number of projects that are under execution. We want to make sure that we are able to monitor those on the ground as actively as possible. The increase in the allocation, relative to last year, is really to provide for an even more active and proactive approach to monitoring of the execution of the budget, which is principally what is driving the change in the allocation, which, like I said, is in fact the same as the budgeted provision for last year.

Ms. Fernandes: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: I am looking specifically at the allocation there to the Bureau of Statistics in excess of \$2 billion. Through the Chairman, I want to ask the Minister if this amount would actually be sufficient for the Bureau of Statistics to carry out its mandate? I want to draw the Minister's attention to the fact that we are seeing in Appendix T the details given for the Bureau of Statistics to

say that wages and salaries have decreased by almost \$200 million. I am also seeing that the rental and maintenance of buildings has moved from an actual of just over \$17 million to now over \$54 million. Could the Hon. Minister explain why this is so? Could the Hon. Minister also say if this allocation, in excess of \$20 million to the Bureau of Statistics, is actually going to fix the fact that we are yet to receive very important reports? Is this going to be giving moneys toward aiding reports like the Guyana Labour Force Survey (GLFS) as the last report we had was in the third quarter of 2021? Should we expect to see any one of those improve this year with this allocation?

Dr. Singh: I guess the short answer to the question is, we do believe that the \$2 billion provided in *Budget 2023* will suffice to meet the cost of the operations of the Bureau of Statistics, which the Hon. Member rightly identifies as a very important national institution. I guess, that is the short answer to the headline question. That amount represents our best current estimate given currently available information. It is our best estimate of what is needed to meet the ongoing operating costs of the Bureau. The big activity that the Bureau was engaged in last year was the census. The Hon. Member alludes to the census. That activity will continue. There are census-related activities that are continuing this year. In fact, the enumeration is ongoing. While we have completed a number of regions, there are still a few regions where additional visits are needed, a number of households are still to be visited. We anticipate a preliminary report to be completed during the course of this year. Colleagues in this House who have been following this would know that the census is a very long and involved exercise. That has been the big activity. The Hon. Member drew attention to the labour force statistics. I am not sure how long the Hon. Member has been following these developments – I note that the census only happens once every ten years – but typically, once the survey team starts working on the census, the entire survey team focuses on the census. That has been the focus of attention which is why one may not have been seeing some of the labour force reports being produced. The whole survey team is focused entirely on working on the census right now.

Mr. Chairman, like I said, the short answer to the question is that this \$2 billion, \$2 billion and, I think, \$43.9 million, represents our current best estimate of what would be required to finance the operations of this very important national institution.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow-up on that, Sir: Specifically, when it comes to the wages and salaries allocation, I mentioned

that the allocation given here is almost \$200 million less than the actual for last year. My question to the Hon. Minister is, could the Hon. Minister say if the staff complement is filled at the Bureau of Statistics? If not, how many staff are not there or missing so that those positions need to be filled? More specifically, to add to that, when it comes to the information technology (IT) department, particularly with persons that deal with the website, are those vacancies filled? The public would notice that work has not been done in that department for quite some time.

Dr. Singh: Thankfully, the estimates provide a lot of rich, historic information. If the Hon. Member would go back to say 2021, I am sure the Hon. Member would see that the wages bill in total employment cost in 2022 represented a dramatic increase over 2021 and, in fact, is declining in 2023. In 2021, there was a total employment cost of \$333 million. In 2022, there was an estimated employment cost of \$1.45 billion. In 2023, there is a sum reversion to \$1.3 billion. The reason for that is quite simple. There was a lot of employment of finite duration, fixed or limited term employment associated with the census in 2022. That explains the dramatic ramp-up of employment. There was a lot of temporary employment and fixed term employment in 2022 associated with the census. A lot of that will taper off in 2023. One will see a significant fall off, not a complete falling off because census activities will continue. One will see some falling off of the fixed term and short term, finite duration employment associated with census in 2022, but not all of it will fall off.

Concerning the question specifically in relation to the IT department – again, a good question – we recognise the importance of strengthening IT systems in the Bureau of Statistics. Work is already ongoing in this regard. I could not agree more with the Hon. Member that we recognise the need to continue to strengthen IT capabilities in the Bureau.

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$34,765,618,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$7,600,760,000

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, I am looking at project code 1202200, Buildings: Could you kindly inform the House what is the status of the Ministry's annex on Croal Street and what departments will be housed there? When are we expected to occupy the building?

2.56 p.m.

Dr. Singh: It would be recalled that this was an incomplete project that we met when we came into office. There were a number of challenges regarding the contractual arrangement surrounding this building. I think the Hon. Member is familiar with the history, so I will not repeat it. We had to do multiple rounds of reworking to bring it back into a position where this building could be completed. We anticipate that this building will be completed this year. It is our intention, in fact, to bring the building into use this year. The Hon. Member asked about percentage completion, I think. Our current estimate is that the building is in the vicinity of 90% completion. It is our intention Hon. Members, through you Sir, to complete the building this year and to occupy it. The Hon. Member also asked about which departments or divisions will be occupying the building. In relation to that, the matter is still very much under active consideration and a final determination has not been made on it.

Ms. Fernandes: Project code 4400700 – Poverty Programme: Could the Hon. Minister state how many persons are manning this department within the Ministry of Finance?

Dr. Singh: Here, again, this is not new. This programme has been in place for a long time. We do not have, as such, a dedicated department managing the programme. The programme is managed within the project department which manages the entire portfolio of government projects. We have received multiple requests for support and have constituted a committee to consider and exam these requests to ensure coordination with various other line ministries which might also be able to provide support, depending on the nature of the request and submissions received. It is a purely technical committee that considers those requests and then makes recommendations, but there is not a full-time department or division managing this programme.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say, or give to us rather, because he is saying now that there is a committee...? But I just want to remind the Hon. Minister that in the 2021 Budget he actually said:

“We have set up an administrative structure within the Ministry of Finance to consider request for these committee-based or organisation-based projects and these projects are executed through the Ministry of Finance in collaboration with the agencies involved.”

Given that the Hon. Minister did say that there is an administrative structure in place since 2022, then could he kindly give us details of what this structure entails? How many persons, what are the positions and so forth? That is because he did not say a committee the last time.

Dr. Singh: Absolutely, Sir. I must admit that I do not have at the forefront of my mind as precise a recollection of what I said in 2021, but I thank the Hon. Member, in fact, for doing the research she did and pulling up the *Hansard* for 2021. Happily, but unsurprisingly, my answer in 2023 is fully consistent with my answer in 2021. We have, in fact, put in place an administrative structure that comprises a committee which did not exist previously. When I indicated that we have put or will be putting in place in 2021 an administrative structure, it was precisely this arrangement that we had in mind – the technical committee. The committee is now in place; it is a three-person committee. As I said, it is comprised of professional civil servants of the Ministry. They receive these requests and engage with both the sectoral ministries and, also, in many cases, many of these initiatives are implemented through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or civil society organisations (CSOs), *et cetera*. The committee engages with these entities to ensure that there is close coordination. It also engages both with a sectoral ministry where one might be involved, and/or with an NGO and/or CSO where one is involved, to ensure optimal coordination and collaboration in execution.

Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for reminding me of my own words in 2021 and, like I said, happily but unsurprisingly, my words in 2023 remain fully consistence with those that I offered in 2021. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, could the Minister turn his attention to project code 1900400, Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF)? Hon. Minister, as a Member of the Opposition persons meet me from time to time to find out what is being done by the BNTF with all of these moneys we voted for in the National Assembly. I am asking you, Sir, if you could kindly provide the National Assembly with a breakdown of the projects contemplated under this head, and if you could say where they are going to be located and at what cost.

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. I thank the Hon. Member for giving me the opportunity to highlight the excellent work that is being done by the BNTF. The BNTF is a very important regional trust fund. It is, in fact, a trust fund that is administered by the Caribbean Developmental Bank (CDB). It has a number of international and bilateral donors and contributors. Guyana is one of the regional beneficiaries of

the BNFT. I am saying this more for the benefit of the general audience rather than the Hon. Member, because I believe the Hon. Member is very familiar with a lot of this. The BNFT does and has historically been doing excellent work in supporting community level social infrastructure, no different in 2023 as was the case in 2022 or indeed in historic years. I will be happy to provide more details of all of the projects but, just broadly, the BNFT will be financing, in 2023, investment in education infrastructure, in particular the construction of primary, nursery and special education schools – very modest. These are very small school buildings in small communities typically in very small, often times remote communities. The BNFT has also been supporting the construction of early childhood development centres. I think the Hon. Member might be familiar with some of these. We also do some small community roads under the BNFT. We also do some modest water projects, in particular there is a strong emphasis on hinterland water. I have before me a number of projects that we anticipate we will be doing in 2023. Of course there is a process, because we have not only to identify these projects in consultation with the communities – the Hon. Member I suspect will know this process – but we also have to propose these projects to the CDB. It has to review and approve them and then grant approval for these projects to be implemented. Those are the broad areas – education, roads and water.

Ms. Fernandes: Project code 4503100 – Contribution to Local Organisation – Linden Enterprise Network (LEN): Could the Hon. Minister state what is the status of the board of LEN?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, through you, I am happy to inform the Hon. Member that we recognise that the matter of the appointment of the board for LEN is pending. The Hon. Member will no doubt be very pleased to know that this matter is engaging active and urgent consideration.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow-up, Sir. In the last budget consideration for 2022, the Hon. Minister said:

“... the matter of the appointment of the board is under active consideration and I expect should be concluded forthwith.”

When I question if there is a timeline in place, the Hon. Minister came back and said:

“I believe the word I used earlier was forthwith.”

Given that we are allocating \$50 million to LEN and the people of Linden looking at this consideration would say, yes, we are getting \$50 million but there is no board in place

so they cannot receive that money, could the Hon. Minister give a time and, more specifically, define “forthwith” for this honourable House?

Dr. Singh: I would once again thank the Hon. Member for taking the time to research my answer last year. I will simply say, as I said indeed last year, that we recognise the urgency of the need for a board to be appointed. This matter is under consideration in Government. Let me go on to say that we continue to have the management structure in place. There is a team of staff still at the LEN’s Office. They continue to provide support to clients. The Unit is still very much there, notwithstanding the non-appointment of the board. But, once again, I thank the Hon. Member for drawing attention to this matter and I assure her that it will engage consideration.

Ms. Lawrence: Project code 2401300 – Land Transport: Between 2021 and 2022, more than \$337 million was spent on vehicles. In 2023, another \$350 million is being requested, bringing the total in three years to nearly three quarter billion dollars. How many vehicles are to be procured in 2023, and how many new vehicles, not reconditioned vehicles? And, Sir, could you kindly say how many vehicles are anticipated from your fleet that is obsolete?

Dr. Singh: Just to clarify that this allocation, in fact, is not an allocation that is used to buy vehicles for the Ministry of Finance only. In fact, it is an allocation that used to purchase vehicles for a number of agencies across central government. I want to assure the Hon. Member that it is an omnibus allocation that is used to purchase vehicles across the whole of central government. In fact, the Hon. Member would have taken note of the fact that across many ministries there was not an allocation for land transport for vehicles. The reason is that there is this single omnibus lump sum allocation which is then used for the purposes of programming, having considered relative priorities and needs, because lots of agencies have gaps in terms of their transport fleet; many ministries have gaps in their transport fleet. Then, of course, there is the issue of the state of the fleet as well and not just the number of vehicles.

3.11 p.m.

There are some ministries who have old vehicles. In some cases, some of them are inefficient vehicles, and some of them need to be retired and replaced. This allocation – not only this allocation in 2023, but also in 2022 – have been used in 2022 and will be used in 2023 to address, to help and to meet the gaps in the transport fleet across the central Government. I might add, the Hon. Member would note that

there is an increase from 2022 to 2023. That in fact is a direct result of His Excellency, the President, making a commitment to provide vehicles for institutions representing persons with disabilities. The Hon. Member would recall that during the course of 2022, President Ali gave a commitment that he will provide vehicles to support organisations, entities or institutions working with people living with disabilities. The increase that is observed in the allocation is not just for administrative vehicles or so, but the allocation will also be supporting the acquisition of vehicles for that purpose. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow up: Mr. Minister, is the committee responsible for the disposal of assets, especially vehicles? Is that in place? How often does it meet?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, this question of disposal of unserviceable assets or inefficient assets is of course one that has been around for some time. There are standard guidelines that govern disposal of assets. There is a process that involves identification of the assets that might be unserviceable; valuation; verification by the Auditor General; public advertisement; and auction to dispose of assets, whether vehicles or otherwise. That process is still very much in place. I know that within the Ministry of Finance, we used that process late last year, in fact, in relation to some vehicles that were deemed by the Ministry of Public Works where the Mechanical Engineers identified some vehicles that were unserviceable and we invoked that process. The same process with which the Hon. Member is familiar with is still very much in place and is being used by ministries including by my own in relation to disposal of unserviceable assets.

Indeed, I would encourage my Cabinet Colleagues, where they have unserviceable assets to use that process to make sure that we get rid of assets that are sitting around occupying space, where sometimes it is space that could be deployed to do other things. I would encourage my Colleagues in the Cabinet to invoke that process, which is a well-established process to get rid of unserviceable assets, free up space and reduce the call on the budget maintaining things that perhaps at the end of their useful economic life. Thank you very much, Sir.

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$7,600,760,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$7,131,687,000

Ms. Lawrence: Line item 6262 – Overseas Conference and Official Visits: The actual cost under this sub-head in 2021 was \$118.466 million, even though \$205 million was budgeted in 2022, the revised amount is more than \$411 million. The provision in 2023 is \$450 million. Could you kindly inform the Committee, in terms of making this provision a \$450 million in 2023, what informed you?

Dr. Singh: In fact, the Estimates have historically presented a three-year window. We have in these Estimates 2021; 2022; and, of course, the budget year for 2023. Of course, these past two years have been anything but normal. If you are to go back say to 2021, which was a year that was still very severely affected by Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The years 2020–2021 were very unusual years. There were COVID-19, international travels were virtually ground to a complete halt and a lot of the international meetings and engagements were either not being held or attempts were being held to hold them virtually. This three-year window, particularly the historic part of the three-year window 2021, presents a slightly unrepresentative picture of the volume of activities that have historically been executed and certainly does not serve as a good predictor of the level of activities that we will required going forward. What you are seeing now is a resumption of international meetings. I know the Hon. Member herself served in Government until 2020; she would recall that as COVID-19 started to sweep the world international meetings grounded to an halt, nobody was traveling, nothing was happening, *et cetera*. We are now seeing a resumption of face-to-face engagements globally. A lot of the meetings previously held and meetings that were either cancelled or held online are now being held on a face-to-face basis once again. That is the first point I want to make.

The second point I want to make is that we are in Government in fact ramping up our global diplomatic efforts and, in particular, our economic diplomacy. As you know, we are aggressively promoting Guyana as a destination for investment and trade activities. We have a new and elevated prominence in a number of economic spares including, of course, what is happening in oil and gas also, the work that we are doing led by the President and my distinguished Colleague and Minister of Agriculture. On the food security front, there is a ramping up of Guyana's presence and advocacy. Our visibility, our presence and our advocacy in a number of specific areas which we see increase international representation as the Hon. Member with no doubt could

imagine. The allocation which we have provided in 2023 represents our best estimate of what the anticipated needs would be in 2023 given this expectation regarding international representation and participation and international business conferences, *et cetera*. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Fernandes: I have a follow up on that and I am just going to put the two questions together, if that is alright with you, Mr. Chairman. A follow up on that line item 6262, Overseas Conference and Official Visits, could the Hon. Minister give an estimation of the allocation that is being budgeted for the Office of the Prime Minister?

My second question is for line items 6284 and 6294, Others, could those be disaggregated?

Dr. Singh: If I might answer first to the question in relation to line item 6262, we do not actually disaggregate it by agency. There is not an allocation for the Office of the Prime Minister, an allocation for the office of the Senior Minister in office of the President with Responsibility for Finance or indeed an allocation for any other particular office or unit in Government.

The Hon. Member also asked about, I believe, line item 6248 and 6294. Line item 6284 – Other, we meet primarily license fees and maintenance services associated with various software applications that are deployed across Government. The Hon. Member would know that under the previous People's Progressive Party/Civic Government we had implemented and Integrated Financial Management System (IFMAS), which runs on a particular software platform. The maintenance of that software platform requires the payment of license, maintenance fees and support services. This allocation meets the cost of those license fees and maintenance services in relation to the IFMAS. We also run a payroll system. This allocation meets the subscription and license fees in relation to the payroll system. We also run a variety of enterprise business productivity, applications... I would not list all of these and a number of enterprise platform systems which we pay license fees for all of those. Here again, these are Central Government's wide application. The Ministry of Finance might, perhaps, be the primary owner or originator of these systems. These systems are run across Government. The IFMAS is run across Government. The payroll system is a system for the entire Central Government. We run a number of enterprise software tools for which we pay fees as well. We have connectivity charges. We also have a particular audit

software that we run for the purposes of Government's internal audit.

The Hon. Member would no doubt know that in my Budget Speech I refer to the work that we are doing to improve payment systems. We are, in fact, rolling out a Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) system, an Automated Clearing House (ACH) and Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) system which actually and regrettable the budget speech did not provide ample opportunity to elaborate fully on this, but which actually now gives us the capability to make payments directly to the payees' bank accounts. We are now at a point where all Government salaries; all Government employees; and for all Government pensioners are, in fact, paid directly into the payees' or employees' bank accounts. This is with the exemption of those who work in the Hinterland, under bank areas or where they do not have access to a bank branch such as policemen, teachers or health workers who are stationed in remote Hinterland communities. They do not have access to a branch where they could go to withdraw their money. Certainly, for those Government employees who live on the coastal and major population centres, we now pay them directly into their bank accounts. There is no necessity for an employ to pick up his/her a salary's cheque and take it to the bank into a bank account, and then withdraw money as he/she may need. The RTGS system and the Electronic Fund Transfer system have now deployed the capability of literally hitting a button and paying salaries directly into our bank accounts. We want to roll this out even more extensively.

3.26 p.m.

There are also costs associated with those platforms – the Real-Time Gross Settlement System (RTGS) and Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) platforms – and transaction fees that are associated with that balance of payment. My apologies, I think a question was asked on line item 6294, Other, as well, if I may Sir; that was line item 6294. The Hon. Member also asked about line item 6294, Other; the bulk of that allocation is to meet the cost of compensation claims and judgements awarded against Government. This is if somebody sues the Government and he/she wins an award, we make a lump sum allocation in the Ministry to. Thank you very much Sir.

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$7,131,687,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have exhausted the time for this head; there is only one programme remaining.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$79,250,000

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$79,250,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, on your behalf and my own, I want to thank the Minister and staff at the Ministry of Finance who have been so well recognised by all sides of the House during the last two weeks. I want to thank them for being with us and I also want to express my appreciation to the several Members of Parliament (MPs) who I saw this year going to all of the Volumes of the Budget Debate and having even more intense and informed questions. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, you may have the floor.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Sir. I was just going to echo the sentiments that you just expressed, which is to simply thank my Colleagues on that side of the House for the questions that they posed. I supposed given that I am on my feet, the questions that they posed, not only in relation to the Ministry of Finance's budget but indeed for all of the Estimates during the course of the past week, I think, they gave us, on this side of the House, a good opportunity to elaborate and elucidate further on the provisions that are in the Budget. We appreciate the questions that were asked and they presented the people of Guyana an opportunity to take a deeper dive into the Estimates. I want to thank my Colleagues on that side of the House and for the questions that they asked. Of course, I want to thank my own team for the remarkable work that they have been doing silently and quietly behind the scenes. There are indeed no words that are adequate to express fulsomely and appropriate inadequately the fantastic work that they continue to do. Thank you very much, Sir.

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

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we should have said in Committee of Supply because we do have next item on the Order Paper consideration of financial Paper No. 4/2022. Just one second.

Assembly in the Committee of Supply.

Motion to approve Supplementary Financial Paper No. 4/2022

“BE IT RESOLVED:

Financial Paper No.4/2022, Supplementary Estimates Capital advances made from the contingency's fund totalling \$3,812,999,559 for the period 2022-11-30 to 2022-12-31.”

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

Motion proposed.

Capital Expenditure

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister - Power Generation — Gas to Power Project – \$3,812,999,559

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, let me start by saying I do not profess to be an expert in economics but, for my own understanding and consumption, I know that this is a very big project that will benefit all of Guyana, expected so and hopefully so. I see Sir that in 2022, we had a budgeted sum of \$20,800,000,000 for this project and then this sum of \$3,812,999,559 was taken from the Contingency Fund bringing it up to a total of \$24,613,000,000. I also take into account that \$30,000,000,000 will be coming to this project via loan or grant as stated in the budgeted sum which we considered earlier and there is a total of \$43,300,000,000 for 2023. May I ask the Hon. Minister to provide an update to this Committee on the current status of this project given that the sum that was expended in 2022 amounts to \$24,613,000,000? Could we have a copy be laid over also of the final investment plan that was promised via the media from, I think it was Mr. Winston Brassington who said it in February, 2022?

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Chairman, my understanding is that the Hon. Member is seeking information on the money that has been allocated in 2022 for this project.

Mr. Mahipaul: The status on it as to where it is right now.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We had paid 15% of the contract sum for the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract and that amounted to \$24.213 billion. As you can recall, the total was US\$759,882,080 and that 15% equates to US\$113,982,312 and that is what we arrived at, in Guyana Dollars (GYD), a sum of \$24.213 billion. Payment of \$400,000,000 was made to the Ministry of Public Works and that is for payment to persons whose land has been acquired for the pipeline route under the law Acquisition of Lands for Public Purposes. The amount of \$400,000,000 represents the sum that is more than double

the fair market value as determined by the Chief Evaluation Office as such persons are being compensated for no less than two times the evaluation for the land and that amounts for the payments made so far, a sum of \$24,612,999,559.70. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, could I ask the Hon. Prime Minister if he is willing to circulate to all Members of this House the final investment plan?

Dr. Singh: Sorry, Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips, if I may; Mr. Chairman if I may, I do not recall what statements or commitments were made previously in relation to what will be provided but where we had indicated that information would be provided, we would be happy to do so. If there is a particular item, information, piece of information or plan that was promised that will be made available and it has not thus far been made available, we would be happy to make it available. I am not specifically sure about any particular item that the Hon. Member was asking about. He is referring to a commitment previously made to make an investment plan available, where that commitment was made previously, we will certainly be very happy to honour it. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I was reading up on this project and as I started off by saying, I do not profess to be an expert at it but, with the provision of these documents, I am sure that it will give me and also to the people of Guyana a better understanding. I think this project is bigger than politics and I know that there are many opinions that are being expressed in the public's domain as opposed to bringing the gas-to-shore via the pipelines, why not uses barges? Then, there are some talks that I read, whereby it will be cheaper and more economical and beneficial to the people of Guyana if there should be any issue with the pipelines, at least you know you have the barges that can work as storage tanks and so on and all of these things. I referenced the final investment plan because it was in February, 2022, when Mr. Winston Brassington said, in an interview, that the final investment plan was ready so it is against that backdrop. It is in the interest of transparency and accountability, Sir, that I am asking if perhaps all the documents that are related to this big project that is going to utilise a substantial amount of money from the Guyanese people be made available to the Opposition's side of this Committee.

3.41 p.m.

This is so that we can have a better and clearer understanding and be a part of the process to ensure that the people's moneys are accounted for, and the project is being

scrutinised to the fullest for the benefit of all Guyanese people.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I wish to remind the Hon. Member of the commitments made earlier. We remain committed to transparency and I wish to assure you that all documents will be provided in due course so Hon. Members could be clearly informed to this project.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I am happy for the Hon. Prime Minister's response to that question. I am happy that he has endeavoured to provide all the documents pertaining to this project. May I ask the Prime Minister if he could commit a time on the basis that there are documents that are already...? The noise that is coming from the other side will not deter me from asking because I am elected here by the people, for the people and will work in the interest of the people. This is a big project that requires that type of representation. I am asking the Prime Minister, for the documents that are available now, is he prepared to give us a timeline of when he will provide the Opposition's side of this Committee with the documents relating to this big project?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I already promised the Hon. Member that in due course all the information will be available to him. Additionally, in the media, we had a signing ceremony and a press release. The Guyanese people are already receiving information on this project. This is already public knowledge but I will, in due course, of course, honour the commitment to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Holder: Could the Prime Minister state, when this project is completed, at what rate power will be sold from this plant?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, we already made a commitment that the people of Guyana will be paying far less than what they are paying now. We already communicated out there and some 50% is a figure. The information will be so communicated. We already raised the expectations of the Guyanese people and we will deliver on that.

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chair, could I ask the Minister to deliver the answer which I seek – the rate at which power will be sold? How many cents or dollars per kilowatt hour?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, in all fairness to the Opposition, I do not want to communicate too many figures to confuse them. Let us live with the fact that at the end of this project, Guyanese will be paying far less than

they are paying now for electricity. That is easier to process for now – information on a need-to-know basis and information as it becomes available. When the project is completed, we start to distribute the electricity and the rates change, we will communicate that. For now, it will be far less than what they are paying.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, could I have a chance?

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chair, the PPP/C Government has a bad track record when it comes to these types of massive projects. This project is being undertaken with billions upon billions of dollars. It is only fair that the Prime Minister gives us in this Committee and the people of Guyana this information. Could I ask another question? What do you estimate to be the unit cost of the gas that will be supplied to the plant? If you determined that the power produced will cost the Guyanese people to see a 50% reduction...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. ...

Mr. Holder: I am building up to the question here.

Mr. Chairman: You have already asked the question. The question you asked – tell me if I am not comprehending – is what is the price of the gas that will be delivered to the plant.

Mr. Holder: Yes. I am trying to give some context to the question.

Mr. Chairman: You asked the question and I am about to put. I was about to also say before you asked the question that you made a statement about the PPP/C Government, and it might envisage a response. Hon. Prime Minister, these failed projects of your Government...

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, the PPP/C Government has a history of conceptualising, constructing and delivering to the people of Guyana. Contrary to the Coalition Government who is good at dreaming and perhaps some amount of conceptualising, but not at implementing and no delivering. Even for the projects that they tried; they are all incomplete. In some cases, we have to take corrective measures and deliver them to the people of Guyana. Be rest assured that this project will be delivered to the people of Guyana in keeping with the timeline. The cost that they will pay for electricity will be far less than they are paying now.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, so my understanding is that for the pipelines, the money will be coming out from the cost of oil which ExxonMobil will cover. What system do we have in place? What is the established system that we, as a country, have in place to monitor the price and ensure that we get value for money now? I understand that there is an

audit team and all of that to do X, Y and Z but all of that is being done after expenditure. Do we have a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer now? If I can put it in layman's terms, if this company is going to buy something now, do we have somebody from our team to ensure that the price is as is, it is not bloated, and those sorts of things? Is there a monitoring system in place now to deal with all the costs that ExxonMobil is going to get and ensure that it is according to what the Guyanese people will have to pay? Sir, please permit me because I am not an expert. I am trying to ...

Mr. Chairman: You have been repeating the same thing a couple of times now.

Mr. Mahipaul: It is probably because of the heckling, Sir.

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Chairman: Please, do not heckle the articulate Gentleman.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am trying to get at that we have an audit going on and it is auditing things that have already happened. We are in a position, as Guyanese – people of this country – to put a system in place so that when the expenditure is happening, we can monitor it there as opposed to awaiting an audit. Why can we not monitor it there and then get the audit to verify that whatever is being done is accurate? This is so that we can have a monitoring mechanism for the expenditure – a financial monitoring mechanism?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, this is the fourth time.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member asked for a report and he is now trying to direct us on how to write it. The question that you asked will be answered in the report. I already committed that the report will be submitted in due course. It will be in due course. What you are doing there is situating the report. Be rest assured that we will produce a report for you that will cover everything in a quite holistic manner on all the questions that you asked.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, could I have the floor?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, please, go ahead.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon, Sir. To the Hon. Prime Minister, one – the pipeline-to-shore is a separate project. Could I ask you – just as you have an independent consultant for the power plant, do we have one engaged to safeguard the interest of the

people of Guyana since this is an ExxonMobil project? Do we have a technical consultant? Two – if so, who is the consultant; what is the cost; and is it included in this? Thirdly, there was a gas-to-sale agreement signed and acknowledged by the Government. Could the Hon. Prime Minister make this available to the people of Guyana – the National Assembly? Those are my first three questions; I will have a follow up depending on the responses to these.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, those are very good questions by the Hon. Member of the Committee. I can assure him that those questions will be answered in the report that will be submitted in due course.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, as a follow up, is the Hon. Prime Minister saying, at this time, that he is unaware if there is a technical independent consultant in place looking at, reviewing and safeguarding the plans – as every other project we have – that ExxonMobil submitted? For the power plant, we have a consultancy from India. I think that was signed by a new company.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the excitement raised by this project. After all, it is the largest project in the history of Guyana and it will be delivered to the people by the PPP/C Government. Instead of answering questions in a piecemeal manner, kindly await the report which will be submitted in due course.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, the Hon. Prime Minister mentioned that \$400 million was transferred and paid to the Ministry of Public Works for the acquisition of lands for the pipeline. There were 73 acres in total claimed by the Government. Could the Hon. Prime Minister update us on how many of the landowners – there are several of them – of these 73 acres have accepted and, if so, what amount out of this \$400 million has been expended to date?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, [Ms. Singh-Lewis: Put down your phone and answer.] I am aware... [Ms. Singh-Lewis: Do you want me to pull a gun on you?] There is no need to pull any gun. Do not raise anything about violence in this Committee, please, please, please. ...that all the landowners were involved in this process. As I mentioned, kindly await the comprehensive report. All these questions will be in that report. We are committed to transparency, and the report will be submitted in due course.

3.56 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. I am trying to hear the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, can you hear me Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Now, I can hear you.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, all moneys transferred to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and all other government agencies has to be returned to the Consolidated Fund at the end of 31st December. That is why we are asking because, obviously, we transferred the money last year, so there has to have been an account. If they had not spent it, they would have returned all \$400 million, that is why I am asking. So I do not know why the Prime Minister cannot say, and we have to wait on the report to find out if all the money was paid out and, if not, how much was returned?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Prime Minister, this is the last time I will put the repeated question to you.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I do not think that question was necessary. I already said that the report would have all the information, including the money paid for the land acquisition, the people's names, and the date when they signed for the cheque. Everything will be in the report, so why are we belabouring this point? This is turning into a circus. A circus led by the senior people in the Opposition.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members I think this has exhausted our questioning at this time. After we receive the report in due course, we could ask more questions.

Item 1: 02-023 – Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation — Gas to Power Project – \$3,812,999,559 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member this completes the consideration of this Financial Paper.

Question

“That this Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set in Financial Paper No. 4 of 2022 – Supplementary Estimates on the Current and Capital Estimates an Advances made from the Contingency Fund totalling \$3,812,999,559 for the period 30th November, 2022 to 31st December, 2022.”

put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Committee of Supply has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 4 of 2022 and I now moved that the Assembly

doth agree with the Committee in the said resolution. Thank you, very much.

Mr. Speaker: I put the question that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee doth agree with its resolution. We have to move first the Suspension of the Standing Orders No. 13 (n) and 54. Hon. Prime Minister.

Motion put and agreed to.

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 13 (n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023, Bill No. 1/2023 to be introduced at this stage.”

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I moved that Standing Orders No. 13 (n) and No. 54 be suspending to enable the Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No.3/2022) 2023, Bill No. 1/2023 to be introduced at this stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much Mr. Speaker. In accordance with paragraph (2) of Article 171 of the Constitution, I signify that the Cabinet has recommended that Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No. 3/2022) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 1/2023 for consideration by the National Assembly. I now present the Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read the first time.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

Appropriation Bill – (No.3/2022) 2023 No.1/2023

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2022, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in the conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read the first time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 3/2022) Bill 2023 –Bill No. 1/2023 be read a second time.

Bills – Second and Third Readings

Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No. 3/2022) 2023 – Bill No. 1/2023

A Bill intituled:

“An Act for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2022, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in the conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we now have to move the approval of the proposal set out. Hon. Members and especially for the Hon. Member Mr. Duncan, remember we have become a very litigious society, so every slip of a word or a comma instead of a full stop will envisage. Hon. Members, we are actually in Assembly, and I call on the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I presume that we are now at the point where we will be reporting the conclusion of the consideration of the estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Your presumption is accurate.

Dr. Singh: Very good, Sir. I am delighted to report that the Committee of Supply has considered the estimate of

expenditure for the year of 2023, and the Committee of Supply having considered those estimates that is to say the Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial year of 2023, it is now my honour to report the completion of consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure for the year of 2023 and the need to report that the Committee has approved of the estimates as printed. Thank you, very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Hon. Members I will now put the motion. Hon. Members there are some direct charges on the Consolidated Fund. The finance ministers in waiting, maybe we can listen.

4.11 p.m.

Mr. Speaker:

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2023, of a total sum of seven hundred and twenty-one billion, five hundred and twenty-nine million, and seven hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars (\$721,529,734,000), excluding sixty billion, three hundred and fifty-one million, two hundred and twenty-nine dollars (\$60,351,229,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2023 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of thirteen billion, eight hundred and six million, five hundred and seventy-seven dollars (\$13,806,577,000) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2023.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$208,944,156,942, equivalent to US\$1,002,130,249, to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2023 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.”

Motion put and agreed to.

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Appropriation Bill 2023, Bill No. 2 of 2023 to be introduced at this stage.”

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, with your leave I move that Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Appropriation Bill 2023, Bill No. 2/2023 to be introduced at this stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: In accordance with Article 171(2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Appropriation Bill 2023 – Bill No.2/2023 for consideration by the National Assembly. I now present the Bill to the National Assembly, and I move that it be read the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

APPROPRIATION BILL 2023 – Bill No. 2/2023

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2023, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility of Finance]

Question put and carried.

Bill read the first time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2023 – Bill No. 2/2023 be read a second time.

BILLS – Second and Third Readings

Appropriation Bill 2023 – Bill No. 2/2023

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2023, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility of Finance]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we now have *Budget 2023* approved by the National Assembly. Hon. Members, we have the second reading of the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill – Bill No. 3 of 2023 first published on 24th January, 2023.

INCOME TAX (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023 – Bill No. 3/2023

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act.”

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility of Finance]

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to speak at length on this Bill. It would be recalled in the budget speech that I announced the intention to increase the income tax threshold from \$75,000 monthly to \$85,000 monthly with effect from the year of income 2023. I indicated further that as a result of this adjustment, over 12,000 will be removed from paying income taxes and that every single taxpayer will benefit. I also indicated that this would result in a \$3.3 billion increase in disposable incomes in the hands of those paying income taxes. I offered an illustrative example of a hypothetical individual taxpayer who currently earns approximately \$100,000 per month and who, as a result of this measure, would have an additional disposable income of \$33,600 annually. That was amply elaborated in the budget

speech and ventilated and debated during the course of the debate on the budget. This Bill having been previously presented, I now move that it be read a second time.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed.

Motion

CONFIRMATION OF THE CUSTOMS (AMENDMENT OF THE FIRST SCHEDULE) ORDER 2023 – NO. 9/2023

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly, in accordance with section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, confirms the Customs (Amendment of First Schedule) Order 2023 (No. 9 of 2023) which was made on the 16th day of January, 2023, under section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01 and published in the Official Gazette dated 24th January, 2023.”

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility of Finance]

Dr. Singh: Here again, Sir, it is not my intention to be expansive on this matter. In the budget speech for 2023, a number of measures were announced, including measures in relation to the taxation of vehicles, including electric vehicles. This Customs (Amendment of the First Schedule) Order 2023 – No. 9 of 2023 was published in the Official Gazette on 24th January, 2023 and was made under Section 8 of the Customs Act. Its purpose is to give legal effect to some of the measures that were announced in the budget speech and which, like I said, were subject to ample elaboration and debate during the course of the consideration of the budget, which I do not wish to repeat at this point in time. It is now my honour, on behalf of this People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) Government, to move that this National Assembly, in accordance with section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, confirms the Customs (Amendment of the First Schedule) Order 2023 – No. 9 of

2023, which was made on 16th January, 2023. I now move that the Assembly confirms the said order.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

COMMITTEES BUSINESS

Motion

ADOPTION OF THE SIXTH REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS AND APPROVAL OF THE LIST OF ENTITIES AND CONSENSUAL MECHANISM TO NOMINATE MEMBERS OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD COMMISSION

WHEREAS, Article 212 Q of the Constitution has established a Rights of the Child Commission;

AND WHEREAS, in accordance with Article 212 U (2) (a) and (b) of the Constitution, the Rights of the Child Commission shall consist of-

“(a) Not less than five nor more than fifteen members, with expertise in issues affecting children, nominated by entities, by a consensual mechanism determined by the National Assembly, after the entities which shall include the Ministry with responsibility for Children’s affairs, the Ministry of Education, and organizations representing the interest of youth, are determined by the votes not less than two-thirds of all elected members of the National Assembly; and

(b) A member who shall be a nominee, without the right to vote, chosen by and from each of the following commissions: the Human Rights Commission, Ethnic Relations Commission, and Women and Gender Equality Commission and Indigenous People’s Commission:”

AND WHEREAS, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Appointments (COA) examined the list of entities to nominate members to the Rights of the Child Commission in accordance with article 212 U(2)(a) of the Constitution regarding to the number of members on the said Commission;

AND WHEREAS, the Committee having deliberated on identifying the entities to submit nominees for appointment to the Rights of the Child Commission, unanimously agrees and proposes that the Commission be comprised of nominations from

the list of entities in the First Schedule in the following categories:

Services	2
Religion	3
Youth	2
Women	2
Statutory Bodies	2
Professional Bodies	1
Ministry of Education	1
Ministry of Health	1
Ministry of Human Services and Social Security	1

AND WHEREAS, the Committee also unanimously agreed on the consensual mechanism to guide the process for consulting and nominating of Members to the said Rights of the Child Commission herein at the Second Schedule;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the proposed representation of the above mentioned categories from the list of entities;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly adopts the Sixth Report of the Committee on Appointments in relation to the Appointment of Members to the Rights of the Child Commission;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the entities to nominate Members of the Rights of the Child Commission, in accordance with article 212 U(2)(a) of the Constitution, as set out in the First Schedule attached;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the consensual mechanism outlined in the Second Schedule attached.

FIRST SCHEDULE

Proposed entities to be consulted for the Nomination of Members of the Rights of the Child Commission

SERVICE - 2

Child Link
 Community Based Rehabilitation Programme
 Friends of the Needy
 Generation Next
 Guyana Legal Aid Clinic Inc.
 Guyana Relief Council
 Help and Shelter
 Kids First Fund
 Phoenix Recovery Project
 Radio's Needy Children's Fund
 Salvation Army
 The Guyana Red Cross Society
 Young Women's Christian Association of Guyana (YWCA)

RELIGION - 3

Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana -1
 Guyana Council of Churches - 1
 Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha -1

YOUTH – 2

Central Baptist Youth Fellowship
 Church of Christ Youth Group
 Dharmic Naujawan (Dharmic Youth)
 Empowering Queers Using Artistic Learning (EQUAL)
 Full Gospel Youth Fellowship
 Guyana Central Arya Samaj -Youth Organisation
 Guyana Congregational Young People's Union
 Guyana Girl Guides Association
 Guyana Scouts Association
 Guyana Youth and Student Movement (GYSM)
 Guyana Youth Development Association
 Indian Action Committee Youth Group
 Joshua Generation

Junior Chamber International Guyana (JCI Guyana)
 Leo Association of Guyana
 Methodist Youth Club
 Muslim Youth League of Guyana
 Muslim Youth Organisation
 National Youth Council
 Outreach Ministries International -Youth Arm
 Presbytery of Guyana Youth Council
 Progressive Youth Organisation
 President's Youth Award: Republic of Guyana, MS
 Rotaract Clubs of Guyana
 The Moravian Church in Guyana, Youth Fellowship
 The Youth Ministries Department of the Guyana Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
 University of Guyana Student Society
 Volunteer Youth Corps
 Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)
 Youth Advocacy Movement (YAM)
 Youth Challenge Guyana
 Youth For Change - (YFC)
 Youth Ministries Department of the Assemblies of God

WOMEN – 2

Assemblies of God Women's Ministry
 Association of Women Entrepreneurs
 Guyana Association of Women's Artists
 Guyana Association of Women's Lawyers
 Guyana District Conference Women's Work Committee (Methodist)
 Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha- Mahila Mandalee
 Guyana Women Miners Organisation
 Guyanese Women in Development (GUYWID)
 National Committee of Sisters Affairs (NACOSA) (CIOG Women's Arm)

National Congress of Women
 Lutheran Church Women
 Mothers' Union Diocese of Guyana
 Outreach Ministries International Women's Group
 Red Thread Women's Development Project
 Salvation Army Home League
 The Women's Ministries Department of the Guyana
 Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist
 Women's Advisory Council (WAC)
 Women Across Differences
 Women's Chamber of Commerce & Industry Guyana
 (WCCIG)
 Women for Change (AFC Women Arm)
 Women's Home & Overseas Missionary Society
 Women's Progressive Organisation
 Young Women's Christian Association of Guyana (YWCA)

STATUTORY BODIES – 2

National Commission on Disabilities – 1
 National Commission on the Family - 1

PROFESSIONAL BODIES -1

Association of Chartered Accountants
 Guyana Association of Professional Social Workers
 (GAPSW)
 Guyana Bar Association
 Guyana Nurses Association
 Guyana Medical Association
 Guyana Pharmacists' Association
 Medical Technologists Association of Guyana
 Ministry of Education – 1
 Ministry of Health – 1
 Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security – 1

SECOND SCHEDULE

Consensual Mechanism for the Nomination by Entities of Members of the Rights of the

Child Commission

All the Entities in each Group, immediately on the passage of this motion, shall be written to by the Clerk of the National Assembly inviting them to meet as a group, to select their nominees and to send a representative/s on an appointed day/date, time to appear before the Parliamentary Standing Committee to Appoint Members of the Commissions, at the Parliament Buildings to present the name/s of their nominee/s for Membership on the Rights of the Child Commission.

A deadline shall be set by the Clerk of the National Assembly on advice by the Standing Committee, by which time it would be formally notified of the names and other requested particulars of the Nominee/s, the process used for the selection of the Nominee/s by the entity, and a statement to the effect that the Nominee/s is/are supported and accepted by that entity.

The Nominee/s chosen to represent the Group must be person/s who are competent to contribute positively to the work of the Commission and who are committed to ensuring that it discharges all of its functions. They should have earned public respect and be of unquestionable honesty and integrity.

The process used must be demonstrated to be unbiased and transparent. It is important that the Nominee/s obtain the unquestioned support and acceptance of the Entity nominating them as well as the Entities within the Group.

Where there is a recognised “*umbrella organization*” in the list of entities for that Group, the Clerk shall write to that organisation and copy his letter to each of the “constituent entities” within the Group.

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip – Chairperson of the Committee on Appointments]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Parliamentary and Governance and Chairperson of the Committee on Appointments, please proceed.

4.26 p.m.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Thank you very much. I am very pleased and I thank both sides of the House for concluding our *Budget 2023*, I think, in a constructive and productive manner, which bodes well for the future.

I would hope that Mr. Duncan could not have his *last lick*, but as usual, he must have. The Sixth Report, the motion on page 10 of the Order Paper, came out of the Committee on Appointments with regards to the list of entities to be consulted for the Rights of the Child Commission. This was tabled in the House on the 8th August, 2022. This allows the Committee to proceed with the Consensual Mechanism of finding nominees for the Rights of the Child Commission. This motion requires a 2/3 majority. Regrettably, between August last year and up to now, we have been unable to get it because those times when it came on the agenda, there were not enough persons here. I do not know if we now have to get into a debate about what 2/3 in Guyana means, but it is about 43 persons. We did not have those at that time in the House. I am seeking the support of the National Assembly for us to approve the list of entities which is attached in the motion, that we went through as a Committee. We have a good Committee. The Committee worked and unanimously approved the motion and approved the Committee Report, which was also circulated to Members. I would ask the House to support this motion to allow the Committee to start.

To recap quickly, we had agreed that there would be two representatives from the Service Organisations, three from the Religious Organisations – one each from the three main religions of Guyana, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam, two for Youth, two for Women, two for Statutory Bodies, one for Professional bodies, one for the Ministry of Education, one for the Ministry of Health and one for the Ministry of Human Services. I have great pleasure in having reached this point, and I sincerely hope that the Opposition will support it, as the Committee did so that we can proceed in the consultation process on these lists of entities. Thank you, Sir. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Is there any other contributor?

Mr. Ramjattan: I agree entirely with what was stated just now by the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, a member who worked very hard in relation to getting the names of the entities put together. We would like to see the work of this Committee proceed. Though there might have been some disagreements that may have caused this delay, I do not want any further delay, and I have asked the Opposition side to support it. Thank you, very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: I am checking with the Clerk. Do we need to do a recording to ensure that we have the 2/3? The Clerk will need to do a roll call, to register the support.

Division bell rang.

Hon. Members, as we give those persons who are not here an opportunity to get in place to register their vote, I just want to announce that the Clerk, as we are moving into high spirits, has provided for us also at the end of today's proceedings. Minister Persaud, are you okay with that? Clerk, you may proceed.

Assembly divided as follows: Abstained 2, Absent 3, Ayes 60

Abstained:

Mr. Jones

Ms. McDonald

2

Absent:

Mr. Jagdeo

Mr. Forde

Mr. Rajkumar

3

Ayes:

Mr. Shuman

Mr. Sears

Mr. Sinclair

Ms. Alert

Ms. Philadelphia

Mr. Jaiprashad

Ms. Flue-Bess

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Cox

Mr. Patterson

Ms. Fernandes

Ms. Ferguson

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Mr. Henry

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. Walton-Desir

Mr. Jordan

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Ms. Lawrence

Mr. Duncan

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Ms. Hughes

Mr. Holder

Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Norton

Mr. Speaker: Could you try Ms. McDonald one more time? Apparently, she was answering but her microphone was on mute. Okay, proceed.

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks

Mr. Narine

Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj

Mr. McCoy

Mr. A. Persaud

Mr. Indar

Ms. Rodrigues

Ms. Parag

Mr. Ramson

Dr. V. Persaud

Mr. Croal

Mr. Dharamlall

Mr. Bharrat

Mr. Hamilton

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Manickchand

Dr. Anthony

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Todd

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Nandlall

Mr. Phillips

60

Clerk of the National Assembly [Mr. Isaacs]: Mr. Speaker, 60 Members voted for the motion, three are absent and two abstained.

Question put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, that record confirms that the support given by the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan to the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira passes the motion by the necessary majority.

APPROVAL OF PERSONS FOR THE NOMINATION AND APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE ETHNIC RELATIONS COMMISSION

WHEREAS the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Appointments acting in compliance with Resolution No. 36 of 2022, which approved the list of entities to be consulted for nominations to the Ethnic Relations Commission held an open nomination and consultative process with the

approved entities between the months of 29th August, 2022 and 20th October, 2022,

BE IT RESOLVED

That this National Assembly approves the following persons from the following categories as members of the Ethnic Relations Commission established under the Constitution, and signify to the President that:

Christian Bodies

Rev. Rodwell F. Alphonso Porter

Hindu Bodies

Pandit Krishna Deo Sharma

Islamic Bodies

Mr. Moeenul Hack

Labour Movement Bodies

Mr. Norris Witter

Private Business Sector Bodies

Mr. Charles Ogle

Youth Bodies

Mr. Dwayne Adams

Women Bodies

Ms. Chandroutie Sarran

Cultural/Ethnic Bodies

Indigenous/Amerindian Bodies

Mr. Ashton Simon

Afro-Guyanese Bodies

Mr. Deon Dick aka Ras Khafra

Indo-Guyanese Bodies

Mr. Neaz Subhan

have been nominated in accordance with Resolution No. 17 of 2003, and Article 212 B (1)(a) of the Constitution to be appointed members of the Ethnic Relations Commission; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly adopts the Seventh Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments

which addresses matters relating to the nomination and appointment of Members to the Ethnic Relations Commission.

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip – Chairperson of the Committee on Appointments]

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish that all our Sittings would be like this. I am bringing before you the Ethnic Relations Commission Report. We have gone through all the stages in the Committee on Appointments from the Resolution of No. 36 of 2022, where we got our 2/3 majority to consult the list of organisations approved by the National Assembly and got into the actual consultative phase, which went up to October. We are bringing it today, the actual nominees that came out from the process. I hope that you will look at the Report. The actual Report is short, but the appendices are many in relation to the bio-data of the candidates and the reports of each cluster on the electoral process. One would be able to see that we, as a Committee, are satisfied that the process was transparent and accountable. We bring to you today, for your support, the nominees for the ethnic Relations Commission, numbering no more than 10. Once the House approves these names, then the President will appoint them and they will internally meet to elect the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.

4.41 p.m.

For the record, the name that came out of the Christian Bodies was Rev. Rodwell F. Alphonso Porter; for the Hindu Bodies was Pandit Krishna Deo Sharma; for the Islamic Bodies, Mr. Moeenul Hack; for the Labour Movement Bodies was Mr. Norris Witter; for the Private Business Sector Bodies was Mr. Charles Ogle; for the Youth Bodies was Mr. Dwayne Adams; for the Women Bodies was Ms. Chandroutie Sarran; for the Cultural/Ethnic Bodies Indigenous/Amerindian Bodies was Mr. Ashton Simon; for the Afro-Guyanese Bodies was Mr. Deon Dick also known as Ras Khafra; and for the Indo-Guyanese Bodies was Mr. Neaz Subhan. I put these names and the motion was circulated earlier last week for your consideration. I hope you will support this. This motion does not require two-thirds, it requires a simple majority. I should, again, in this case with the Committee on Appointments, thank the Members and say that this Committee went through all of this and approved the process. In some cases, Members were part of the consensual consultations and, also, approved the report and the motion to come before this House. Thank you.

Mr. Ramjattan: I must state that these names, as you would appreciate, did give us some problems. We had to, in the process of what you call comity, appreciate that we are never going to get the perfect 10 from one side or the perfect 10 from the other. I support the fact that, at least at the end of the process, we realised that it was from these clusters that these names were selected. That helped me, at least, in gaining support for this. I will support it and I will ask my Members to do so too.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I just want to be a bit consistent. With the third names, instead of putting Mister, we consider him Sheikh Moeenul Hack.

Motion put and carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think this concludes our business for today. Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, am I accurate? Am I accurate there? Does this conclude our business for today?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Sir. It does.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Members, we have had a very long, hardworking two weeks with the support of a lot of staff, police, and caterers. On behalf of the staff of the Parliament Office and the Clerk of the National Assembly, I want to express my appreciation to everyone and to all of you, for taking us through this process. I have a list of order. I will have the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, I will have the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, I will have someone from the Opposition, and close with the Prime Minister.

Mr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have already, at various points during the course of this debate, thanked my Colleagues on this side of the House and indeed, my Colleagues on that side of the House for their various contributions during the course of the consideration of the budget, and, in particular, the many public servants who would have contributed to the process to get us here. I would like to reiterate all of those sentiments that I have expressed and that others have expressed on both sides of the House in relation to those various invaluable contributions.

Sir, may I also extend thanks to you, to the Clerk of the National Assembly and to his staff for their remarkable effort in supporting us through this process and for ensuring that everything went so impeccably, smoothly and efficiently. Long after we would have left, they would still have been working to ensure that the next day's sitting was being prepared, and long before we arrived, they would

already have been here, hard at work to ensure that the imminent sitting be prepared for us. I want to thank, you, Sir, and in particular, the Clerk and his very hardworking team. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Deputy Speaker, you have the floor.

Mr. Shuman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To all my Colleagues in the House, I stand to simply say thank you for an opportunity to serve beside you. Though we may not have *seen eye to eye* on many things, I would like to think that my presence here may have brought some sense of sobriety to my Colleagues on this side. It has been an honour and a privilege to have met some fine staff from the Parliament Office. Mr. Speaker, I want to also thank you, and thank all of those who would have voted and supported all the work that all of us in this House have come here to do. I look forward to once again challenging my Colleagues to be better representatives of the people and that we can one day *see eye to eye* on many of the issues in service to the people. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you have the floor.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for indulging us at this stage. For thank you comments, I want to say, first of all that, in a democracy, Opposition politics means necessarily getting a little belligerent with the Government. If one does not do that, it may not be a good attribute to have in a Parliament. To that extent then, all that one may have seen from our side is but a necessary, normal course routine. We have no hatred for those Members of the Government, and we will never have. The peace that I think my good Friend, Mr. Benn, indicated, will be supported by every Member of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, we know that this was the largest budget. I do not like to repeat that term, but it is, indeed, all the more why scrutiny should be there because it is the largest budget. I am extremely honoured to be amongst Friends here in the Opposition who utilised their learning that has happened over the past two budgets to make sure that they showed the country and especially the Members here, a capacity to get beyond the figures. It means that we are learning and that those young ones that we have are learning. Notwithstanding, now and again, the disruptions or the disagreements, as I said, it is going to be *part and parcel* of it. We just have to look at other parliaments where they take out their shoes and start pelting and cuffing up each other and so on. We will not go there. The trouble is that whatever

we are doing here sets a standard that is very normal. To the extent then that we are moving forward in that regard, we should all be congratulated, both Government and the Opposition. In the best, ‘thank you for camaraderie’ and solidarity as representatives of this honourable National Assembly, I want to thank everyone for doing a wonderful job this budget.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. It has been a pleasure to work with the Chief Whips this year. Would you like to say a few words, Mr. Jones?

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I would like to echo the sentiments by the Hon. Member, Khemraj Ramjattan. We have found that this is the fourth budget of the Government and, indeed, in terms of its interrogation by the Members of the Opposition, we have seen improvement. Particularly, our young Members who would have been somewhat last *out of the gate*, this year, they performed exceptionally well. I would want to single out Mr. Richard Sinclair, for example.

Mr. Speaker: You are never too old to learn.

Mr. Jones: I know as well, Sir, in terms of us continuing to work together in the interest of the nation that we serve, we still have somewhat of a long way to go. I recognise that the efforts are there but I think all of us, collectively, have to put that effort in front.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Teixeira?

Ms. Teixeira: I was not aware I was going to speak. To echo all of the sentiments of all the speakers before me, the Deputy Speaker, my Colleague Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Mr. Jones, and Mr. Ramjattan, I think we have to learn to work together and to agree to disagree. How do we do that? We cannot expect you, as Opposition, to sycophants of the Government, and you cannot expect us to follow you. We have our mandate and our responsibilities.

It is an understanding of where we go and how we work together. There will be sharp differences and there will be times when we can work on our national issues in the best interest of our people. I hope that this experience in the budget, despite some times they were quite heated, quite loud, in a sense, this has been one of the better experiences of a budget debate in the National Assembly. I want to thank everyone for that. I believe that we have an opportunity in 2023 to really do a variety of things across the board, across the Opposition and Government, to move different processes forward and to ensure that we are able to move rapidly

forward in the development of our country and the transformation of our nation. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, permit me to take this opportunity to thank all Members of Parliament (MPs) on both sides of the House for this budgetary process and the scrutiny that you *brought to bear* on us, the Government’s side. I endorse the sentiments expressed by all before me, but I also wish to thank the public servants not only in the Ministry of Finance, but throughout the public service of Guyana. Of course, I wish to thank you, Mr. Speaker, our Deputy Speaker, our Clerk...

Mr. Speaker: Our Assistant Deputy Speaker.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: And all the staff of the Parliament Office, the staff of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC), the caterers... [**An Hon. Member:** The police.] The police.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.”

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: I ask that we adjourn the sitting of this House to a date to be fixed in the near future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Prime Minister. As we are on this very conciliatory note, let us acknowledge the maiden Test century of Matthew Nandu, the first-class match for Guyana. Hon. Members, the House now stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 4.54 p.m.