

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2017) OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

74TH Sitting

Monday, 4TH December, 2017

Assembly convened at 10.30 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Leave granted to Members

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted to the Hon. Members, Mr. Jaipaul Sharma and Mr. Harry Gill, from the 4th – 8th December, 2017. Leave has also been granted to the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, from 4th – 6th December, 2017, inclusive. Hon. Member Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha will be on leave until the 11th December, 2017.

Birth Anniversary of Ms. Bancroft

Mr. Speaker: I am pleased to inform this House that Hon. Member Ms. Rajcoomarie Bancroft celebrates her birthday today. I know we would wish to wish her well and continued good health. Thank you. [*Applause*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2017

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2018 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2017-11-27.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2018, of a total sum of two hundred and forty three billion, three hundred and seventy five million, two hundred and eighty eight thousand dollars (**\$243,375,288,000**), **excluding twenty three billion, seven hundred and eighteen million, four hundred and eighty three thousand dollars (\$23,718,483,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to further provision in respect of finance. *[Minister of Finance]*

Mr. Speaker: All Hon. Members would, by now, be in possession of a copy of the list of speakers and the times which have been allocated to each speaker. I received a letter from the Government Chief Whip, Ms. Amna Ally, to that effect and I believe all Members have copies. I also received a letter from Ms. Teixeira, this morning, which points out that there are two differences in perspectives. There is no challenge to the times allotted to speakers and so we will be guided by those times in our conduct of affairs.

I do not perceive that the matters to which Ms. Teixeira referred, in one instance, as to numbers, that numbers is a matter which the Speaker is in a position to influence. In relation to the second point which Ms. Teixeira made, I recall that, at our last Sitting of the National Assembly where there was consideration of the Budget, the very matter was raised and it remained unresolved. I suspect that that would be the same here. I note the objections which Ms. Teixeira has raised, but I would propose that we proceed with the debate.

I ask that Hon. Members be guided by the Standing Orders which, I assume, all Hon. Members are familiar with. We are going to show respect to the speakers so that Members do not hold themselves free to interrupt in some of the ways we have been doing in the past.

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great privilege to speak on Budget 2018 at a very interesting time locally and globally. Let me take this opportunity, on behalf of the Parliamentary Opposition, to thank all the public servants and the technical officers who would have worked tirelessly in putting together Budget 2018. However, the responsibility of moving the economy forward, expanding our economy, creating opportunities, creating jobs and improving the livelihood of the Guyanese people rests squarely with the elective Government through its policies and measures to improve the life of every Guyanese.

Budget 2018 is devoid of any measure to rescue our ailing economy or to improve the wellbeing of our people. The Budget provides no comfort for parents, especially single mothers who are denied the \$10,000 cash grant and are now burdened with tax on educational services of approximately \$342 million annually. Budget 2018 does nothing to correct the burden of \$342 million in taxes on educational services for parents and children across this country. Budget 2018 does nothing for pensioners who are denied more than \$1.5 billion as a result of the removal of water and electricity subsidies. Budget 2018 does or says nothing to private citizens and businesses forced to pay \$32.2 billion more in taxes over the last three years as a result of new taxation measures and fees implemented by this Government. Budget 2018 says nothing to the tens of thousands of workers displaced from sugar, forestry and the construction sector. Budget 2018 does not address the upsurge in violent crime.

Budget 2018 did not announce a single measure for infants who are now exposed to diphtheria-pertussis-tetanus (DPT), yellow fever, poliomyelitis (polio) and Bacille Calmette Guerin (BCG) due to a decline in immunization coverage, as reflected in Appendix I of the 2018 Budget Speech; there is nothing for these infants in Budget 2018.

Budget 2018 brings nothing for the farmers, nurses, teachers, public servants, policemen, policewomen and army officers. Budget 2018 brings no relief for the 61% category of businesses affected by non-performing loans; not a single initiative; not a single measure to help those businesses. Budget 2018 is devoid of any measure to help the people of any category in this economy.

Let us look at the area of growth. Not only was the Minister of Finance wrong in his prediction for growth twice in 2017, but also there is a bigger picture that supports the view that the economy has lost its vibrancy. The Hon. Minister of Finance made it a point to say that this Budget is a review of the mid-term of the Government. I would like to conduct that review at this moment also.

Since 2015, the economy has limped along to the elusive “good life” concept. This is most evident in the sub-optimal growth registered over the last three years. Let us look at Article IV of the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) Surveillance Report. Potential growth for 2015, our potential to grow in 2015, was 4.07%. We underachieved; our achieved growth was only 3.93%, underperformance of the economy. Our potential to grow in 2016 was pegged at 3.93% and we only grew at 3.4%. Again, we underachieved in 2016. Using the same analytical framework, which is the Hodrick-Prescott filter used by the IMF, in 2017, our growth potential should have been 3.79%. Again, we underachieved, only now projected to grow by 2.9%. This is the reality. When we look at our growth rate for every year of this Government, we have underachieved as it relates to the growth of this economy, another story of this Government. In actual fact, the loss of income as a result of the underperformance in 2017 will be \$3 billion.

10.45 a.m.

As a result of the underperformance of the economy, the loss of income for 2017 will be \$3 billion. What menu of measures did the Minister announce for 2018 that would address the suboptimal performance of the economy? Nothing is there - none.

Let us look at the mid-term score card where the Minister of Finance referred to the fact that this Government is at its mid-term and it was analysing its performance. The Minister actually said that the Government is very satisfied with its performance at mid-term. But let us look at the reality that is based on factual analysis. Appendix II of the Budget speech... From the time the Government took office to now, let us look at the important productive sector and see what the results are. From the time this Government came to office to now, sugar has declined by \$3.8 billion, forestry by \$4.2 billion, rice by \$740 million and bauxite by \$792 million. Decline. Decline. Decline. Decline. And this Government could tell the people of this country that it is satisfied and happy with its performance when every one of the productive sectors has declined under its watch since it came into office.

It is important to note that these sectors are not only about numbers and revenue, but also about people, their lives, families, communities and societies. For example, these sectors that I mentioned employ more than 61,000 persons directly. More than 244,276 Guyanese depend exclusively on these sectors for their livelihood, income and sustenance. What does this Budget say to them? All of them would have seen a decline in their disposable income, displacement or removal from their jobs. What does Budget 2018 offer 32.9% of our population? It is 32.9% of our population which is directly affected as a result of the decline at this mid-term point under this Government. But what does the Budget give to these people? It gives empty promises, false hope and no hope. The Budget lacks the creativity, innovation and the thinking power that could stimulate, advance and create opportunities for these people. This is the reality of Budget 2018.

How do we address the extreme hardships faced by these families in Wales, Rose Hall, Rosignol, in the interior, Buckhall, the forestry areas and Mainstay. How do we address it? Where are the incentives to diversify the economy? Where is the concessional financing that would help them to readjust their lives and reintegrate themselves into other aspects of economic life? Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Decline. Decline. Decline.

As I said earlier, not only are these traditional sectors casualties of Budget 2018 or of the last three years, but also business enterprises are facing a tremendous difficulty out there. A number of persons in the society, outside of that 32.9%, are employed by small and medium-size business enterprises; 61% of the non-performing loans falls in that category, that is, business enterprises account for 61% of all non-performing loans in the commercial banks. What does

Budget 2018 provide to these businesses? What opportunities? What help? What measure? What facility? Are we just going to allow them to go into non-existence, bankruptcy and to shut their doors? Are we going to do that and just wait on the revenue coming in from oil? Outside of mentioning investment coming in for the oil sector, for the first time, a budget does not identify a single foreign investor that is coming to invest in any other sector in the economy. For the first time, there is no quantitative or qualitative analysis in terms of new jobs that would be created in a budget. Other than the flowery language, there is no quantitative and qualitative analysis as to where the jobs would come from, which sector and what measure by this Government would help to create this opportunity. Nothing! Nothing! The Budget is devoid of that.

The business environment has become so toxic. Last year, the Hon. Minister of Business stood and one of his proudest moments was to say, “We have jumped the ranking on the Doing Business Indicator.” At that time, I said, “Be careful how you jump.” The business environment has become so toxic that Guyana has slipped two base places in the ease of doing business. We never had a Ministry of Business. Now we have a Ministry of Business that concentrates specifically on business development and we have slipped. We are supposed to be improving, but we have slipped. I would provide the statistics now to show that it is not only a slip; it is a big slide. Not only have we declined two places on the Doing Business Indicators, but also the following categories show tremendous deterioration. Listen to the categories.

These are the categories that speak directly to economic performance, business development and the efficiency of governance and Government. Dealing with construction permit, we now have two Ministers. Two Ministers are dealing with the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA). And, in dealing with construction permit, we have slipped 15 places.

Not only did this Government promise that it will end blackout. I think in its celebration of its first year in office, it said that it will end flooding and blackout, but we have slipped five places in getting electricity. So the problem now is not only blackout, but it is also that people are not getting connection because we have slipped five places in getting electricity.

This is a Government that likes to talk about protection of people’s rights, protection of the minority rights, but, in protecting the minority investors, we have slipped nine places. This is a

Government that likes to say that things are good and people are getting loans. In getting credit, we have slipped eight places.

We have a Government that is supposed to be doing well in trade with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and our neighbours, but, in trading across borders, we have slipped seven places. And this is the Government that cares about transparency and the enforcement of contract, laws and rules. But in the enforcement of contracts, we have slipped two places. In resolving insolvency, we have slipped eight places. And if one wants to find out more in the story of slippage, I urge one to visit Table III of the ease of doing business ranking. This is the reality that our country is faced with - decline and slippage. We are on a slippery pathway to the green concept and it is not that the Hon. Minister of Finance is unaware.

The Minister of Finance was very skilful because he avoided these realities. He avoided the fact, but he could not avoid, any longer, the propaganda and promises to the people out there. That is why he tried to put in a saving clause in the Budget that states that it never promised the good life in this term. But I would like to know, did the people of Guyana promise them another opportunity to bring a good life? After this good lie that the people of Guyana received, they are never going to trust them again to bring any good life because the reality is that it was a good lie and not a good life.

I am following the direction of the Minister of Finance. Inflation: Amidst the slowdown in the economy and the loss in income, guess what is happening to consumers. This Government likes to paint a rosy picture as if consumers are happy out there. Who are consumers? Consumers are the farmers, public servants, police officers, Army officers, nurses, teachers and pensioners. And what are they facing out there? Food prices have increased by 4.5%; medical and personal care has increased by 3.4%; education has increased by 4.6%. Where is the good life? Where is the improvement in the conditions of living in this country? Where is the improvement in the economy? I ask the Hon. Members on the Government side, if they are listening to these declines and the increases in food prices, personal and medical care and education, if they are still satisfied that this Government is performing, then let them put a round of applause for Budget 2018. Did you hear the silence? It is because they are satisfied with the proposition now that they have been enlightened that the Government and the economy have underperformed and that the Government has failed to deliver to the Guyanese people. [*Interruption*]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

[Mr. Ramjattan: That is why you all are over there.]

awakened from his slumber.

Mr. Speaker, a Member has just

11.00 a.m.

In addition to the 4.5% increase in food prices, the 3.4% increase in medical and personal care and the 4.6% increase in education, guess what? Consumers were asked to pay \$40.4 billion more in Value Added Tax (VAT), which is \$3.1 billion more than when the Government took office. Do you remember the great promise that they will reduce VAT? But, today, consumers are paying \$3.1 billion more in VAT from the time this Government took office - a failed promise. This is the reality and it is not getting better. The 2018 projection is that we will pay \$3 billion more than 2017. So, the Government said that we do not have any new taxes, but the consumers are going to pay \$3 billion more than 2017. When you take the total, the consumers will be paying \$6.1 billion more in VAT now than when this Government came to office, and this was the Government that promised a reduction. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** It is okay.]

The Vice-President said that it is okay. Well, it is not okay for us. It cannot be okay for us when the people of this country are suffering. It cannot be okay for us when the economy is in decline. It cannot be okay for us when people are losing their jobs. It cannot be okay for us when farmers are not getting any support in Budget 2018. Nothing is okay about that – nothing. **[Mr.**

Ramjattan: You do not like it over there anymore.]

This Opposition can serve the

people from anywhere and we will serve the people from anywhere.

Foreign Exchange Market and Balance of Payment: The carnage on our economy is further reflected by the depreciation in the principal exchange rate, coupled with the deterioration of our balance of payment position. As a result of the poor performance of the export sector, the principal exchange rate suffered its sharpest decline. The sharpest decline has come since liberalisation came under this Government. Appendix IV of the Budget speech states that the current account deficit is projected at 481.3% more than the Budget deficit for 2017.

The Minister of Finance did not only make a mistake in his projection of the growth rate. You would recall that, in 2017, the Minister of Finance projected the current account deficit of \$45.3

million. It is a US\$335 million mistake, a 481.3% mistake made by the Minister of Finance, a wrong projection again.

If the Minister of Finance and this Government cannot accurately project the important macroeconomic indicators, how are they going to develop measures to tackle the problem? The first thing you have to do is to accurately make projections and, based on those as close as possible to the accuracy, you have to develop measures and policies to address the problem. If the projections are so wrong, then how will you develop proper policies and measures to address the problem?

The decline in our current account deficit can be directly attributed to the downward adjustment of the export receipt. Another area of decline, which is in the mid-term report, is the export receipt for bauxite which has declined by 21.4%; export receipt for sugar has declined by 38.1%; export receipt for rice has declined by 7.3%; export receipt for timber has declined by 4% and re-export has declined by 43.8%. This is the reality of this Government, which is decline in every aspect of economic life, decline in every form of economic wellbeing. This is the reality that we are faced with and this is the good lie.

Good Governance, Transparency and Accountability: This is another segment in the Budget speech. Let me turn your attention, Mr. Speaker, to table 3 - Summary of Findings of the Auditor General's Report - and let us see how this Government fared in result to governance, accountability and transparency.

When the Government came to office, there were 53 instances in relation to overpayment on construction in 2014 and with... [Mr. Ramjattan: We are doing well.] Are you doing well? Let me tell you how you are doing. It has moved from 53 instances to 126 instances and the Hon. Vice-President is saying that we are doing well. Well, God help us if they are doing well and they have slipped from 53 instances to 126 instances. If I got first place in the first term when I was going to school and I got home and told my parents I got sixth place, I would get some good *whip lash*. I do not know what the Hon. Vice-President means, but, if you cannot recognise that, moving from 53 to 126 instances is a slippage, then something is really wrong with you.

If you look at the category of weak internal controls, there were 90 instances of that when they came to office but, today, there are 106 instances, and the Hon. Member said that they were doing well. A movement from 90 to 106 breaches of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMA) Act; a movement from 47 to 82 breaches of the Procurement Act; a movement from 16 to 71...and the Government is saying that it cares about law, order, transparency and accountability - another good lie.

The reality, the truth and the fact have been presented here - slippage in overpayment; slippage in internal control; slippage in breaches of the FMA Act; slippage in the Procurement Act. This is a Government of slippages.

I see the Chief Whip pointing to some time here. Let me summarise the performance of the economy based on the statistics reported in the 2018 Budget.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are allowed 30 minutes and additional five minutes. You are on your additional five. You have been speaking for 31 minutes.

Mr. Ali: Let me summarise the performance. The economy has underperformed as a result of the Government's inability to formulate policies to rescue the ailing export sectors; two, prices for food, housing, transportation, medical and personal care, education, recreation and culture have all increased markedly due to the 2017 tax measures; three, balance of payment has resulted in the depletion of the gross international reserve and import cover; four, the principal exchange rate depreciation is more than \$4, despite the draconian measures to stabilise the exchanging rate; five, based on all macroeconomic indicators, the economy is limping along and the average Guyanese is still waiting to see the good life as they battle with the good lies.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, I want to turn your attention to some of our recommendations in our motion. If we really want to help the economy and if we really want to help the ordinary people, the working class people, then let us remove the 200 plus burdensome tax measures that were imposed and implemented in the 2017 Budget. Let us bring measures that would help small and medium enterprises and let us bring measures that would stimulate the growth of new businesses. Let me give you one example of a failed measure, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes more.

Mr. Ali: In 2017, the Minister announced a measure which was duty free concession on solar powered vehicle. Not one Guyanese benefited; not one solar-powered vehicle is here. That measure has been abandoned and now the Minister of Finance has announced a new measure to bring duty free concession on liquefied petrol gas (LPG) powered vehicle. Not one LPG refuelling station is in this country. Who would that benefit? That is just political fluff, bluff and gaff.

The reality is that the Budget presents no real opportunities for growth. It presents no new opportunity for the ordinary man and woman. It gives no hope to the thousands of sugar workers. It brings no comfort to the thousands of workers in the forestry sector. It brings no additional benefit for the small and medium-sized miner. It does none of that. It does not even bring clarity on the removal of VAT on educational services and supplies. It does not remove the VAT from medical supplies and services. It does not remove the VAT from the food item that it is now imposed on. Nothing in Budget 2018 is there for the ordinary man - the farmer, the nurses, the teachers, the public servants – nothing.

I urge this Government, in good faith, to consult with the motion we presented and to look at the recommendations and to have some empathy for the Guyanese people and to implement those recommendations. I plead with you, on behalf of the Guyanese people.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: I would ask Members to try to stick to the time allotted to them and I would remind Members that a Member present in the Assembly during debate, who is not speaking, ought not to read newspapers or any other document not relating to what is taking place here.

Minister of Business [Mr. Gaskin]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member has painted quite a dismal picture of our economy and he is clearly not seeing *the glass as half full*. In fact, I am wondering whether he is seeing *the glass* at all.

11.15 p.m.

Not because you are on that side of the House means that you do not have to have some sort of vision. It would help us a lot if we knew that you had the vision on that side of the House to

understand what this budget is all about, and to understand the journey to the good life, and to appreciate the journey to the good life.

Before I get too carried away, I would like to, first of all, commend the Minister of Finance and his hard working team for, yet again, bringing to this House a budget... **[Bishop Edghill:**

The largest.] Yes, not just the largest budget, but also bringing it on schedule. It takes determination and dedication to do this year after year and to produce these figures. Somehow, they have managed to do this every year and I would like to express my appreciation to them. In doing so, I include the Minister as well. I notice that the Hon. Member who spoke before me singled out the hard working staff of the Ministry of Finance, but said nothing about the Minister. I would like to express my appreciation to the entire team.

I am seeing a totally different budget than what was depicted by the Hon. Member. Budget 2018 is a good natured budget. It has a certain benevolence about it; it is a people-focused budget; it is a budget that speaks to the man in the streets and it says to him that when this Government is spending tax payers' money, that he or she is going to be the beneficiary of that spending.

I want to give some examples in the measures. If we look at the personal income tax allowance, the \$728,000 per year, the man who works for half of a year and, as a result, would normally be entitled to a deduction of only half of the annual allowance from his earnings, the entire allowance can now be deducted. This will allow persons who were laid off and who are unable to find another job in the short term to at least get back some of the taxes that they would have paid during the previous year, while they were working. Of course, they would have to file their tax returns in order to benefit from this measure, but this measure speaks, as I said, to the ordinary man, woman, and worker, and lets them know that our Government is fair, considerate and wants the best for them.

Another example is the Value Added Tax (VAT) on low-cost housing. The removal of VAT on low-cost housing units below \$6.5 million is another measure which identifies with the man in the street. This is not a measure that will only benefit a handful of people, it is not a *fat cat* measure; it is a measure for the ordinary working person who wants to invest in a first home, perhaps. A lot of these people are likely to be young people with limited means, to whom the

Government is saying that it is willing to forfeit hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenues in order to ensure that they can become home owners.

Concessions to employers who provide day care services - I noticed the Hon. Member, Mr. Ali, lamenting the fact that this budget had nothing in it for single mothers. Concessions to employers who provide day care services to their employees - this is another step towards reducing the burden on parents, mothers in particular, to arrange affordable and convenient day care for their young children. This is a win-win situation all around for the employer whose staff attendance is critical and is likely to improve if they have this kind of support, and for the child who can now have somewhere safe and secure to go while his/her parents are out at work. Again, this is not a *fat cat* measure; this is a measure for the ordinary Guyanese to benefit from. These are all clear commitments to the man in the street and the woman in the street, who are looking to enjoy their share of the good life.

In addition to speaking to the people of our country, Budget 2018 also addresses the needs of the private sector. It builds on three previous budgets presented under our Government and will renew private sector confidence in our economy. There are thousands of private business operators in Guyana and they are the ones who need to understand this budget and how it will benefit them.

Let us look at the forestry sector. This sector will benefit from a number of measures tailored specifically for this industry. The increase in the Common External Tariff (CET) on imported pinewood from 5% to 40% will certainly help to reduce the amount of imported wood into our markets and have more of our local lumber utilised. The exemption of the VAT on logs and rough lumber for the sawmilling industry will restore the *status quo* that the industry has lobbied for at a cost to Government of approximately \$80 million in forfeited revenues. This Government is investing in our productive industries. The sum of \$120 million is set aside to start a forestry inventory which will provide important information and data for timber harvesters. The setting aside of \$50 million for a consolidated stockyard is a major step in the right direction, aimed at managing a more efficient supply chain for forestry products. These are all measures intended to support the production of value-added products in Guyana.

This is an excellent start in addressing some of the sector's specific challenges that have prevented us from adding value to our natural resources for so long. There may be more that the Government needs to do and more will come as we identify the real challenges facing these sectors.

The tourism sector will also benefit from concessions granted on vehicles used by licensed tourism operators in the hinterland areas and also on buses used to transport tourists.

[Bishop Edghill: How many?] You have to have the vision to understand the tourism industry. If you do not understand that this is an industry in its infancy, an industry that has enormous potential, you will not be asking us how many. We cannot tell you how many will benefit; you will have to wait until next year. This is a measure for 2018. These measures demonstrate the Government's understanding of the needs of this growing industry and its willingness to invest in the sector. The hinterland is the heart of tourism in Guyana and those who have the vision and the commitment to invest in our emerging hinterland tourism industry, must be given the support they need to succeed. The Budget 2018 gives a boost to the tourism sector and, like with the forestry sector, there will be more to come.

The amnesty to tax payers who have not filed returns will encourage more businesses to file their returns and to pay their taxes. The waiver of interests and penalties means that businesses filing and paying their outstanding principles in full can approach the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) with a lot less fear and anxiety.

[Bishop Edghill: Get your papers in order there.] My papers are in order. I am looking at my watch. *[Interruption]*

Before I go into the estimates, I would like to share with this House, some of what the Ministry of Business has been doing in 2017. Our Department of Commerce is a very service oriented department and is constantly seeking ways to make it easier to do business in Guyana. It carries out outreaches in all 10 of Guyana's regions and meets with various chambers of commerce in those regions, as well as local authorities, in an effort to share information and to directly hear the concerns of businesses all over Guyana. This year, the Department of Commerce has collaborated with local chambers of commerce in Lethem and Mahdia to establish business registration hubs. This is so that persons can register their businesses in these towns rather than to travel all the way to the Essequibo Coast, as previously prevailed. This has helped people in

Regions 8 and 9 to regularise their business activities so that they can develop formal businesses and enjoy the benefits of doing so.

By the end of the third quarter of 2017, the Department of Commerce recorded an increase of approximately 17% in the number of import and export licences that they processed. This was over last year. Ninety eight per cent of the 4,545 as at 30th November were processed within 24 hours, which is up from 89% in 2016. Further improvements will take place in 2018, we are targeting 99%. *[Interruption]*

In addition, trade agreements between Guyana and other countries such as Costa Rica, Brazil and China have been analysed and created into fact sheets to raise private sector awareness of market opportunities, key provisions, and exemptions granted by such agreements. In 2018, more such fact sheets will be available for Guyanese to learn about the opportunities for trade with other countries.

The private sector continues to play a vital role in the growth of Guyana's economy. The Ministry of Business recognises this and supports private sector development. In this regard, various projects and initiatives have been undertaken, including the conducting of product surveys to identify potentially viable manufacturing businesses that can benefit from Government incentives and training for women in Region 9 in the area of record keeping. In 2018, nearly \$1 million will be spent on similar initiatives to build the capacity of local businesses with export readiness, especially in the agro-processing sector.

Having a good awareness of the issues facing the business community is important in making meaningful interventions. This is why our Ministry has begun surveys for the development of the Business Confidence Index. Surveys have already been conducted in Regions 6 and 10 and are ongoing in other regions. This index is intended as a tool to identify the level of optimism or pessimism in our economy, and to arrive at and propose evidence based policies for enhancing the ease of doing business in Guyana. In recognition of the strong correlation between the business environment and the levels of investment that take place in the economy, the Ministry of Business has been pursuing various 'Doing business' reforms to make Guyana a better place to do business and to ensure that Guyana's economy will continue to attract investment.

In 2017, works were undertaken in the areas of registering a business and registering property, with the development of a web portal to allow the public to access forms, statistics and information on procedures, and other requirements.

In alignment with the Green State Development Strategy Framework, the Ministry, in 2017, has sought to develop an incentive framework for green businesses to promote sustainable green business practices through regulatory reforms and training. To this end, the Ministry has secured partial funding from Compete Caribbean for the examination of regulatory reforms and the provision of training to be carried out in 2018.

11.30 a.m.

Our Department of Industry continues to focus on the development and management of industrial estates in Guyana. The existing industrial estate at Coldingen has had infrastructural works undertaken in an effort to improve the operating environment for its occupants. Estate management committees have also been set up, both at Coldingen and at Eccles industrial estates to actively address matters of importance to the occupants. Work is also being done to regularise the occupancy in these estates and to curb malpractices that have gone unchecked for so many years.

On the investment facilitation side, the Guyana Office for Investment (Go-Invest) has welcomed close to 1,000 visitors looking to do business in Guyana between January and September of this year. The agency has been providing information on starting a business, doing business, concessions and other Government policies that can support investments, guidance on application procedures and the eligibility of projects for concessions. This is in addition to the role it plays in processing formal applications for investment agreements.

The Go-Invest has also hosted trade missions from Brazil, Canada, as well as a familiarisation trip for potential client companies for the business process outsourcing industry. The latter has enormous potential for job creation and Go-Invest is monitoring the follow-up taking place between the locally based operators and the client companies who had visited.

Up to the end of November 2017, 103 investment projects received the agency's assistance and nineteen investment agreements were executed for this year. Three of those agreements were

public sector projects with proposed job creations of 122, while the remaining 16 were private sector investments with proposed job creations of 850. The total value of those investments was \$23 billion. At the end of October 2017, there were eight applications still awaiting approval and 31 still being processed. There were also 43 applications for land.

For benchmarking purposes, if we were to look at the Jamaica Promotions Corporation (JAMPRO), which is Jamaica's trade and investment agency, according to its annual report for 2016, the subvention that it received from the Government of Jamaica last year was US\$4 million. With that, it was able to facilitate 23 investment projects valued at approximately US\$340 million. Go-Invest would have received an annual subvention of approximately US\$1 million, which is a 1/4 of what JAMPRO received. **[Mr. Hamilton: What was the output?]** The output of Go-Invest, so far for the year, is approximately US\$120 million in investment projects. I am saying that with a 1/4 of the subvention of JAMPRO, we have achieved perhaps 1/3 of the output of JAMPRO when it comes to investment facilitation.

The Go-Invest is actively involved in the work of the Investment Promotion Council, which is a statutory body set up under the Investment Act 2004 to examine Guyana's incentive regime and to make recommendations to improve its effectiveness. This is an important responsibility because incentives could cause billions of dollars of tax revenues to be forfeited. Revenues forfeited through incentives must contribute to the development and competitiveness of our key economic sectors and must be recoverable in the long term from increased economic activities. The Go-Invest recently completed a two-day joint venture training session to give local businesses a better understanding of how joint ventures work, the benefits of joint ventures and how to go about establishing joint ventures.

There are a lot of discussions amongst the Guyanese business community, and some of our local commentators, about local content and the extent to which Guyanese will benefit from the large sums being spent and earned as a result of activities in the Oil and Gas sector. We all understand that most Guyanese companies lack the experience, the expertise, the financial resources and the quality control systems to be competitive industry suppliers at this point, and that there is an urgent need to build local capacity in order to maximise Guyanese participation in the lucrative opportunities that the Oil and Gas sector brings. Joint ventures are one way of getting Guyanese

companies involved in the early stages of the development of the off-shore oil industry. This was a timely initiative by Go-Invest that would no doubt impact positively on the local/private sector.

The Go-Invest also collaborated with the Canadian High Commission and the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) and propelled to host a webinar for producers of fresh and processed foods. This webinar was focused on providing access to the Canadian market for local producers of fresh and processed food. The agency facilitated the attendance of 23 businesses to expositions outside of Guyana. It also connected over 44 businesses with markets outside of Guyana. These were exporters of sugar, rice, woods, seafood, fruits and vegetables to the United States of America, the Dominican Republic, Korea and Trinidad and Tobago.

The Small Business Bureau is continuing to establish itself as a key national institution for supporting micro and small enterprises and to develop effective programmes to meet its objectives.

At the end of September of this year, 831 persons were provided with training in various aspects of running a business as well as technical training. Forty loans, valued at US\$758,753, were disbursed during the said period. Additionally, 132 grants, valued at US\$170,000, were disbursed. The Small Business Bureau also launched its in-school entrepreneurship programme in which 100 grants of \$30,000 each were distributed to students in 15 schools all around the country. This is a project aimed at helping 4th and 5th Form Business students to fund their School Based Assessments (SBAs) projects and to try to turn them into real investment projects. It is also competitive and fosters the development of the entrepreneurial spirit. Subject to review, this project would be expanded into 2018.

The Small Business Bureau has also been contracted by the Ministry of Public Security to execute its Youth Entrepreneurship Programme. This year a total of 68 grants, valued at US\$1,500 each, were disbursed by the Small Business Bureau on behalf of the Ministry of Public Security. This project is also expected to continue into 2018.

The Small Business Bureau has also begun work on developing a programme for operationalising the two business incubators that are currently under construction in the Lethem and Belvedere Industrial Estates. An incubator specialist from Curacao is assisting the Small Business Bureau to create a viable and sustainable incubator model.

The Small Business Bureau has also been working with the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) to make special provisions in its new software system for the implementation of the Small Business Procurement Programme, which would finally and formally allowed the special treatment of registered small businesses and contractors in public procurement.

The Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) continued to develop and revise standards for the various products and services and also provided technical assistance to companies seeking to become International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certified. At the end of September 2017, 21 companies received assistance in achieving ISOs certification. In 2017, the Guyana National Bureau of Standards assisted yet another laboratory in attaining ISO accreditation, raising the number of accredited laboratories in Guyana to three. More laboratories would become accredited over the next few years, thereby enhancing the national quality infrastructure and reducing the amount of samples that has to be sent overseas for testing. In all, 740 businesses were provided with technical assistance, training and product certification in 2017 by the Guyana National Bureau of Standards. Training was conducted in areas of management standards, root cause analysis, process mapping, food safety management systems, good laboratory practices and safety management training, to name a few.

The Guyana National Bureau of Standards is also working on a national building code to raise standards in the local construction industry. Based on the recommendation of the Guyana Association of Professional Engineers, the building code from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was adopted by the Guyana National Bureau of Standards in August of 2017. The implementation of a building code in Guyana would greatly improve the standard and quality of works carried out, both in the public and private sectors, and would raise the levels of safety in the industry.

The Department of Consumers' Protection and the Consumers and Competition Affairs Commission are the two entities with responsibility for consumers' matters. These bodies have worked in tandem, during 2017, to raise their profiles and to establish greater relevance to the citizens of this country. This has resulted in an increase in consumers complaints. At the end of November 2017, 196 consumers' complaints were received with a sales value of over \$100 million. So far, 155 of those complaints, that is 79 %, have been resolved. The remaining 41

cases are still ongoing and a total of 8 cases were referred to the Board of Commissioners of the Consumers and Competition Affairs Commission.

I would like to turn to tourism. In 2017, two new community-based tourism projects were set up in Warapoka in the Barima/Waini region and in Maraikobai in the West Berbice region. These initiatives reflect a concrete intervention aimed at improving livelihoods in remote communities through sustainable tourism.

Training in a range of areas, including hospitality and business practices, has been provided to workers in those communities. This would be intensified in 2018 and funding will be sought to develop appropriate tourist accommodation in five additional areas.

I would like to turn to Budget 2018. [An Hon. Member: ...Inaudible...] If you were paying attention, Hon. Member, you would have noticed that I was summarising the performance and work of the Ministry of Business in 2017. In 2018, the Electronic Single Window System will receive budgetary funding for the first time with a \$10 million allocation from our capital budget, earmarked to fund preparatory work for the implementation of the system across Government agencies. The total cost of this project is \$1.2 billion and will be funded from an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) loan. The system is intended to automate and enhance the flow of information between businesses and regulatory agencies, resulting in a more efficient and less uncertain process for obtaining various approvals from Government. Persons will be able to get your licences, permits and approvals simply by logging on and utilising a single electronic window where they would no longer have to submit the same information to 10 different Government agencies. One submission and it goes through the entire system and persons would get their approvals in an efficient way. It would also significantly reduce corruption because it reduces the opportunity for interference and it also records any interference.

The Ministry of Business will continue its efforts in approving the ease of doing business in Guyana with the assistance of the IDB to the tune of \$10 million. In 2018, we will see more work in the area of access to credit through the establishment of a Secure Transaction Regime, which would make it easier to access credit using movable assets – moveable collaterals.

11.45 a.m.

This will entail the revision of a draft Movable Property Security Act, the establishment of a modern electronic registry for registering movable property, and the training of staff. Regarding the ease of doing business, work will also be done in the area of getting construction permits through collaboration with the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) and the City Engineer's Department, and other agencies involved in issuing building permits. The Ministry of Business will seek to rationalise an application process that is time bound and efficient.

Work will also continue on two new industrial estates in Lethem and Belvedere, East Berbice. The Lethem estate is expected to create an economic hub in Lethem and one that can attract investors interested in producing for the Brazilian market.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you are on your final five minutes.

Mr. Gaskin: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Once the road from Lethem to the coast is finally constructed this estate will have a reliable road link to the Atlantic Coast and to the international shipping lanes. The Department of Industry has also begun the design and construction of two business incubators on the new industrial estates. This initiative is designed to create an enabling environment for the development of micro and small enterprises. Business space and equipment will be provided to these businesses, together with a supporting environment, in which they can start up a business with the help of a support programme that will provide training and other assistance, and work with them until they become independent enough to leave the incubator, and open up space for the next individual. With attention to be paid to quality and standards as well as business skills, the programme is expected to accelerate the business development of numerous small operators. The Ministry of Business will seek a consulting firm to develop a prospectus for the estates along with an operations plan. This project will continue into 2018. Three hundred and fifty million dollars has been allocated for this project.

Over the years, the Small Business Bureau has demonstrated its capacity to manage business development programmes successfully. The Bureau has an allocation of \$148 million for 2018. Additionally, \$100 million has been allocated towards the establishment of the Small Business Development Fund. This is the first time that this fund is being funded and this will serve as a revolving loan fund to be able to address the needs of businesses that cannot meet the requirements of the traditional banking system. The effective implementation of a sustainable

revolving fund will limit the erosion of the fund's capital. This will be achieved through careful screening of applicants prior to referral to the programme, frequent review of the performance of the revolving fund, favourable interest rates, and shorter repayment periods, to allow for timely revolving of the funds. In 2018, the Small Business Bureau also intends to implement a programme where it will register companies that meet certain criteria with regard to standards and quality. These companies would form a list of companies that the Bureau can recommend to large companies looking to subcontract or to contract a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME). Advertisements will be placed by the Bureau on behalf of those companies to promote them to larger enterprises.

Mr. Speaker: You have one minute remaining, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Gaskin: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

In 2018, GO-Invest will receive a total subsidy of \$218 million. The agency projects to facilitate investments of \$154 billion for the creation of approximately 5,725 jobs. Critical to enhancing the performance of this agency is the development and implementation of a National Export and Investment Strategy. This forms part of a US\$9.2 million loan funded project. Work has already begun in drafting terms of references for the consultants required for the design and implementation of this subcomponent of the project. Two hundred million dollars has been provided in Budget 2018 for expenditure under this project.

The Guyana National Bureau of Standards...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time is up.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the next speaker is the Hon. Mr. Joseph Hamilton. Before I invite Mr. Hamilton to take the floor, the Government's Chief Whip and the Opposition's Chief Whip have something to say. Ms. Ally, you are first.

Minister of Social Protection [Ms. Ally]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to refer you and Members to the 'Speaker's line-up' document which was circulated. There is a mistake with regard to the times allotted for Mr. Hamilton and Ms. Gillian

Burton- Persaud. Instead of 15 minutes plus five, it is 30 minutes plus five for both of them. I request that the change be made and that they be allowed to speak for the required time.

Mr. Speaker: I thank you. Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira.

Ms. Teixeira: There is no objection to this, as we had brought this to the attention of yourself and the Hon. Minister. There is just one other thing, a spelling mistake. It is not Dharamlall Seeraj, it is Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj. So, both Ms. Ally and I, in typing up some of these names... Mr. Nigel Dharamlall's name - "Dharamlall", is spelt wrong, so, just in terms of the spelling of Members of Parliament (MPs) names, it would be nice to have Members names spelt correctly on the form.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Mr. Hamilton, you have the floor.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

What we have presented to us, Budget 2018, I liken to a man who is at the altar with his to-be wife – he is going to get married. And he says to her, in the presence of all the family and friends, and the pastor, who is marrying them: "Baby, I promise to make you happy and I promise to give you a good life". Two and a half years into the marriage, the bank has foreclosed on the property that they had, Trans Pacific Motor Spares & Auto Sale Inc. has repossessed the car that they had, and there is no food in the pantry. Courts Guyana Inc. has taken back all the furniture and they are unable to pay their utility bills. The woman is in a quandary and she starts to complain; she is losing her mind. The husband – a generous good guy, as the Government profess to be – says to her, why are you complaining my dear? If you recall, I did not promise you a good life, I promised to take you on a journey to a good life.

For those of us who read the Bible, there is a story about a man by the name of Moses, not the Moses here who promised some people milk and honey, he promised to take them to the promise land and to the journey... [Mr. Williams: Get to the Budget.] I am already at the Budget - the journey to this good life. The fact is that journey took 40 years. We are told that, during this journey, one generation died because what you had was that they were wandering around in the wilderness trying to make this journey. This Coalition Government and the

Minister of Finance, what they have had the Guyanese people doing for the last two and a half years is wandering in the wilderness on this journey. The wilderness of hopelessness and helplessness; the wilderness of poverty, pauperisation and pessimism; the wilderness of despair, desperation and despondency; the wilderness of trials, tribulations and travails, weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth - that is the wilderness. This is because, simply put, the Guyanese people are unable to feed themselves and their children. They are unable to pay their bills. That is the reality of the situation.

I have with me, all four presentations of the Minister of Finance. It would be instructive to note that when these documents are analysed, 80% of what is in one, is in all. All you have here is sometimes a change of structure, a paragraph moved from one page to the next, lines adjusted and some numbers dropped in. That is what you have. So, in every way, these four documents are the same; nothing has changed from 2015 to 2018. Also, what is instructive is this, if you look at the 2015 Budget document, it has 92 pages; the 2016 Budget document has 90 pages and the 2017 Budget document, 109 pages, and I will come back to this one just now; and the 2018 Budget document, 93 pages. Is this a coincidence? Do you know why the 2017 Budget presentation has 109 pages? It is because this was the Budget of the taxes; this was the Budget of the burden on the backs of the people.

The analysis is, as I said, 80% of what is in one, is in all. This is what you call a lazy man's job; just go on the computer and shift. There is nothing with the people's interest in mind; nothing with the dilemma, the frustration and the pressure of the woman who is unable to put something in her children's lunch kit to send them to school; there is nothing about that. There is nothing in mind about the businessman, who the bank is about to take his property, or about the farmer, whose tractor the bank is about to take; nothing in mind about that. It is just sitting at a computer and rearranging pages, rearranging lines and paragraphs and dropping in some numbers.

12.00 p.m.

My good colleague, Mr. Ali, alluded to, in 2017, a measure - the type I call the *Bud and Lou* measure - for people who are bringing in electrical cars and setting up electrical stations. The Minister of Public Infrastructure cannot even get the electricity going for us, much less, electrical cars. This year, another *Bud Abbott and Lou Costello* measure, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG)

vehicles. It is just nonsense. Those two measures are nonsensical measures. They make no sense to any of us in this chamber, and in this country.

The Hon. Minister of Business, who spoke before me, the mighty professor, he is the lecturer,... Every time the Hon. Minister speaks you would wonder whether he understands what he is saying must be done, it is for him to do it. Two and a half years, and the Minister of Business is yet to get it right. Again, he is following on from his erstwhile colleague, the Minister of Finance Minister. I have with me the Minister of Business 2015, 2016 and 2017 presentations and the one he just gave. All four are simpler things. The Minister of Business has to change to report on what he has accomplished. That is it - his achievements, not that which is to happen.

The Hon. Minister, in passing, mentioned about the Lethem Industrial Estate and the Belvedere Industrial Estate. What he failed to mention is that this National Assembly appropriated funds since last year December for those two projects. The Minister failed to say that for the Belvedere Industrial Estate project the contract was just signed last week. For the Lethem project the contract was just signed a month ago – one year - a project that should have been completed in 2017. Money was available for these two projects since last year December. I want to show you the competence level of the Hon. Minister. Just last week the Belvedere Industrial Estate project was just awarded to Memorex Enterprises – just last week - and the project for Lethem was just awarded a month ago. How competent the Minister is?

Mind you, in 2016, the Minister, in his own words, indicated that these projects are to be completed in 2017. We are in the first week in December 2017, and the contractors are now mobilising for these projects. Those are two flagship projects. The time the Minister is taking to execute these two mini industrial sites, the Chinese would have been able to build a ‘rail line’ from the Port of Mombasa to Nairobi, Kenya. Right now, I could fly to Kenya and I could go to Mombasa and I could take a train and go to Nairobi. The rate the Minister is going with his projects, I would be able to traverse from the east of Africa to west of Africa on that ‘rail line’ on that project. The Hon. Minister should mention that.

The other issue is that the Hon. Minister is unable to even build his own house on time, the building to house his Ministry. Again, moneys were appropriated for the rehabilitation of the Ministry’s building on South Road, since last year December. This is the building in which the

Minister resides in every day. This is the building the Minister functions in and the contract for that building was only awarded just a month ago. The question the Guyanese people must ask: If a Minister is unable to build on time his own house, how will he contribute for me to build my house?

It is not fluff. They say the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It is not that I could bake; I am a baker. It is putting the pastries on the table for people to eat it. That is what the Government is failing.

My other colleagues would speak to the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), and I know the Hon. Member Mr. Harmon, my name sake would agree with me, and the Minister of Finance. You have bemoaned the fact that that execution rate is terribly. The Hon. Minister of the Ministry of the Presidency gathered the Permanent Secretaries in the ambience of Splashmins and he informed them, that “Listen, we have a grave problem, we cannot continue the implementation rate at 15% and 26%.” Those were his words. I am not making up anything. The Minister of Finance, five times, actually this year, he is speaking and was speaking. The question to ask, as I divert there a bit, is... Most of the people who were there before 2015, they are still there, even though they got rid with some. It is saying to us, it is the persons who are there to manage the policy, that is the Minister, who are failing and not the [inaudible] - failing,

The Minister of Public Security - who is happy as he said - if you go into yesterday's papers... [Mr. Ramjattan: So what.] ...is still advertising for contract. In December, he is advertising to build things, buildings which should have been completed in 2017. When you say “so what”, when you failed to utilise public funds that were appropriated, what you do is fail to give service to the citizens of Guyana. Apparently, the Government is yet to understand that. It is not just to say we send back money, “so what”. When you fail, Mr. Minister, to build police stations on time, you are neglecting your duty. You have the money to do so, and you said that you are happy. You are a failure, Sir. The failure of one Minister to ensure we build an appropriate prison on time cost us a whole block at Camp Street. It also cost us 17 lives of people, citizens of this country. That is what failure... [Interruption from Government Members] What is happening over there?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you must allow the Hon. Member to make his statement. Please proceed.

Mr. Hamilton: I repeat. Failure to build a prison on time with the money that was appropriated by this Parliament cost 17 Guyanese citizens, young men, to lose their lives. Failure to utilise moneys to build a proper prison, again, cost us a prison burning down, there were and tragedy and travail and the citizens of this country are unable to sleep because there are prisoners who are desperate people on the road. You are incapable of understanding that, so not to worry. Goose has eaten out your brains.

The Minister of Business, as I said, every time he speaks, I always reflect on one of these *Anansi* stories you used to hear in the country side when I was growing up as boy. They had a popular they called *Sensi Bill and Stupidity Bill*. They would have given us some things, they would have said some things and then the question would have asked, “What do you think it is? Is it *Stupidity Bill* or *Sensi Bill*? I say no more.

The Hon. Minister is at the Expo in Berbice, I just want to give you an example, and you would form your opinion. Speaking to farmers, sugar workers, vendors, fishermen, ordinary people, he said to them, in his own style, “You have to wean yourself away from sugar and prepare for information technology and the oil and gas sector.” Could you imagine that? Just think about it. Saying that, without saying how, is just talk. Apparently, my good friend is unable to understand that. Making declaratory statement without talking us to logical conclusions is just talk.

The Hon. Minister, again, spoke about the issue of pinewood and the tariff that would be put on it and there has to be the use of a permit to import pine wood. A measure, I really do not have any great difficulty with.

12.15 p.m.

Let me say this, and the Minister of Public Infrastructure would understand. It is not the Minister of Public Security. We have to be able, at the same time we are doing that, to ensure that our exporters and our people, who are dealing with in forestry and lumber, have the capacity to produce the type of item. What is the reality? When pinewood arrived here it is coming here kiln-dried. It is easier to work with for people who are in business. They people who have kiln in

this country do not put their wood in the kiln to sell on the local market. They put it in the kiln to export it to get hard currency. No one with kiln, unless he is doing his own house or his cousin's house, is selling wood to anyone here. Ordinary greenheart that is not in a kiln sells for \$280 per BM, up to \$320. Those that are put in a kiln sell at \$650 per BM. That is reality. Complimentary to dealing with the issue of the pinewood, we have to empower the lumber dealers and the foresters to reach to the stage where they have the type of comparable products. That is what is missing in the haste to levy our pinewood. That is what is missing. A good measure, but no complimentary action, therefore you are making a wrong measure.

Again, the Minister spoke to concession in tourism sector. What he failed to say is that the duty-free concession only applies to the people who were in this business for the last five years. There is no incentive for a young man or woman to start up.... I thought that the budget was to create jobs. While on one hand you are talking about you want young people to become entrepreneurs, what are you doing in the tourism sector? You have done nothing. A young man or a young woman who wants to go into the tourism sector, a young family, cannot access this concession. He or she cannot compete with the person who was in that business. What are you doing? On one hand, it is a good measure and the other, it is bad measure, so you make it a bad measure.

The Minister of Business also spoke glibly here and there, at no time... That was normal, for Budget 2015, Budget 2016 and Budget 2017 presentations, just talks about 900 jobs, 1,500 jobs. Everything that is summarised, it has a line item. You can only get to summary. Apparently, the Minister was not a good maths student. You cannot just get to the summary without the working. In the days when I was in school and the teacher gave you the sums, "Train is moving from north to east at so much..." You would have it in your head but the teacher would have said, "Work it out so that I can see". What the Minister of Business never does it is to work it out so that the Guyanese people can see. Eight hundred and sixty jobs, where? Which sector? It is that myself and the Minister can go and visit the place where you have 45 employees, where you have 60 employees. It is just talks. He said that they spoke to 1,000 people and businesses around the country, in this fantastic survey, who registered. Again, from the 1,000 persons, how many of those persons did the Small Business Bureau helped to start their business? How many of those are employed persons and how many are new employees? The answer to that is nil. Just do not speak about these things.

Again, the Minister spoke about Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) and the different sectors. Businesses that GO-Invest has engaged, again, there is no working. He has not said to this National Assembly, of the so many hundred businesses GO-Invest has engaged, we have received from two dozen expression of interest to invest in Guyana. Business people, carpetbaggers, come days and night, every day, which ever Government is in office. All over the world there are carpetbaggers who go... Sometimes when you are finished narrowing it down, of the 100 people you shake hand with, it will be only 12 of them with intentions. The other people are just like a certain person's son-in-law who is about to sell the estate. They are just like the other person who was supposed to do the wind farm that has gone with the wind.

Last year, we were told by the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Public Infrastructure and the Minister of Business that a wind farm will be established. For that matter, Guyana Power and Light (GPL) was to sign some memorandum of understanding, if I recall, with the company, to establish this wind farm at Hope. I passed at Hope there and all that it has is 'Courida' bush - no wind farm. The point is, as I started, what you have is every budget presentation by the Minister of Finance and the Government is just throwing things in here that they know will go no place, will not affect the lives of people, will not change the economic circumstances of citizens of this country.

The Minister of Business spoke about - he said that in 2015, 2016 and again he said that - the Small Business Bureau is supposed to start loaning young people financing and grants. The question is: How many? Again, there is no working. One of the other important issues, in all the Minister's budget presentations, up to this one, is the Procurement Act - the Minister just spoke again about it - speaking to ensuring 20% of procurement goes to small businesses. The question is, two and a half years and the Minister of Business is yet to get that right. There is not a small business or medium business out there which has been able to access that facility. All the Minister does is talk about the facility. In 2015 it was supposed to happen, 2016 it was supposed to happen and 2017 it was supposed to happen and now we are told that 2018 it will happen.

I return to the "journey" the Finance Minister spoke about, as I started, I will end, that this journey to this "good life", the people of Guyana has already seen through this Government. The people of Guyana, they made a point at the 2016 Local Government Elections. They registered their objections to the Government and 2018 Local Government Election, again, they will

register their objection to the Government and show it how they feel about it. Finally, 2020 General Elections the people of this country will say “go in peace”, because you have not served the people. All the things that you have promised the people of Guyana, you have failed to deliver.

The Hon., smiling, Prime Minister cannot get constitutional reform right as yet, two and a half years. That is the only thing he has to do. The only thing he has to do is to get the constitutional reform right, Integrity Commission right and the other commissions, and he cannot do it yet. He cannot get anything. Instead, he is eating birthday cake. The people of this country are paying him not to eat birthday cakes, but to deliver.

I say that nothing in the budget will help the young people; nothing in the budget will help the poor; nothing in this budget will help women; nothing in the budget will help disabled persons; and nothing in this budget will help the people of Guyana to ensure that they get even on the journey of the good life.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Sitting suspended at 12.27 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.30 p.m.

Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs [Ms. Garrido-Lowe]: I rise to make my contribution to the debate on Budget 2018 under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. I am pleased to join with my colleagues in congratulating the Hon. Winston Jordan and his extraordinary theme for a job well done. I would like to thank too the staff of the various Ministries who work hard to ensure that Guyanese across the country benefit fairly from the country resources.

The Journey to the Good Life Continues is without doubt a fit and proper budget. Budget 2018 reflects your Governments careful and caring management of our people’s resources which we are responsible for. As a Government, we believe that the time has long come for a strong foundation to be built, not only for today’s generation, but for future generations as well. We would like our Guyanese brothers and sisters to know that we understand that they have given us the opportunity to be in this position of trust, so that we could be able to make the decisions that

would better serve them, and we are doing just that. For the past two and a half year we have been making the soft and the hard decisions, all in the interest of the Guyanese people, spread across the ten regions of this beautiful country.

1.32 p.m.

For the development of the entire country it is imperative that we bridge the gap between the hinterland and the coastland, so that there would be equal opportunities for all and equality among all our citizens. To this end, Mr. Speaker, the Vice-President and Minister and the Minister within along with staff of Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs are working feverishly to effectively carry out the Ministry's mandate to support and encourage the economic empowerment, integration and environmental development of Indigenous people's communities through strategic and informed policy formulation.

In order to restore the pride and dignity of the Indigenous peoples of Guyana, economic empowerment is vital just as any other mother, Indigenous mothers would like a comfortable home for their families. They want to be able to shop for their children clothing, shoe, toys, and lots more. They would like to be able to own their own gas stove and their own television sets. They would like to be able to buy a laptop for their children and have internet connectivity or buy their own vehicle. They would like to be able to afford to feed their children three square meals per day and their fathers would like to do nothing less than to be able to provide for their beautiful wives and children. It is really shameful that for the past many years, no real effort was made to create an environment for them to enjoy a better standard of living, but it is no more, Mr. Speaker, your Government is ensuring that that wrong is being corrected. Strong measures are being put in place to fix that problem and it would take some time, but it will be fixed.

In keeping with our country's green agenda and 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations, your Government has embarked on a developmental strategy of building strong village economies by promoting agriculture, agro and food processing, ecotourism and youth entrepreneurship in the hinterland regions. For the year 2017, the Government has invested \$59 million in the village of Paramakatoi, in the Potaro-Siparuni region, for the establishment of a sun-dried tomato facility, while the High Commissioner of Canada invested the much appreciated \$5 million. Today this modern facility, complete with solar power system, a solar

dryer, internet connectivity, a processing facility, a dormitory, a water trestle and a guard hut, stands at the top of the mountain as a beacon of hope and innovation, a true testimony for all to see that the Indigenous people of Guyana could rise to any occasion, that they could build thriving communities and sustain themselves and contribute more to society. They want to do so. They could feed, clothes and house themselves all by themselves, if given the necessary support by their Government, and we plan to do some, and we are doing so.

This modern processing facility was built by the people of Paramakatoi. *Paramakatois* are employed at the processing facility. Forty farmers of Paramakatoi, Mountain Foot and Bamboo Creek supplied the facility with naturally grown, healthy and fresh tomatoes. Nine persons are employed at the processing facility. The Paramakatoi Agricultural Cooperative was established with 58 farmers and 43 food processors were trained. To date, the facility has purchased 4,956 pounds of tomatoes from these farmers and dried tomatoes in stock amounted to 334.2 pounds. To lay the foundation for this green, sustainable village economy, the Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs partnered with Dr. Suresh Narine and his team from Institute of Applied Science and Technology (IAST), Dr. Homenauth and his National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) team and, of course, the Ministry of Social Protection through the Broad of Industrial Training (BIT) and the Department of Labour. [Mr. Dharamlall: What

about the Minister?] Of course, the Minister is included. Without the hard work and the will of the people Paramakatoi this project would not have been possible. I salute them. It is the only village industry so far in the mountains of North Pakaraima that is bringing revenue into the village, other than mining.

Very soon Guyanese will enjoy delicious, healthy, sun-dried tomatoes, tomato salad dressing and tomato ketchup all products carrying the brand 'Wokpon' which means "from the mountain", in Patamona language. In the North Rupununi, outdoing themselves and competing with the world cosmetic market are the Macushi women, producing the much sought after the Rupununi Essence, make from coconut oil, crab oil and lemon grass oil, all natural resources from the communities. With the Ministry of Social Protection input and the technology training from IAST, Rupununi Essence is a growing industry in the hinterland creating much needed employment for Indigenous peoples in that area.

These two start up industries were established in the hinterland, just over two and half years by this Government in support of our Indigenous peoples, is the beginning of the positive change that we promised and the “good life” continues in the Budget 2018. Santa Rosa in Region 1 would be benefiting from \$10 million to set up a ground coffee production facility which would create employment for women, youth and 20 farmers of the community to begin with. This project would generate much needed revenue for the village resulting in an improved standard of living for over 100 persons who would benefit directly, that is, farmers and their families and businesses within the community.

The sum \$10 million is allocated for a cassava flour production plant in the Kwabanna village in Region 1. The first people of this country produce a lot of cassava, but Guyanese do not eat the amount of cassava bread or *farine* that they could produce and anytime they want to plant more than they could eat and attempt to introduce it into the local Guyanese market, they suffer losses. It is time for us to make healthy eating habits a lifestyle. Cassava is an absolutely healthy dietary choice which should have been promoted a long time ago to the entire Guyanese nation as such. Wheat flour is believed, by many, to contain irritants that are harmful to the body, yet, to date, nothing of the sort has been discovered in cassava. Barbados and a few other countries, Caribbean countries, are now producing a mixture of wheat flour and cassava flour and bakeries have created delicious wonders with this mixed flour. The Caribs of Kwabanna are all excited and are waiting eagerly for the opportunities to produce this same mixture in their community and to introduce it to the rest of Guyana. Our talented bakers in Guyana, and of course roti bakers, I am sure, will produce mouth-watering bread, cakes, pastries, and more.

This economic venture will directly benefit all the people of the Kwabanna community who are farmers along with their families, neighbouring communities, such as Santa Crus, the villages of Waikrebi and Warapoka, farmers along the Kumaka/Kwabanna road. Approximately 400 farmers would benefit by supplying the facility with the cassava root that it would require to produce the amount of flour that it needs. Together, approximately a 1,000 lives will be touched in a positive way, though the income, which this project will generate, would touch several communities. We are counting that our healthy eating public awareness campaign would encourage Guyanese to adopt a healthier lifestyle and to eat the good old Guyanese cassava flour. Guyanese will benefit.

The Opposition dares to say that we have nothing in store in this budget that would create a “good life” for our Guyanese people. What I am outlaying here is a “good life” for our Indigenous people. Smith’s Creek and Imbotero, the Mabaruma sub region, at least three communities, would directly benefit from crab meat processing and fish processing. These two communities have been surviving from a day to day basis from sales of crab and fish. This processing and packaging facility would allow for a longer shelf life for crab meat and fish, creating more sales for these products, hence bringing sustained revenue into these communities.

Last, but not least, on the focus on economic empowerment, \$10 million is allocated for the lapidary workshop in Monkey Mountain, and this is a start. Introductory training will commence in Monkey Mountain next week with 20 persons from the communities of Monkey Mountain, Tuzeneng, Kurukabaru, Kato and Maikwak. Participants of this two-week workshop would be trained to recognise and gather quality semi-precious stones and how to test them and learn the history of the various stones. In the second phase of training, at least six of them would be trained in cutting, polishing and jewellery making. Additionally, craftsmen and craftswomen would benefit from creating unique craft cases out of Tibisiri, Nibbi, wood and spun cotton for the different pieces of jewellery. The polished stones would also be sold locally to support our local jewellers in Guyana. I could assure you that the best advice and guidance and technical assistance would coming from no other than the Ministry of Business, and as we all know the Minister of Business is one of Guyana’s leading jewellers. The marketing of this business would be done via the internet which the Ministry of Public Telecommunications will provide to communities in the hinterland region.

Another positive spin-off to this economic venture is tourism. Visitors would be taken on semi-precious stones, hunting and gathering tips and would be taught how to recognise quality stones. They would also be able to choose their stone they wish to make their jewellery pieces from and the workshop would produce the pieces for them. The project would create employment for at least 20 persons in each of the five communities that will be involved and an additional ten more in Monkey Mountain itself. These are about a few of the exciting and transformative economic ventures that this Government will be supporting for the economic empowerment of our Indigenous people in 2018.

If the Members of the Opposition have any genuine love for Indigenous peoples they would put aside love for themselves for a while and support these initiatives, so the Indigenous people could benefit.

Now, for brief highlights for 2017 and 2018 budgetary allocations in our projects' department.

The Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs continues to work on the sustainable development framework, a project that will see Indigenous villages developed their sustainable village plans aim to achieve their long-term development goals. The sustainable village plan is one of the main planning guides for the Indigenous council to work towards sustainable community development in which the programmes plans and activities are in line with Guyana's green state economy and with regional, national and international commitments which will be measured and reported on.

1.47 p.m.

The 10-year plan also includes the annual village plan that is mandated by the Amerindian Act of 2006. So far, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, with the collaborative partners - Conservation International (CI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Regional Democratic Council (RDC) Region 9, Kanuku Mountain Community Representative Group (KMCRG) and North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB) - have completed 22 villages and all their satellites in the Rupununi while other villages are in the process of being completed by the first quarter of 2018. The Ministry will also be moving to Mainstay/Whyaka and Santa Rosa to commence the Sustainable Development Framework (SDF) process.

Institutional Strengthening, with respect to the Sustainable Development Framework, has commenced at the Ministry, where key staff were trained on certain aspects of the SDF. Community Development Officers (CDOs) were trained in monitoring and evaluation of the programmes. The SDF will help in improving transparency and accountability, strategic channelling of the resources, stronger collaboration among key stakeholders, development of priority projects and reporting adequately on all projects in a timely manner.

Traditional Knowledge (TK) Project: Another collaborative project that the Ministry is working on is the Traditional Knowledge Project. The Ministry is working towards integrating traditional

knowledge into policies and practices in Guyana. This project is done in collaboration with seven other organisations. The project will be implemented in a three-year to nine-year period.

Goal of the Project: Working in Guyana, this project will achieve Aichi Biodiversity Target 18, incorporating traditional knowledge into biodiversity policy for poverty reduction by evaluating TK integration using case studies focused on protecting areas management, building institutional capacity in TK integration and developing a national action plan for traditional knowledge. Although there is increasing recognition for the importance of TK within biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation, there is insufficient focus on the development and testing of participatory transparent and evidence-based process for TK integration.

This project will provide policy level guidance, capacity development and research-led experience for incorporating traditional knowledge into conservation and sustainable development decision-making.

Monitoring and policy: This will be done through evaluating the opportunities and barriers to traditional knowledge integration, using case studies focused on protected areas management, streamlining a participatory cross sectoral process, to incorporate local traditional knowledge at the national scale and developing a national action plan for traditional knowledge that can be used as a model of best practice for other countries of Guiana Shield and the world.

The study on the Indigenous women and children in Guyana: This project was undertaken with the support of the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). It is a very important study that provides a firm understanding of the experiences of Indigenous women and children. The results will inform evidence-based projects and programmes aimed at empowering Indigenous women and ensuring the survival, development, participation and protection of the children. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs launched a report last September and a full review of the findings is being done, with the assistance of UNICEF, to inform an action plan for key stakeholder to address.

Transportation for Indigenous communities: In 2017, funds were released to procure four minibuses to assist the children in the Indigenous villages of Santa Rosa, Port Kaituma, Thomas Hills and Moblissa. These buses form part of His Excellency President David Granger's Five Bs Initiative, contributing to educating the nation. The goal is bringing transportation relief to

students in the outlining and remote areas in more than 16 communities. For 2018, the Ministry decided to expand on the transportation system by procuring one minibus to serve the scholarship students in Liliendaal, a huge minibus.

Water transportation: During 2017, a total of 13 villages in Regions 1, 5, 7, 8 and 10 received outboard engines while 12 villages got grants to construct boats for the engines. The Government is committed to providing such transportation relief to the Indigenous communities to help, in the village, elderly and children, including for emergency purposes. For 2018, an additional six villages will receive support with outboard engines, while 10 villages will receive grants to construct boats. These will help to enhance the transportation system for the Indigenous communities.

Land transportation: In 2017, two villages requested all-terrain vehicles (ATV) to serve their communities and these were approved for purchase. An additional four ATVs will be bought in 2018 to serve four other communities in Regions 2, 8 and 9. The injection of additional land transportation will help, particularly, in emergency situations for the villages.

Community Development Sustainable Livelihood Projects - Presidential Grants: The Government will continue to support village economies by providing incentives in the form of Presidential Grants to help Indigenous villages implement small projects that will boost community development...*[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Ms. Garrido-Lowe: ...in 215 Indigenous villages.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I must ask you to reduce the extent to which you are interrupting the speaker. I have not called the names of Members but we are getting very close to there. You cannot continue to talk to one another across the aisle when a Member is speaking, and to speak so loudly that you interrupt that Member. Please proceed, Minister.

Ms. Garrido-Lowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government will continue to support sustainable village economies by providing incentives in the form of Presidential Grants to help

Indigenous villagers implement small projects that will boost community development in 215 Indigenous villages. In the 2018 Budget, \$224 million is provided to be injected in the Indigenous communities for projects such as school kitchens, cash crop cultivation, community buildings, eco-tourism projects, village canteens and shops, general transportation and village markets, among others.

Community-based eco-tourism projects: The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is moving strongly to support the communities for Hinterland development so that they can use, sustainably, the nature-based and community-based eco-tourism businesses which have great potential for economic growth and community development. Attractions such as nature trail, wildlife, culture and other nature-based attractions will pave the way for the Indigenous communities to put their natural resources to productive use in a sustainable manner. This will strengthen, promote, reserve and conserve the eco-systems and Indigenous peoples' traditions and culture as well as provide jobs for the local people.

The year 2018 will see five villages building eco-tourism lodges, benabs and nature trails along with the training of tour guides, customer service and hospitality in the villages of Karasabai, Warapoka, Maraikobai, Great Falls and Assakata, which will receive a total sum of \$17,000,500.

Agricultural development and tractor implements - Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Goal 2, Zero Hunger: to promote sustainable agriculture to achieve food security, revision of appropriate technology and strong infrastructure to improve the transportation and materials to provide safety and protection to the farmers in securing their farms from various animals, especially cattle that destroys same. In this regard, tractors and implements will be procured, in 2018, for three Indigenous farming communities to boost and enhance sustainable farming productivity and food security for the Indigenous peoples. The sum of \$25 million for tractors and implements is earmarked in this Budget.

Farm to market roads: Six communities in Regions 1, 2 and 9 will see their farm to market roads upgraded and improved, which will bring relief to the smooth flow of transportation for their agricultural products to the market. The total investment by the Government will be \$33 million for roads in Karasabai, Wakapau, Kariako, Maruranau, Masakenari and Ruperti. The upgrading

of the ATVs trail in central Baramita to lower Aranka will also receive the sum of \$10 million in 2018.

Culture and education: The Bina Hill Youth Learning Centre is an Indigenous institution which is managed by the Indigenous peoples. It is focused on training youths in Natural Resource Management, Forestry, Wildlife Management, Agriculture, Tourism, Business Studies, Life Skills, Traditional Skills, Basic Computer Skills, Mathematics, English and Sustainable Agriculture. Over the past year, Government has released a sum of \$110 million to the Bina Hill Institution for the construction of male and female dormitories, teachers' quarters, sanitary blocks, mechanic shops, storage rooms, water trestle and general repairs and extension of the main meeting room. In 2018, the sum of \$40,000,399 is earmarked for the completion of both the male and female dormitories and for equipping the auto-mechanic workshop in Bina Hill.

For the first time ever, a Hinterland Green Enterprise Development Centre will be constructed in the North Rupununi and will be a key facility of job creation for the Indigenous communities. The centre is expected to serve 120 students from Regions 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10 and will focus on training that will leverage Indigenous traditional knowledge and drive upstream a demand for local products and services. The sum of \$80 million has been allocated in the Ministry's budget to start the construction of the facility in 2018.

School Uniform Project: The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs continues to give the Indigenous students of the Hinterland school uniforms. The Project is part of a larger plan to invest in the Indigenous children in the field of education. A sum of \$89 million was added into the programme in 2017 for schools in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 and the distribution is currently in process along with the sewing of school uniforms being coordinated. [Ms. Teixeira: It started [inaudible]] It started a long time. In 2018, the project is approved for continuation. Six villages in Regions 1, 2 and 9 received grants.

Language revival and village history projects to implement language revival projects to support the preservation of the Indigenous languages, customs and traditional knowledge: These classes are to be delivered by skilled and knowledgeable Indigenous peoples capable of teaching the Warrau, Carib, Macushi and Wapishana and the Arawak languages.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Ms. Garrido-Lowe: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eight million, six hundred thousand dollars is provided in this Budget for that.

Infrastructure: In 2017, three villages were slated to receive grants to construct their community centres that will provide a forum for various community activities and which will bring in an income for the village councils and residents.

2.02 p.m.

The sum of \$6 million was disbursed to undertake the building of the centres, while \$1.5 million was disbursed to support the women's group in Kaikan and their sewing centre.

Hinterland Scholarship Division: 77 students completed the secondary school programme in 2017; 64 students wrote an average of nine subjects at the recent Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), securing a pass rate of 90.1%, surpassing 2016's 83.3%. Mathematics has the lowest passes and the Ministry has decided to take measures to have teachers work with the students at the dormitory on Sundays in Math and English. When the tertiary dormitory at Liliendaal is completed, in 2018, our hinterland students will breathe a sigh of relief. They will perform much better because they would not have to worry about house rent, food, water, electricity and, more importantly, security on the premises.

Capacity building and youth entrepreneurship: Your Government cares for the youth and, to date, the Indigenous youth have benefitted from allocations, in 2016, to the tune of \$997 million and, in 2017, \$991 million for the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) Programme. So far, the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service Programme has seen positive results and a minimum dropout rate. The second cohort in a 100 villages is being rolled out as we speak. Youth from 112 villages from the first cohort have established small businesses to support themselves and families. Every village has one, two or even three HEYS businesses. Indigenous youth have grabbed the opportunity to empower themselves in order to make meaningful contribution to their communities and regions.

Our Government, your Government, has promised a good life to the Guyanese people and to bridge the gap between the Hinterland and Coastland, and this is exactly what we are doing.

Thank you so much. *[Applause]*

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank God and the People's Progressive Party (PPP) for giving me the opportunity to be here today to speak in this honourable House. I rise to contribute to the 2018 Budget debate, this 2018 Budget, under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. However, before I deal with the subject matter, I wish to respond to the presentation made by the Hon. Minister, Ms. Valarie Garrido-Lowe.

Just a few minutes ago, I was wondering if we are living in the same country, Guyana. The Minister, in her opening remarks, said that the Budget, under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*, is, without doubt, a fit and proper budget. As an Indigenous person standing here in this House, I felt insulted by the Hon. Member saying that *The Journey to the Good Life Continues* is a fit and proper budget. What is fit and proper about the 2018 Budget? The Minister said that it is important that we bridge the gap. Yes. It is important that we bridge the gap, but what is happening here is that the gap is widening and there is no bridging of any gap.

I agreed with the Minister that there is need to empower the Indigenous peoples, Guyana's first peoples. With regard to economic empowerment, I agree with her. We are hearing about the good life and we would like to live well. But, listening to all the petty things, I would want to say that the Ministers here and there cannot give us the opportunity to live well.

The Minister answered some of my questions that I had listed in my presentation and that is the Tomato Project that we have been hearing so much about. What is the real cost of the project for the farmers, These are some of the questions I had: how many farmers are benefiting? How many pounds of tomatoes? What is the production rate? Of course, I am an Agriculturist too. I do farming and I understand the whole system about farming, processing and marketing. Some of the questions have been answered and it is an exciting time because the project has just started.

Do we have the market for the product or do we have enough products to meet the demand of the market? Which one? How does it go? I would like the Hon. Member to answer at some point in time.

I think the North Rupununi essence was there a long time ago. We are hearing about Santa Rosa coffee and cassava flour but it is a pity that we are not hearing about rice flour and plantain flour. We are hearing of how excited the people are. Of course they are excited because it is a new project for them. We heard of how cassava flour is nutritious.

I wonder if the Hon. Minister is aware that, in Tapakuma, there is a processing facility that processes cassava. Had she ever thought of visiting that village to talk with the people and see why that project is not prospering? [Ms. Charles-Broomes: The Hon. Member.]

Yes, sorry, the Hon. Member. I am happy to hear that the Minister would visit Mainstay and I urge the Hon. Minister that, when she visits Mainstay, to meet with the farmers. Some of the other projects like the Presidential Grants and transportation were things that were done before and so I am not excited and I doubt whether our people are excited to hear that again because that is old news.

That being said, I wish to now turn my attention to what I have to say. Budget 2018, under the theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues...* Let me say, from the outset, that this caption is misleading. Where is the good life? There is no good life anywhere around and, if there is no good life, then how can the journey continue? There is confusion. There is mistrust and there is fear. If they would go out there and speak with the ordinary people, then they would know what is happening on the streets out there.

Permit me to look at Budget 2015, under the theme, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. I wish to highlight what was said by the Hon. Member and Minister of Finance, Hon. Winston Jordan, on page 85, under conclusion, paragraph 7.1:

“Mr. Speaker, I have spent the last hours laying out our Government’s Vision 2020. Its realisation will see a citizenry that is better educated, healthier, financially and physically secure, socially cohesive, and environmentally responsible. This vision will be realized against a backdrop of inclusionary democracy, enhanced accountability and performance improvement and macroeconomic stability. In short, Mr. Speaker, a citizenry enjoying the good life about which he or she once dreamed, but was visited with nightmares for over a decade.”

Here the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, was saying these things. Today, are we better educated? Are we financially and physically secured? The answer is no. The Hon. Member also said that we had dreams of a good life, but we were visited by nightmare. More than ever, now we have severe nightmares. The housewives and grandmothers, like myself, are thinking and having nightmares in the blackout of what would happen tomorrow. So more than ever, we are

now suffering with a syndrome of nightmares. When will it end? Is this the good life that was promised? No. This is not the good life.

The 2016 Budget was under the theme, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. Again we heard about the good life. Where is this good life? The good life is hanging somewhere beyond our reach. Again, we are waiting and hoping for the good life. More than ever now, people are being faced with tremendous hardship and not the good life. Hundreds of our brothers, sisters and comrades have lost their jobs, particularly in the agricultural sector and not forgetting those who had worked with the Barama Company. If people have lost their jobs, then is this the good life that was promised? Where is the good life that beckons? It is not there, nowhere around; it seems to be beyond our reach. We are having more nightmares now than before.

The 2017 Budget theme was *Building a diversified, green economy: Delivering the Good life to all Guyanese*. Once again, we are being fooled about this good life. This matter about a good life has now become like a song where the song is being sung. However, only certain people can sing this song and understand the meaning of a good life because they are living the good life.

2.17 p.m.

Mention was made about the diversified, green economy. I listened also to the Hon. Member, Minister Garrido-Lowe, mentioning about the green economy. But do we really understand what a green economy is? This word is being thrown around and the people are saying green economy, green economy. A green economy is not painting our important State buildings in green. A green economy is not planting of palm trees all over the place - no. A green economy is not establishing parks all over the place - no. That is not a green economy.

It is important for us to understand what a green economy is. It is important for us to define what green jobs are. It is important for us to understand that and not run away with the idea of painting everything green and we would be going green. A green economy should contribute to the reduction of energy consumption and the use of raw materials, reduction of greenhouse gas emission, minimisation of waste and pollution and protection of the eco-system. That is what should be and that is what our people should understand.

Many people do not understand what is happening. Many people are not benefiting from the good life. Many people do not even know where their next meal is coming from and some of us do not understand it because we are not in that situation.

Hinterland Development: Sir, I wish to, again, remind the Colleagues or the Hon. Members on that side of the House that, in the 2017 Budget presented by the Hon. Member and Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, on page 69 of the presentation, it states:

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: It states:

“Mr. Speaker, bringing the good life to all Guyanese must translate in reduced cost of living in hinterland communities, an expanded range of health services, improved quality education, food security, cultural preservation, job creation, reliable and renewable energy, and adequate infrastructure for physical and virtual connectivity. To this end, the Government has allocated \$13 billion for interventions that will improve the livelihoods of our hinterland communities.”

What I would like to ask any Member on the Government side of the House is if they are aware whether the cost of living in our rural villages and communities has gone down. What I would like to know also is how the \$13 billion was spent. I would also like to know or we would also like to know about the renewable energy and how many solar panels were given to our villages and communities after 2015. Somebody needs to answer that.

Budget 2018, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*: Again, I would say that it is totally misleading. What we see is a lot of window dressing in the 2018 Budget. What we see is the journey to a dire economy. What we see is the journey to corruption and lack of transparency. And what we see is a journey to hardship and increased poverty.

The fact that the Indigenous peoples are organising themselves for political, economic, social and cultural development and bringing to the end all forms of discrimination and oppression in Guyana, this action, might seem as a threat to some of the Guyanese population. However, we have the right to enjoy the good life.

We were informed that the National Toshias Council (NTC), the legally elected leaders of Guyana's first peoples, submitted a budget, requesting the amount of \$37 million in order to carry out its function as provided for in the Amerindian Act, No. 6 of 2006.

It is sad to say that listed in the Budget for the NTC is an allocation of \$16 million for the year 2018, which is exactly the sum the Council received in 2017. So, there has been no increase for the National Toshias Council. It leaves us to wonder about all the talks that the Government cares for the Indigenous peoples, Guyana's first peoples. If the NTC requested an amount of \$37 million which is not much because we have seen moneys being spent freely elsewhere, and they would receive only \$16 million, this leaves us to wonder. As was said in a publication, which is known, by the NTC, the NTC said that it looks as though Government officials' accommodation is more important than the lives, welfare and wellbeing of our Indigenous peoples, Guyana's first peoples.

I therefore call on the Hon. Member, the Minister of Finance, to reconsider the request made by the National Toshias Council and to make available to the Council the sum of \$37 million as requested by the NTC, the legally elected representative of Guyana's first peoples.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Rutherford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and a pleasant afternoon to all. Sir, with your leave, I rise to make my contribution to Budget 2018, a masterly crafted projection under the apt theme, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. This 2018 theme fits well with our *Good Life for All Guyanese* mantra postulated in our 2015 Manifesto.

Sir, please permit me to pause and commend the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston DaCosta Jordan, and his well-oiled team for putting a smile on all Guyanese' faces, perhaps with the exception of the 32 *Dr. Doomers*. Despite we want to move this country forward with all on board, we might be forced to move this country without those 32 accepting the good life.

This Budget is guided by His Excellency's vision, as outlined in his fifth address to this Eleventh Parliament on 2nd November, 2017. President Granger clearly stated: **[Mr. Dharamlall:**

When was that?] You were too busy. The President stated:

“Parliament’s deliberations and decisions should be aimed at exercising sovereignty for the common good.

It is altogether fitting, therefore, that the elected representatives of our people in this National Assembly should be informed of the state of the Nation and the economic plan and legislative agenda for the new financial year and the future. All parties assembled in this honourable House bear responsibility to this nation. They are obliged to participate meaningfully in its deliberations in order to be better able to discuss, debate and decide on programmes to be adopted for the common good.”

These are instructive remarks and we, on this side of the House, will follow them to the letter. We believe in pronouncement of the executive that:

“The Nation continues to consolidate this happy state of comity which it has enjoyed over the past thirty months.”

This \$267.1 billion Budget will continue to transform our dear beloved country from coast to hinterland, from young to old and from resident to the all-important, non-resident Guyanese. A careful study of the Budget should convince anyone that direct measures are in place to cause inclusive growth in keeping with the green state development strategy and in sync with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Budget sums to respective sectors are a clear indication of our focus. Development will always be hinged on education and that is why we have proposed \$41.9 billion. Noted is our intention to provide \$2.4 billion to the University of Guyana and \$4.7 billion to schools in general. As we continue to modernise our public infrastructure, we have projected spending \$35 billion for 2018. Works will include, but not be limited to, \$2 billion upgrade of the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL), \$14.3 billion for roads and \$2.7 billion going to the East Coast Demerara Highway. The Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) will receive \$5 billion and water will get \$3.2 billion. The critical public health sector will see spending of no less than \$33.3 billion in 2018, which will see all Guyanese benefit from services such as \$2.4 billion in health infrastructure. Public security received a commendable \$30.7 billion and the nation will benefit from \$1.5 billion to expand and rehabilitate our prison infrastructure. Agriculture will get

\$19.4 billion of which the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), my good Friend's friend, will receive no less than \$6.3 billion.

Youth being a primary focus of this A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition Government has resulted in Budget 2018 having \$1.7 billion for youth programmes, such as the Youth Innovation Project of Guyana, the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training and the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service, to name a few. The other sectors are all well financed and all Guyanese can look forward to improved services for our Indigenous peoples, residents from coast to hinterland, and services for all other sectors.

I proudly represent Region 10, particularly, sub-region 2, Kwakwani on the Berbice River, and the citizens of this trend setting region have demanded that I say thank you to the APNU/AFC Coalition Government for all that was done recently. They are pleased with the delivery over the last 30 months but continue to request more, some of which are in the 2018 Budget.

During 2017, we have done much work to our internal and external roads in Region 10. Despite the Linden to Soesdyke, Linden to Mabura Hill and Linden to Kwakwani Highways, all needing much more work, much has been done to date. Health care, schools, potable water and electricity availability have all been improved during 2017. A quick glance at the analysis of the region's 2017 work programme will see a common status - 100% completed. A few have low figures or are work in progress and I was advised that, within weeks, all would be completed.

Under Programme 1, Regional Administration and Finance, in 2017, the Regional Administration purchased a land cruiser, a boat, a 75 horse power outboard engine, and a motorcycle, while work to improve the faulty electrical system inherited continues.

Under Programme 2, Public Works, rehabilitation of the main access concrete bridge for over \$11 million at Industrial Area resulted in much relief to hundreds of citizens and businesses, inclusive of a bakery, two hotels, a sawmill and lumber yard, two farms, two engineering establishment and a few small shops. Ten million dollars was spent on Casuarina Drive, which will benefit residents of Watooka, Noitgedacht, Fairs Rust, Richmond Hill, Old England, Coomacka and other areas in the Berbice River.

2.32 p.m.

The amount of \$12 million for One Mile's Access Road, \$11 million for Upper Green Heart Street, \$22 million for Icee Road, \$11 million for Dageraad Avenue, \$10 million for Jeffery Avenue at Amelia's Ward and \$8 million for Church Road at Block 22, have brought much relief to a region of almost 50,000 residents. At present, additional works on roads are being done from savings from the aforementioned projects.

Also, under public works in the Region, upgrading was done to the drainage systems, which are 90% completed. These include Manni Street, Wismar Street, Crabwood Street, Potaro Road and Henderson Street. The region has completed the desilting of the Silverballi Creek and the creek channel for \$5 million, upgrading of an access dam, instillation of a culvert at West Watooka and the construction of a farm-to-market road which will relief our farmers. Revetment, erosion and control structures were made and desilting was completed in the Haimara Creek area for \$7.3 million. Without constant attention to this main drainage creek, the central business district of Mackenzie is easily flooded. We inherited no road maintenance equipment and thus, last year, we purchased a grader and, in 2017, \$13.1 million was used to acquire a motor roller.

Under Programme 3 - Education Delivery - in 2017, almost all of our schools received attention with works of \$14.3 million at the Christianburg Wismar Secondary School, benefitting over 800 students; \$15.4 million, at the Linden Foundation Secondary School, also benefitted over 800 students. Fences were also constructed in Lichas at the Mackenzie High School, One Mile Primary School and the Kwakwani Secondary School to name a few. Shortly, cool storage will be built at the Aroaima Primary School for \$1.8 million and at the One Mile and South Amelia's Ward Nursery Schools, all to have our effective school feeding programme being maintained.

Additionally, for the comfort of over 1200 students, water troughs are being constructed at the Mackenzie High School and the Kwakwani Secondary School. To enable better supplies' delivery and programme monitoring, a 4x4 pickup for \$6.9 million was purchased. These are only a few of the resources that were made available for education delivery in Region 10.

Under Programme 4 - Health Services - a health centre with living quarters for \$13.7 million was constructed and this will benefit 1000 residents. The enclosure of the bottom flat of the staff quarters at Blue Berry Hill for \$4.5 million, the construction of staff quarters at Hururu for \$13.3 million, the construction of staff quarters at Ituni for \$11.3 million and the construction of a

reservoir at the Upper Demerara Hospital for \$3 million are all in progress. Some of the other acquisitions for the sector in Region 10 include an ambulance for \$10.9 million and a motorcycle for \$1.6 million.

Region 10 Budget 2018 - Region 10 will receive its largest budget allocation in 2018 - \$3.4 billion, which is \$280 million more than what was given in 2017. It is proposed that Programme 1 - Regional Administration & Finance will receive \$301.9 million, which is over \$30 million during 2017; Programme 2 - Public Infrastructure - is scheduled to receive \$322.5 million; Programme 3 - Education Delivery - will receive \$2.1 billion; and Programme 4 - Health Services - \$663 million.

Regional Administration & Finance - to enable the optimal use of the regional resources, it is imperative than staff of the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) work in a safe and comfortable environment. Thus, to improve operational efficiency, the region will embark on the building of a new Regional Administrative Building, which will be financed by \$33.1 million in 2018. Importantly, it is proposed that all national and other regional calendar events will be funded from \$9.9 million with equipment maintenance for almost \$3 million and security services for \$24.8 million. In an effort to continue efficiency and comfort, \$1.5 million will be used to purchase computers and chairs for our schools.

Public Works - Region 10 will continue to focus on road improvement, infrastructural and agricultural development, under Programme 2, with \$322.5 million. Some of the major upgrades include Stanley Road, Wismar Hill Primary School Road and the teacher's compound Main Access Road, for a combined \$68.5 million. This will bring relief to more than 5,000 residents directly and over 10,000 indirectly. Under Infrastructural Development, \$20.8 million is sought to upgrade the drainage system at Stanley Road, Dakama Circle and Determa Street to benefit over 12,000 residents.

Agricultural development in my region is funded centrally by the Ministry of Agriculture or under the Public Works programme in the region. It is my belief that a fifth Programme – Agriculture - is overdue in Region 10 to push the Agriculture potential of the region, particularly in Sub-Region 2. In 2018, it is proposed that we use \$15 million to construct additional farm to market roads in West Watooka and the provision of revetment, erosion control structures and

desilting of creeks in Mackenzie. These works will alleviate much flooding in the flood prone areas. In the meantime, the region's agriculture will continue to benefit from programmes in the Ministries of Agriculture, Public Infrastructure, Business, Social Cohesion, Natural Resources and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs.

Education Delivery - Region 10 is a complex region that is easily accessible from the coast, but some of our schools are in remote areas and reaching them is equally challenging as the schools in the hinterland Regions of 1, 7, 8 and 9. We have done exceedingly well in the last 3 years and will continue to turn around the fortunes of the important sector in the region. We have, hence, proposed \$133 million in 2018 to construct a nursery and primary School at Bamia, which will bring much relief to residents in Bamia, Melias Hide Out and the Upper Amelia's Ward areas. Additionally, \$14.5 million will be spent to purchase a bus to increase the fleet of vehicles. Another major proposed spending will be \$14.5 million for school furniture and equipment, inclusive of much needed lathes and science kits.

Health Services - we propose to continue the transformation of the Health Sector in Region 10 together with the general programme of the Ministry of Public Health. Sixty four million five hundred thousand is therefore budgeted to be used to rehabilitate the Upper Demerara Regional Hospital, with provisions for health centres at Mabura Hill and at Amelia's Ward to benefit over 30,000 residents. Further, to improve health services in our riverain areas, river ambulances will be purchased for \$19.4 million, bringing overdue relief to over 8,000 residents in these deep land areas. A further \$15 million will to spend for other essential supplies, inclusive of solar systems, which will tremendously benefit the far flung areas and our indigenous brothers and sisters.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, it is the wish of the residents who are the benefactors and monitors that our Regional Administration seek to better monitor our suppliers, service providers and contractors. It will be remiss of me not to congratulate the residents of Region 10, particularly the students, teachers, parents and guardians and the Department of Education - Region 10, for their victory in the just concluded Ministry of Education and Guyana Teachers Union championship.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Neendkumar: Hon. Members of this House, as I rise to contribute to this 2018 National Budget Debate, let me say from the outset that I am in sympathy with our poor, working class people, in particular our pensioners, youths and students, given the continued insistence and Government orchestrated varying levels of hardships that are perpetuated through the Government's past and present economic financial plans.

I listened very carefully to my good friend Mr. Rutherford and I would like to ask Mr. Rutherford, he quote all these figures, but when will the commuters from Linden to Kwakwani get an all-weather or proper trail to traverse on. I will ask Mr. Rutherford and remind members of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources that I have raised, in the Committee...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Rutherford.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear you.

Mr. Speaker: You will refer to any member in this House by Hon. *so and so* and no other way.

Mr. Neendkumar: Yes Mr. Speaker, I know. Mr. Speaker, I said "my Friend", which I think is more honourable than "An. Hon.".

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us choose a different way, which is "Hon. Mr. Rutherford".

Mr. Neendkumar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have made the complaint on several occasions that the crossing at the Kwakwani waterfront is just a waiting disaster and they did not address this issue. The crime situation in Region 10 is alarming. During the year that we are speaking about, 2017, a Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) was raped. Mr. Speaker, the health centres and the schools in the riverain areas, in the Berbice River, desperately need attention. I would like to ask the Hon. Member what is the position with respect to riverain transportation in Region 10. There is so much that we could say about it, but we will leave it there.

This is the fourth consecutive National Budget presented in just over 900 days, since the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Chance (APNU/AFC) coalition assumed Office. It is the fourth budget under which Guyanese have worked harder and paid more taxes in the history of this country, while we are experiencing serious declines in the precious productive

sectors such as rice, bauxite, sugar, forestry, fishing and agriculture and the livestock industries. They have all declined miserably.

History and current experiences confirm that this Government is incapable of effectively and efficiently managing and administering the basic support required by these critical industries in our country. The unsustainability of such measures will have long lasting effects. The impacts will be an indictment on the previous gains we have made under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. As a result, our people are being forced to pay more taxes. At the current rate, there will be very little to tax as this coalition Government has proved that it cannot stimulate production and productivity, which is essential to the continuous development of our nation. **[Ms. Charles-Broomes: *Inaudible*]** Go to the *obeah man*.

This 2018 Budget is the biggest but it certainly will bring greater hardships to our people. We are certainly on our way to pre-1992 and the journey to imposed man-made poverty by the APNU/AFC which is gripping our society. Our people's expectations are continuously being shattered with every consecutive APNU/AFC National Budget, thus far.

The budget lacks the social content that would address the more pressing needs in our communities. Our communities are crying out for the streets and the bridges to get fixed. With the serious and rising crime situation, more people are calling for street lights and are demanding police protection through outposts and police patrols. The communities are calling for a reliable power supply, potable water, cleaner burial grounds and maintenance of access-to-farm roads.

The APNU/AFC coalition must stop making foolish promises. The coalition must put in place, a real programme that will bring relief to towns and villages, the hinterland and our Indigenous communities. They must support elected Local Government Councils and not seek to stymie development in areas where they have lost at the Local Government Elections (LGE). Above all, we need to maximise the role of our women and youth in social development.

I now turn my attention to what the Hon. Member on the other side referred to as "inheritance of the APNU/AFC coalition". I want to tell this House and this nation what this coalition Government really inherited. They inherited, like never before in history, but as we say in local parlance: "*bill-away, reckless spending, like neva see come fuh see*"

They inherited a solid and functional *Constitution*, a fat treasury, strong foreign reserves, bonuses for the security sector.

2.47 p.m.

They inherited economic growth – nine years of consecutive economic growth that was never seen before in Guyana and the wider Caribbean.

Parliamentary democratic sharing, which was evident by the cases of the Hon. Clarissa Riehl and the late Hon. Deborah Backer as Deputy Speakers of the National Assembly. What is happening today?

Fiscal space enough to pay the pensioners water and electricity subsidies and fees for school children - the one for \$10,000.

Big ongoing funding projects, including the East Bank Demerara Road, the Timehri Expansion Road and the East Coast Demerara Road, along with other developments are too numerous to mention.

The approach by the Government is one of squandering the Treasury with four Vice-Presidents and a number of Ministers which never existed in Guyana. Look at them; some of them have gotten away - some of them have gone. They know about this. *Fat cat* salary increases; \$20 million vehicles bought by someone who could not even afford to buy a donkey cart, they are now driving a \$20 million vehicle; \$500,000 house rent for Ministers and I am not seeing my other Hon. Friend here; Advisors galore at the Ministry of Legal Affairs; millions of dollars on forensic audits and commissions of inquiries (COIs).

At the same time, there are zero meaningful bonuses for the security sector and the public sector. What a shame. You have paid yourselves big money and a hard working security sector and public sector would get nothing. In fact, you have broken up the Guyana Police Force (GPF). This is why we will get much more crimes. We must answer why we are not promoting persons and why we are demoting persons. We are creating more problems by demoting persons and not doing the right thing.

The local government system, under the Ministry of Communities, is in chaos. It is a real sad travesty that the 2016 Local Government Elections are still incomplete. Some Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) are experiencing serious political interference from the Regional Executive Officers (REOs) at the accommodation of the Minister and the Government. It was good to see the Hon. Minister reprimanding Mr. Hopkinson in Region 2. That was good. This coalition Government is discriminating blatantly against local government areas where they lost the elections. They lost badly; they were desperately beaten. We are looking forward to beating them in 2018.

Since 2014, for example, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) represented, at the regional level, for the building of a health centre in Eccles. In 2015, the coalition Government agreed to build the health centre. It was further budgeted for in the 2015, 2016 and 2017 Budgets. However, to date, absolutely no effort has been put in place to build this much needed health centre.

Imagine, in the heavily populated Neighbourhood Democratic Council, where there is no health centre, this Government is procrastinating to spend moneys that was budgeted for on three occasions. What is worse is the fact that we have two Hon. Ministers sitting over there who live in Eccles. They seem to be taking directives to discriminate against their own people. I think that I would have to beg Hon. Minister Mr. Harmon to please build our health centre.

Councillors are complaining bitterly about the numerous "push around" that they are getting as it takes genuine efforts to do work to enhance the communities. The region is assuming the role of doing the procurement for most of the Capital Works and in many cases, Current Works. In so doing, the NDCs are not allowed to function effectively and efficiently. It was noted that the Minister of Finance, on page 21 of the Budget Presentation, contemplated the idea of advancing countrywide evaluation exercises to bring all property values up to date so that more taxes could be collected. This will be resisted. How much more taxes must our people pay? The fact is, the Government has sufficient money to address the needs of the citizens, but they cannot or rather, are not spending it in a transparent and accountable way. That is the problem. We have left them with enough moneys but they do not know how to spend it.

Further, the holding of Local Government Elections in 2018 is most welcome. However, it is imperative that the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) put its act together. We must get a clean, verifiable and tamper proof list of voters. The need for a new Registrar of Registrants is overdue. The serious allegations of corruption at the GECOM Secretariat must be urgently addressed. The GECOM must be cleansed now of partisan and corrupt staff. **[An Hon.**

Member: *[Inaudible]* *Ha ha ha?* You want to go to the Flat Shop?

The future of our country belongs to our youths. It is sad to know that the Minister of Finance, at page 58 of the Budget Speech, alluded to the fact that there is a clear need for reform and innovation across all levels of education delivery. It is indeed sickening to know how quickly the deterioration of the education system is taking place after the good performance of our own past two Ministers of Education, who performed with distinction. Now, all of that has gone in the gutter. Ms. Manickchand did an excellent job. Congratulations, Ms. Manickchand. You would be returned there in 2020.

I agreed with the Minister of Finance that our children must no longer be subjected to frequent teachers' absenteeism, poor curriculum delivery, shortage of textbooks and materials and non-submission of grades at the tertiary level. There is growing evidence of violence in schools. Worst of all is the sad situation at the Bishop's High School that is now attracting the education system. Our students must be given precious time to study and to develop into good adults. Instead of this, Mr. Speaker, do you know what happened last year, our students, parents and teachers occupied themselves for days and weeks by protesting and struggling against the 14% Valued-Added Tax (VAT) on education. Education is a right and not a privilege. Our students and teachers won a well fought battle against this APNU/AFC Government. Thanks to the Almighty, the Government was forced to remove the VAT on education.

I would like to challenge this Government to tell this nation what new and good initiatives they have introduced since they assumed Office in 2015?

The word "sports" seem to be absent from the Hon. Minister of Finance and the APNU/AFC vocabularies. The word "sports" seem to be absent from all four budgets presentations. This is the fourth budget and I am challenging the coalition Government to tell this nation what they have done or what they intend to do for the further development of sports.

In 2016, the budgeted sum for the National Sports Commission (NSC) was \$301,310,000.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Mr. Neendkumar: I will finish in time. I am a disciplined person. [An Hon. Member: Read faster.] I would carry you for a *quarter* faster.

In 2017, the budgeted sum was \$536,979,000. An inside source told me that only recently the actual money spent for the year was a mere \$286,979,000. It is impossible for them to go through the procurement process and everything that is legal to spend 70% of the moneys that was allocated to them. These people cannot even run the Flat Shop - a rum shop - and they are sporting with sports. Now, for 2018, the budgeted sum is \$300,949,000. It would be interesting to see how they would continue sporting with sports. This coalition Government is sporting with sports and our youths and students are the victims of their incompetence.

With respect to this cut and paste budget, it is a reflection of the coalition Government's hate for the working class people, our youths and students. Five hundred dollars – Aunty Sandra Abel Sitaram said:

“*Beta, it cant even let me buy lil credit fuh give me grandson fuh call me when he gan a school or it cant buy a half chicken fried rice.*”

Shame on those who gave the \$500. Good evening and thank you. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection [Mr. Scott]: The journey to the good life continues.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Hon. Minister Winston Jordan and his team for a job well done in crafting and preparing this the fourth budget for this distinguished House in the last three years.

Our manifesto is a document for five years. This budget merely signifies that we are half way there. So far, we have kept our promises and we have delivered. Therefore, it is fitting to say that *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. It is most appropriate. It is no secret that the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, ever since May 2015, has been on the move. Therefore, this

budget now stands in the presence of this House to signify its continuity towards to the good life and a better life for our citizens.

A careful examination of Budget 2018 reveals a simple, clear and unambiguous fact which concerns human development. [Ms. Manickchand: ...[Inaudible]...] It is not difficult to talk. We spoke for 15 years in the dark. Whenever we speak about economic development...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, please continue.

Mr. Scott: Thank you, Sir. Whenever we speak about economic development, economic advancement or national development we are simply referring to human development. For that, the budget is all about what we could deliver. In other words, it is a people-centred budget. Permit me to consult the Human Development Report of 2016 for a basic description of the concept of human development because there is much congruence between the findings of that report and the objectives of Budget 2018.

At page 25 of that report, it is written, and I quote:

“Human development is all about people - expanding their freedoms, enlarging their choices, enhancing their capabilities and improving their opportunities... Economic growth and economic income are means to human development but not ends in themselves - because it is the richness of people’s lives, not the richness of economies, that ultimately is valuable to people.”

3.02 p.m.

I would like to stress on the phrase “richness of people’s lives” to underscore that the importance of human development is about people. It is beyond comprehension that any reasonable thinking person would have difficulty in accepting that the truth and validity of the foregoing remarks mirror the objectives of this budget. I wish to emphasise that it is people centred. It caters for every category of Guyanese - the young, the not so young, the employed, the unemployed, the retired, the abled and the differently abled. This budget is valued at \$267.1 billion. It exceeds the current budget by \$17.1 billion, making it the largest budget in our history.

Therefore, I must now direct your attention to some of the specifics, and in this regard, job creation takes a premium position. As we engage this budget, we cannot and will not lose sight of the fact that the parameters of human development include enhancing people's capabilities and improving their opportunities. It is in this context that our achievements and projections, as outlined in our budget, is noteworthy. Pointed out, there are more than 168 young persons who benefited from the Youth Biz 592 Project as well as an In-School Entrepreneurship Project. The intention there is to empower young people with entrepreneurial skills to create, own, and manage, their own business rather than depending on Government to exclusively provide them with jobs. A total of 392 jobs were generated through this venture. The Youth Biz Programme has complemented many apprenticeships and other training programmes which were successfully piloted by the Board of Industrial Training (BIT). BIT has prepared scores of youths for the job market in various disciplines. In fact, a total of 1,692 persons, mostly youths, were trained in various skill sets and released into the job market. The budget provides for the unleashing of the energies and creativity of the youths on whose shoulders the development of this nation rests. Seventy two million dollars more has been given for this year's budget to enhance the development of this very programme. These programmes include: the Youth Innovation Project of Guyana (YIPoG), Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training (YEST) Programme, and the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS). These will be promoted and financed at a cost of \$1.7 billion. It is significant to note that the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) Programme, which is directly concerned with the development of cooperative societies in the hinterland regions, will continue to be promoted. In this context, \$150 million has been allocated.

I wish to place on record that the Board of Industrial Training has diversified its training methodologies to cater for persons who are differently abled and/or physically challenged in one area or another. One hundred and eighty six persons or 11% of all persons trained fall under this category. The philosophy here is to give every Guyanese, who wishes to participate, an opportunity in being better citizens than they can be. This is the opportunity that is offered. We have done so in 2017, and with the adequate funds that we have, we shall continue to do so in 2018. Therefore, we shall fulfil our mandate of leaving no one behind or outside of the mainstream of development.

With the resuscitation of the manganese mine, after four decades of dormancy, let me say that approximately 350 jobs will be created. That is excluding over 12,000 persons who will find alternative employment in construction and other and different phases of the development of the mines and ancillary facilities. This gives an aggregate of no less than 6,000 jobs directly. When we take into account the hundreds of other jobs, which will be generated directly and indirectly through the billions, which will be spent on infrastructural development, the job market is indeed very proactive and vibrant.

It is my pleasure this afternoon to discuss that, under Budget 2017, the Ministry of Social Protection, on whose behalf I speak, has successfully discharged its mandate where both job creation and job placement are concerned. I believe that it is opportune for me to mention that the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency (CRMA), more popularly known as the Labour Exchange Bureau, was able to turn out a more than satisfactory, if not impressive, performance over the past year. During the year, a total of 756 enterprises were engaged and encouraged to utilise our agency and the services for recruitment and placement purposes for young Guyanese. Following these engagements in conjunction with independent initiatives for job seekers, 1,873 persons were registered, 1,877 persons, inclusive of persons already on our registers, were referred by the unit to employers for placement in their services. **[Ms Teixeira: How**

many got jobs?]

One thousand two hundred and thirty eight persons were actually placed in employment. Based on our budgetary projections, under Budget 2018, the number is destined to be surpassed by far.

This statement reinforces the existence of human development in Budget 2018, and at the same time, introduces the concept of *cooperativism* in the discourse. Last year and the year before, APNU/AFC solemnly promised to ensure that, as part of the renaissance of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, there is a revitalisation of the cooperative movement. As a precursor to that initiative, a Ministerial Task Force was established with a view of determining, among other things, the status of the movement and what was needed to be done to secure its rebirth. I take no pride in reminding this House of the state of the cooperative movement that we found at the beginning of 2015. However, I am delighted to let you know that the task force examined and provided solutions to what was needed for our cooperative country. Many of those recommendations have been acted on, and today, many more are still receiving our attention.

I wish to let it be known that we have in place provisions which will see four model cooperative villages in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, being established. Those villages are Buxton, Ithaca, Beterverwagting, and Mocha. A total of US\$12 million worth of equipment and assistance for the execution of the programme will be received for those four societies of which is projected to create a minimum of 160 jobs and more. I wish to emphasise that our cooperative societies and also our friendly societies are concerned with matters, mostly about quality, at this moment, rather than quantity. So far, we have 126 cooperative societies of quality functioning alongside 180 friendly societies of similar standing. I wish to point out that 60 or 1/3 of those friendly societies are now required to be transformed into cooperative societies, so as to satisfy the demands of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Act, which is designed to eliminate the money laundering aspect of some of those societies.

I wish to highlight the fact that, even before we recently hosted the 46th Plenary and Working Group Meetings of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF), we were working assiduously to ensure that all cooperative societies, especially the credit unions, were sanitised and made free of corrupt and money laundering practices. It is our desire that these societies remain vibrant economic units, constituting a third pillar to the economy of our country. To that end, we have conducted a plethora of exercises which included: registration of societies in nine out of 10 regions, hosted stakeholders meetings with the Central Planning and Housing Authority (CHPA), Kuru Kuru Co-operative College, the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) and the Ministry of Agriculture, to name a few. Meetings and training sessions were hosted with the committees of management of several prospective societies. All the committees were subjected to due diligence, within the realms of the AML regulations. We conducted audits and training in audit in many societies. Having being trained by the competent authorities, training was also conducted in the money laundering requirement and inquiries ordered into societies which have been reported to have conducted less than reputable practices. The aggregate effect of these activities was to ensure that societies, both old and new, functioned as vibrant economic units, contributing positively to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

As we speak, we are conducting with the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) an exercise where it has retained the services of the NORBIT Company, an international consultancy firm, to advise on a study to determine what some of the best options are for alternative employment for some of those persons who will no longer be employed in the sugar industry. [An Hon.

Member: It is a shame that it is only now.] Now is the right time. To accommodate some of the employees who will be better off with greater opportunities provided beyond just cutting cane. We have not only sanitised many of the existing societies, but we have strengthened the Guyana National Cooperative Union Limited (GNCUL) and its regional bodies, to help them to better manage societies throughout the regions. Thus far, the regional bodies have revived co-ops in Regions 2, 3,4,5,6 and 10. We are convinced that cooperative societies, which by their very nature are people centred, have the capacity to take us through to the journey of a good life. Based on our allocations, we will be able to surpass our 2017 achievements in the realm of *cooperativism*.

I can say with much enthusiasm that the spirit of the cooperative has been rekindled and burns brightly. At the moment, there are 42 cooperative societies, and 32 friendly societies which are awaiting results of the customer due diligence before they can be properly registered. I wish to submit that the future progress of this nation lies largely in the hands of cooperative societies. Over the years, the barometer of labour and labour management relations in this country has been the number of strikes in the sugar industry.

3.17 p.m.

And when an analysis of the strike data for the past three years, January to October is done, a healthy picture of the stewardship of the Ministry of Social Protection, and by extension the Government of A Partnership for National Unity /Alliance For Change (APNU/FC) is hereby presented.

A tabular representation of strikes reveals that in 2015 there were 170 strikes, in 2016, there were 139 strikes. In 2017, there were 89 strikes. This means that over the past three years strikes have declined by 49.41%. That has never happened before in the history of this nation. This is significant for two reasons. First, this is lowest number of strikes in industry has ever recorded. Secondly, it is the first time in decades that the aggregate number of strikes in the industry is in

the realm of double digits only. Even though the sugar industry is going through a phase of restructuring which usually lead to industrial unrest, the relationship between labour and management continues to be far less acrimonious than it used to be. This is attributed to the Ministry's pursuit of monetary and stable industrial climate and a demonstrated respect for both employer and the employee. This has been a good development in this nation.

I need not mention the negative correlation between strikes and productivity, strikes and employee morale, strikes and investments, both local and foreign. It is not that other industries have not been without differences between labour and management, but it is indisputable that the parties across the board have embarked on a new philosophy of consensus and cooperation, instead of conflict, antagonism and disagreement that our Ministry has been able to pilot in this new direction of "let us all live together and in unity". In the circumstances, therefore, I would respectfully submit that this House based on the nature of industrial relations to our country, that our country, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, is investor-friendly and good for doing business. This is an indication that our budget is succeeding.

Still, within the realms of labour management relations, I am happy to announce that many of the parties have concluded their wages and salaries negotiations for 2017, with timely and quiet inputs from the Department of Labour within our Ministry of Social Protection. That is yet another indicator that people are certainly desirous of living a "good life" instead of strife and confusion. I wish to assure this House that we at the Ministry will continue to do everything possible to facilitate a stable industrial relations climate, boost investor's confidence and make this budget the success it is designed to be.

Let me permit you, at this juncture, it is to remind you that public sector wages, going forward into 2018, will see a people-oriented, people-centred and people-friendly budget that will place a radiant smile on the faces of all public servants. By now our track record on this subject is well known and I need not rehash the details of the increases going back to 2015. However, I must highlight that it is the second time that we have used a sliding scale mechanism, ranging from 0.5% to the highest earning to 8.0% for those who are at the lowest end. You would see that that scale makes allowances for those who have limited resources. This now places the minimum wage for public sectors at \$720,000 per annum. We are confident that our economy, if it performs beyond expectations public servants, therefore, could look forward to even more

increases in the short future. This is not just about the public servants. We have at our consideration also the private sector. The private sector employees in the past did not feel included when they were given leave allowance. Now the leave allowance has been extended to them, where “the journey to the good life”, they are now a part of that.

Similarly, our senior citizens have not been left behind. They have not been left out of the circle of “the good life.” They too have been awarded an increase in their pension from \$19,000 to \$19,500. Let me say one thing. It is not enough to say that you have an increase of \$10 or \$500 or \$2000. What is important to do is that while in our five-year development plan as per our manifesto, we could tell you that we have increased the wages as well as the pension for those persons by 49%, and it gets higher. That is what they had to look at over a period of five years. Within the next two years, we shall go even higher.

I crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, to say, as Mr. Jordan has said, in paragraph 4.162, “Many generations of Guyanese have been raised to duly respect our elders.” This administration has focused on ensuring that elderly care is quality and quality giving at all time. We always look after our elderly because our Government has always given respect where it is due. He went on to reveal our care homes, including the Palms, will continue to be evaluated and upgraded. To that event, we have given \$50 million to upgrade the conditions in the Palms. This way we shall keep our word every year.

This budget is envisaged that the extractive sector, inclusive of bauxite, will expand. This naturally includes Russian Aluminium (RUSAL). For the past seven years, there have been serious differences between the management of that company and a recognised union the Guyana Bauxite and General Workers’ Union (GB&GWU). Production levels have been affected by those differences, which were encouraged and nurtured by a previous administrations weakness for being able to uphold the laws when it comes to those companies. Today, I wish to proudly announce that last week we were able to finally resolve the differences which existed between the parties and then set them on a path to healing and reconciliation.

The generous injection of tax free overtime will now see the inflow into the community of Linden, Region 10, \$173 million. This must be seen as a gift from the Government of the

APNU/AFC. Today, the people in Linden are ready to receive that \$173 million. I trust that before the end of this December month, they will get what is truly and rightfully theirs.

The Hon. Minister of Finance referred to importance of occupational safety and health and how our Government intends to function within the scheme of a “good life.” The occupational safety function for this nation, whether it was mining, construction, aviation commerce or agriculture, falls within the scope of the Ministry of Social Protection. As strikes, the majority of occupational accidents are recorded in the sugar industry, but, the majority of fatalities are elsewhere, including the mining sectors. Our records show that for the year 2017, there were a total of 401 industrial accidents, mainly in the sugar industry, along with a total of 16 fatalities which were not confined only to sugar. I wish to report that all of the fatalities were fully investigated in keeping with our policy of hundred per cent investigation of such events. It is against that background, that the budget initiative to support the Guyana mining school to embrace safety standards and best practices in the promotion of occupational safety and health as an aspect of the “good life” is welcomed. This intervention comes at a time when we are about to launch the second Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) 2017-2021, which among other things caters for an advancement of occupational safety and health (OSH) at the national level and it is designed to impact every industry.

That a part, we are in a position to exhibit significant achievements in this supersensitive discipline. For example, our Budget 2017, we were able to finalise a draft national policy on occupational safety and health, commence consultation on draft regulations under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Chapter 99:10, reintroduced the Occupational Safety and Health Award Programme and successfully completed a month of activities in observance of Occupational Safety and Health Month, during the month of May. These initiatives will continue during 2018.

I shall not burden you with the details of our rudimental activities such as the inspections, trainings, workshop and seminars, to sensitise workers and employers, as well as other activities that we have not yet even slacken the nerve pace. I would like to disclose, that we are in an advance stage of delinking our OSH section from the labour relation section, source to have a better service staff by specialist. Part of the delinking process includes recruitment and realisation, because we intend to be represented in every region.

Therefore, in conclusion, I think I have said enough to convince even those sceptics that Budget 2018 offers nothing but the best and caters also for the young and all those other persons who live in this country. Therefore I would urge you to believe and accept that while “the good life continues”, you demonstrate that by being in support of our Budget 2018.

I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Ms. Burton-Persaud: The theme for Budget 2018 *The Journey to the Good Life Continues* is a bold attempt by the Government to give an excuse for its inability to deliver on the many promises that it made to this nation. It is a budget that is full of bluff and a lot of fluff.

Information Communications Technology (ICT): In today’s world, ICT is a very important component of a country’s developmental process. In 2015, the Government closed the One Laptop Per Family project and it rebranded it by renaming it One Laptop Per Teacher. However, when this Government realised that they were 40,000 laptops that were on its way from China, they decided that it was good to give it to the teachers. What has happened with that project? Some teachers got their laptops, and many were asked to pay \$30,000 per laptop and it is still to make its way into the education system today. Then in 2016, we heard about in the Budget 2016 about the creation of information hubs within Government agencies. What has become of that? How many hubs are there in the Government agencies?

3.32 p.m.

Then there was a \$326 million allocation that was earmarked to design implementation of interconnections within agencies, state buildings and education facilities. What has happened to that allocation of \$326 million? The setting up ICT hubs in various communities, we are yet to hear how many communities benefited from that. Ensure a level of poverty and remoteness in various locations and to transcend that by technology. This Government was supposed to enable communities to be transcended from poverty to “the good life” using information technology. I am not aware that anyone was able to be transcended from poverty to a good life with ICT because the hardships continue.

In 2017, ICT, transformed Guyana through the creation of a digital economy and the use of ICT, transformation of public services to citizens by providing online digital services to Guyanese

consumers at key Ministries, at public sector agencies, in areas of passport and drivers' licence applications, e-commerce, telemedicine, online education and training - a big no. As it is right now, it is hardly even in this hallowed chamber to even get connectivity at times to access information to make your presentations. Encourage our citizens, especially our young people, to take advantage of the increased entrepreneurial activities that the World Wide Web (WWW) offers which is the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector to open new frontiers of innovation, allowing citizens to be able to join their counterparts around the world in developing new entrepreneurial and e-commerce opportunities, from the conveniences of their homes.

Lots of flamboyant words but, as it is, that has not materialised. How can you access the WWW when you cannot get continuous electricity, when you cannot get the lighting fast access speed, when you are unable to sit in the comfort of your home and do business because of the blackouts? The ICT programmes are marking time in this country and I want to let you know, yes, it is nice to tell people that they can get jobs and that they can expand their businesses. I heard the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous People's Affairs talking about the cassava bread projects, the tomatoes projects and all the different beverage products of the Indigenous people, but there is the need to market these commodities. It is that so much which can be consumed at home, but you need to take it across the seas, across the world, so that people can really have a taste of Guyanese culture and Guyanese foods. How are we going to do that when you cannot get access to internet because, either it is too slow or because of the long periods of blackout, you cannot have access? How are you going to market those commodities? We live in a country today where jobs are not available.

I heard the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection who has the responsibility for labour talking about all the job creations and all that there would be and also asking the young people that it was good for them to go out there and make their own jobs. Innovation is good, but in this world today of ICT. How are they going to do that when they are being stifled? They are being stifled because they are places in which they can go online and get jobs. There is freelancer; there is out sourced. These are platforms that they can go on. They can apply and they can be accepted to do jobs online. We have our single mothers who would want to stay at home and look after the little ones because the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection with responsibility for labour recently said that female security guards should not

work at nights, you should stay home and many of us know that people work night duty to get the little overtime to pay Courts and Singers, to pay their light bills, to pay their children's school bus, to pay for aftercare and even day cares. How can they get that extra money if they do not work at night? They may very well want to utilise their skills, work the day and at nights work from the comfort of their homes but they are being stifled and prevented from doing so, because ICT is not at their fingertips. They will now have to go and look for other types of jobs. I am saying that for us to be able to keep these glorious promises of utilising ICT and all that it has to offer, we have to ensure that the components that will keep it alive, will keep it vibrant, is in place and that is not so.

I could remember attending the first Digital Wealth Summit in this country recently where the Hon. Member Catherine Hughes was there and I want to remind the Hon. Minister of her promise to the many entrepreneurs in that room, that, apart from even having the fast internet access and connectivity, the system by which online jobs are being paid is PayPal and she promised that, by before the end of this year, PayPal system would have been made available to Guyana. Hon. Minister I am still waiting because I am one of those persons who applied for jobs.

Budget 2018: Nothing listed really, in the budget that speaks specifically to ICT. I am asking, why? I have perused this budget up and down. I have seen little snippets of it in various agencies, but nothing bold and bright that states "this is the programme for ICT in Guyana." It is good for youths to be innovative, but a Government also has the responsibility to provide jobs for the nation.

I turn my attention to tourism. Destination Guyana is still in flight mode. The many flamboyant initiatives touted are yet to come into manifestation. 2015, "Transform Guyana to the hottest and newest birdwatching destination", I have not really heard about it being that hot and this new birdwatching destination. What I see that is happening with birdwatching is that when I traverse along the East Coast, I see the men standing up at the corners with their bird cages.

Eco-tourism, adventure tourism, wildlife watching, community based tourism, sports tourism, yachting and cruise visits, heritage and cultural tourism, these were all initiatives that were supposed to happen, which were in Budget 2015.

Eco-tourism: Great adventure tourism for those who likes the wild life and adventure - great, and community based tourism - something that should have been kicked off without any hindrance. There is the August holiday when school closes and parents are wondering what to do with their children. Why could this Government not put some of the buses? It has a lot of 'G' buses. Make them available to take children on sightseeing tours. You would have provided jobs for tour guides; you would have provided jobs for people, because, as you know, sometimes the parents are hustling to go to work and they cannot pack a lunch box for them to walk with; you could have provided jobs for caterers; you would have provided jobs even for other minibuses and other vehicles to be used. We are hearing in 2018 about being able to bring in buses duty-free but they have to be five years in the business.

What will happen to the sugar worker who lost his job and has little money saved and he wants to bring in a minibus so that he will continue to survive and he does not have to keep crying? What will happen to the youth who cannot get job, but his parents are willing to finance a bus or finance him to get into catering or being a tour guide? It is because they are qualified from high school, they could have utilised those skills and become a tour guide. Our children would have been more equipped with the knowledge of all the various sites and they do not have to go online and pull down a set of monuments and historical places and paste in an exercise book and send them to school. They would have seen the natural thing and they would have become in love with Guyana, learn to appreciate Guyana and become the patriots that we want them to become.

2016, under a signed memorandum of understanding, there was the packaging of the Beauty of Barbados' Beaches and the Excitement of Guyana's Ecotourism. That would have been signed. We are told that it is a memorandum. Well, apparently, someone did not understand what was going on because we have not heard anything about it yet.

Promotion of the Guyana Shield and FAM initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, 2017, allocation of \$329 Million intended to fund the implementation of the national tourism policy.

2018: "promote the Guiana Shield as a tourism product"; "preparing and implementing a Tourism Development and Destination Marketing Plan"; "strengthen diaspora relations to develop and exploit tourism opportunities"; intensify the training in hospitality, we are yet to see

those come into being. I do hope that this is not one of the many initiatives, another promise to the Guyanese people that would be left on a table in a folder, yet to be imitated.

At this point in time, I am going to make a call and a plea to the Minister responsible for tourism, that the call for Destination Guyana should take off in Guyana. Make tours available in Guyana affordable. We have our citizens who live in Guyana. We hear about the majestic Kaieteur Fall, but we cannot get there because of the cost. We hear about all the rivers, lakes, creeks and all the beauty of the savannahs and the Rupununi; we hear about all the historical buildings in the Berbice and in Essequibo; we hear about Region 10. Let this be the beginning of community tourism. Make these tours available and affordable. Put it out from the beginning of the year with the prices, so that families can plan. Instead of getting a visa to go to the United States of America, to go to Trinidad and to go to Barbados for carnival, they can decide to put up their moneys, as a family, go on these tours. Instead of our youths just going to traverse to the creeks on Sunday, they can take that money and go on group tours and see the beauty of Guyana. This is a wonderful nation - a wonderful country. We need to see it. We need to appreciate it but it is not affordable. You hear a lot of persons saying that it is cheaper to go to Trinidad and Barbados than to go into the interior. Let our people see it; let Tourism Destination Guyana starts in Guyana for the Guyanese people.

Labour in Guyana has moved from being at the crossroads. Labour has found itself on a precarious perch on a mountain waiting to take a death plunge.

3.47 p.m.

I have listened intently to the Hon. Minister Keith Scott's presentation and I want to say that it lacks clarity and direction. It is a hopeless speech. In the lead up to the 2015 General Elections, public servants were promised a 20% increase, so everybody got excited, and that was to be a part of the hundred days plan. Then after the elections, public servants heard about a substantial increase, so it went down a bit lower, and then within that same time frame the Ministry of Labour was being sidelined and it became a department within a Ministry. That was the eye-opener of the disrespectfulness to the workers and labour in this country.

In 2015, it was stated that workers were given a 10% increase, but really when it was calculated it was 5% because it was not retroactive of 1st January, 2015. Then we were told that the

Department of Labour would carve out methods and programmes that would cushion or minimise the negative impact brought to the nation and workers. We were told that this Government would not sacrifice its well-being at the altar of the expedient and unto the enrichment of a few. That sounds like a very familiar phrase from one of our popular trade unionists. The Government would not make empty claims to the working class, to pursue policies, which would enrich and fortify the upper class at the expense of the workers. “Engage stakeholders with a view of developing an agreed mechanism to eliminate conflicts among labour, union and employers” - that is a big fat untruth because there is a series of events that happened after that that showed that there was no collaboration using the tripartite process of union workers representatives, the employers and the Government.

2016, no wages and salaries increase to public servants: When that was questioned we were told in this honourable House that the committee, which was set up to investigate increases into the wages and salaries of public servants, did not complete their work on time to be able to be included in the budget. It was late. That was so hard to accept because if a committee, that is put together by the Government to do investigation, it supposed to know the timeline and it supposed to know that if it really wanted to give increases to public servants of this country it would have completed its work on time.

“Give prominence to conflict and dispute resolutions”, today I am standing in this honourable House and still hearing the Hon. Minister responsible for labour speaking about resolving an issue with RUSAL that came so many years back.

2017, arbitrary increases to public servants: We know what happened there, that the Guyana Public Service Union, which was representing public servants in this country and the Government, ended at a stalemate. The Government decided it was going to put out what it could have afforded, as it said, at that time, and that was an arbitrary increase. It was not an agreement between the bargaining agency and the Government.

Then we had in the Budget 2017, I remembered, and I heard the Hon. Minister Keith Scott talked about it again - I think he loves to boast about that, but I could understand why - the re-establishment of co-operative societies across Guyana. In 2017, I could remember trying to get from him where that \$40 million was going to be allocated. I would still ask that question: Where

did that money go? Today I am sitting in this honourable House and I am hearing that the only thing that was done was the establishment of a task force. We were told that this money was to establish cooperative societies across the ten administrative regions of Guyana.

2018, arbitrary increases again to our public servants: We are hearing about the minimum wage moving from \$55,000 to \$60,000. That is fine, \$5,000 more. This time the Government got it correct by ensuring that it was retroactive from 1st January, 2017, but you know what, that back pay did not do the public servants anything because they keep crying out that by the time it was taxed they got a little something. I am saying that even \$60,000 do not increase the spending power of the public servants of this country, because of all the taxes and other items that would trickle down to the cost they have to pay.

We heard about income tax personal allowance. We heard about income tax travel allowance for the private sector, good, but there is the big “but”, we have done all of that, but our teachers in this country, the persons who are tasked with ensuring that our youths are educated to take up their meaningful role in this society, they have been duped. They were promised that their allowance and all the issues that they had would have been looked after. They went to meetings; the meeting did not work out right. They said that they were going to take industrial action. I think that is where they went wrong. You do not register your shots; you do give the shots. They were called into a meeting by the highest executive Government officer in this country. A task force was set up by very prominent people in the education system to look into the issues. Today the teachers are still crying that for how many weeks now this task force is yet to meet to address their issues.

Unresolved labour issues at the Department of Labour: Many unpaid wages, by contractors who are yet to be paid by the Government. I keep getting this complaint from persons. They are working with contractors who did the work for the Government and when it is time for them to get paid they cannot be paid. They are given the ‘royal’ runaround and then when they go to the Department of Labour and make a complaint and it investigated, it told them that it is a Government contract, the Government has not paid it, so it cannot pay them. They have to wait until the Government pay it. I am asking the Government today, on behalf of those persons who have bills to pay, who have families to look after, to please pay the contractors, so that they could pay their workers so that they could pay the bills that they owe. One of those persons came

to me just this morning, a young man, he said, “*I owe Courts cus I sah I get wuk and I gah tek out sumthing to nice up mi house. Courts gon come and carry it back because this man sah he en get pay yet*”. This is the reality that we are living with. These are the hardships that we are talking about.

We heard about the Hon. Minister responsible for labour seeking to stop female workers from working. I did an extensive article in the newspapers on that because he felt that they were short-changing their children, taking away the opportunity for one to have a choice to choose. A mother does not go about neglecting her children. She does what is best for them. You cannot go and make decisions for people’s life without seeking to have a consultation with them. That very Hon. Minister, again said, apparently he has a thing for using words callously, ...but those words are not nice words. I would remember hearing that the Hon. Minister called security guards derelict citizens in this country. Then we heard in this honourable House when the Hon. Minister calls our Indigenous brothers and sisters avaricious.

Economic decline and its impact on workers: The closure of large businesses resulted in the loss of jobs and hardships on families. The closure of small businesses resulted in the loss of investments, the loss of jobs and repossession of assets by lending agencies. Individual business closure brings about loss of investment, seizure of assets to cover unpaid loans because of the inability to pay loans, the loss of income and hardships on families. We are encouraging small business and entrepreneurship, but when these people go to lending agencies and they borrow the money, because the workers do not have the spending powers and they cannot purchase from these people, they cannot repay their loans, they lose their business, the agency comes down on them and take away whatever assets they would have put up there to allow them to get those loans and then they go into a state of depression. It is no wonder we are having so many suicides.

Failure in agriculture sector, because that covers labour too: Rice, there is no significant markets for our rice farmers. Sugar, there is the closure of sugar estates. I want to tell this honourable House the history of sugar in Guyana. The history of sugar shows that sugar was the first official product of Guyana, that all six ethnic groups participated in the cultivation and processing of sugar. It began with our Indigenous brother and sisters and when they left the sugar industry there were the poorer class of Europeans who came. When they left our Afro Guyanese came by way of slave trade. When slavery was abolished there was indentureship which brought our East

Indian brothers and sisters from India. When that closed off, there were the Portuguese who were coming followed finally by the Chinese. Sugar is a significant produce in this country.

We also have sugar as one of our five publicised natural resources in Guyana. It is depicted on our Coat-of-Arms, the stalk of sugar in the arms of the jaguar. When our independence was going to be achieved it was because it was the major economic earner in this country that rice and sugar was placed on our Coat-of-Arms. It is depicted on our national flag by the colour green for agriculture because sugar and rice were the two main contributing factors economically to our country at that time. When we stop producing sugar, we would turn from exporter to importer. There would be the loss of income to income tax and the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). I want to remind the Members on the Government side of the House that all the talks about the greening of the economy and going green, sugar is the one of the major products that would add to the greening of the economy by the way or renewable fuel.

The banks are sceptical of lending loans because our people are unable to pay their loans. The little businesses that they would have started up have to get licence, they have to pay all the taxes, so when they go to the bank today, maybe to get the loan to buy one of the many homes or condominiums and all the prefabricated homes that the Ministry of Communities is talking about, when they go for the interview, they cannot get the loans because they do not have the ability to repay the loans. How would that project take off?

I have listened to a comment made by Hon. Minister of Public Security when one of my honourable colleagues was talking about the sugar estates and the closure of the sugar estates, the Hon. Minister said, *“Is duh wuh y’all want dem only to do, cut suga, cut cane fuh de res of dem life?”*

4.02 p.m.

I want to pose a question to the Hon. Minister. Should I take it that our country, our city, should remain stink due to the pile up of garbage because we do not want our garbage collectors to continue collecting garbage for the rest of their lives?

Old aged pensioners have already made their contributions to our nation. Today, they are made to feel unwanted, uncared for and disrespected. The recent \$500 increase adds up to \$16 a day. It

cannot even buy some mints or sweets to raise their sugar levels. I have been told by many pensioners how they feel. One particular pensioner said to me, “*I dont want duh \$500; them disrespect meh; them eyes pass me* after making my contributions. Member of Parliament (MP), the \$500 cannot buy an egg fried rice because a whole is \$640 and a half is \$560. It cannot buy a bake and salt fish and a drink. It could only pay my passage.” This was a pensioner from Region 7. “It can only pay my one-way passage by ferry from Bartica to Parika. *If ah got to go further, ah got to walk.*” He is saying that, because of this insult, “*Ah want yuh tell de Hon. Members in Parliament because I cyan come and talk there...* Tell the Government, because they disrespected me, I do not want the \$500. I am willing to sign an agreement for them to *tek* it out. They can take it and utilise it.” Mr. Speaker, because of the language used - it is unparliamentary...but he said that there is a particular purpose which the Government can take the \$500 and use it for.

Budget 2018 has brought on more hardships on the people of this country. The Government has failed to create jobs. It has failed to enhance jobs and it has failed to sustain jobs. Everywhere you go in this country, the people are crying out. There is a particular cry they say, “*Lard, we cyan tek it no mo, give we back de Government we had before.*”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Ms. Burton-Persaud: In closing, the Government has failed to deliver on its promises and are now making excuses. As such, this is a high-class case of deception and hypocrisy in Budget 2018. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, once I have indicated that your time is up, even if you are in mid-sentence, you should sit. We will not allow a rot to take place where we begin to slide. You will remain faithful to the time in which you know you should speak. I thank the Hon. Member. The next speaker is the Hon. Dr. Roopnaraine.

Minister of Social Protection [Ms. Ally]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Dr. Roopnaraine cannot be here. I ask that his name be taken off from the speakers’ list.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. It is so done. The next speaker is the Hon. Jennifer Westford.

Dr. Westford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to add my contribution to the 2018 Budget Debate. Congratulations are in order to the Hon. Minister and the hardworking staff at the Ministry of Finance, who facilitated the presentation of this fourth Budget to the House. Once again, the Minister of Finance referred to the task embarked on by his Government as restoring hope and inspiring confidence.

In 2015, they promised to give the citizens of this country a better quality of life or, to be more accurate, a good life. To date, look what has been done to the lives of the Guyanese. The working poor have become poorer and the middle class is becoming poorer because it is being placed under severe financial pressure. The only people living the good life are my Hon. Friends on the opposite side of this House.

It is a fact that the real middle-class comprises the ones who cannot evade paying taxes on their salaries every month. They are the ones who are subjected to the higher prices. They are the ones who are subjected to higher interest rates on mortgages. They are the ones whose disposable incomes are being depleted on a daily basis. There is evidence of impotence - intellectual impotence. [*Laughter*] **[Ms. Ally:** Oh! I was wondering.] That was deliberate, Mr. Speaker. There is evidence of intellectual impotence on the opposite side of this House. The national ship is rudderless and is without a captain who knows how to steer the ship out of the stormy economic conditions we are currently facing.

The ship of State is lost at sea because the captain and its sailors are also lost. Take a good look at the contributions that have been made by the Members on the opposite side of this House. Look at those contributions: no depth, no statement of policy, no direction, nothing but a repetition and a rehash of what was there in last year's Budget. It is a fact that confidence, as mentioned by the Minister of Finance, in his speech, is a variable that is challenging to measure.

The Hon. Minister of Finance should, at least, by now, understand that it is incumbent on the Government to create an environment in which confidence is optimal. It is not a favour, but a duty. It therefore follows that confidence is also tied to the Government not only as a result of its fiscal policies, but also as a result of the execution of its overall governance of the country.

The general view is that this Government will never be able to raise the necessary level of confidence required to propel the economy and the country as a whole since it has stubbornly

continued to deny its pre-election blustering and campaign promises made to the population. It is a fact that this Government does not have the moral fortitude to engender the level of confidence that is necessary to move the economy and this country forward. The Government is steadfastly and myopically concerned with its ship of partners. Yes, the Government is concerned only with the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) partnership. As we say in Guyanese parlance, the economy *really deh bad*.

One only has to speak with the shop owners and vendors to hear the woes of economic hardship that is permeating our society. I would like to encourage my Hon. Friends, on the opposite side of this House, to take a walk down Regent Street, Water Street and through the Vendors' Arcade. I am sure that they are going to hear of these woes from the very persons I speak about. But, as usual, with this Government, the Minister of Finance tried to blame the previous Administration by suggesting that failing investments from years ago are now causing growth reduction. This Government takes no ownership for its ills. The Government could get away with it and try to blame the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) for its legacy of missteps, misprints, mistakes, mishandling, and miseries of all kind, misconducts and their constipations, but it will not be tolerated. People are becoming wiser and they are seeing them for what they are.

We, on this side of the House, will not allow this smoke and mirror screen response to everything to go unchecked. When this Government came into office, it pretended to be in a hurry to keep its campaign promise of moving to speedily enact comprehensive procurement legislation. Even though the Public Procurement Commission was installed, we have seen hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts being hurriedly and improperly awarded in the State enterprise section, under ministerial instructions, using the pretence of some non-existent competitive process. If this Government is allowed to proceed with its projects in this haphazard manner, we could well be in for a new record breaking phase of spectacular corrupt practices.

Most persons would agree that crime and security hold major challenges for us in Guyana. According to the Minister of Finance, who said, "When we assumed office, there was a decline in reported serious crimes by about 23%." He also spoke of further reducing this figure in 2018. This, according to the Minister, is to be achieved by an administration of strong law enforcement, social intervention and strengthening of the social justice system. Just as the concept of confidence is a critical factor in the promotion of business or economic activity to

grow the economy, confidence in the administration of justice, particularly criminal justice, is equally critical.

4.17 p.m.

Confidence in the criminal justice system and the law enforcement agency is at its lowest as a result of the perverted controlled shenanigans by this APNU/AFC Government. We will continue to monitor the Government very closely to ensure that it promotes protection and safety for our citizens under an independent Judiciary and law enforcement agency.

I want to echo the sentiments of the Hon. Neendkumar and the Hon. Gillian Burton-Persaud as to the \$500 increase that the elderly received, but I would like to break it down a little more. We are speaking about \$500 per month. If one breaks it down, it goes down to about \$16 per day. What could be done with \$16? I do not even think that they could buy some sweets with it.

This is the fourth time that we have had the privilege to watch the Government present random numbers and praise itself in the process. We gave them every chance to get it right, but they have failed on each occasion. The good life that has been spoken about so boldly by all and sundry on the opposite side of this House has now become a dream and not an expectation any longer by our citizens.

We all, as Guyanese, deserve better and not some of us as is currently happening. Our people would like this Government to look after their interest. Our people would like to see their children prosper and our people would like to leave something for their children. The reality is that persons are losing their homes that they would have fought so hard to get. Because they cannot pay their mortgages, their homes are being seized by the bank and, therefore, they have nothing to leave for the generation coming after.

I want to urge my Colleagues on the opposite side of this House to pay a little more attention to the plight of our people. It is real and not a mirage. As I said before, one only has to go on the street and speak with the people out there and one would get what is happening.

This 2018 Budget would not improve our people's social status. This Budget will not promote jobs for our youths and, definitely, this Budget has moved us further away from that good life

that, again, is being rooted and our people are worse off than they were ever in the history of this country.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister within the Ministry of Communities [Ms. Patterson]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get proper into my presentation, I would like to quote from Henri Bergson:

“The eye only sees what the mind is prepared to comprehend.”

This helps me to understand the confusion of my Hon. Cde. Mr. Irfaan Ali, this morning, when he was shouting in this House: slippages! slippages! slippages! slippages in the Guyana economy! I empathise with him but let me repeat for his benefit:

“The eye only sees what the mind is prepared to comprehend.”

It is a well-established fact that no family can have a good life if they are dwelling in squalor and substandard housing conditions. On the 11th May, 2015, in recognition of this salient fact, the APNU/AFC Administration embarked on a journey towards the good life and this journey is inclusive of providing accessible and affordable housing in sanitary and safe communities with the necessities for wholesome and dignified living for citizens in need. That journey began. I would like to repeat what a Chinese philosopher, Laozi, said:

“A journey begins with a single step.”

We are not where we were when we started. We have moved forward and have made strides in the face of many challenges. But, as in a virtual journey, one needs a map, a guide, and a strategy, a strategy that would form the basis for how one approaches his or her journey and get to the intended destination. I am delighted to say, in this House and to the wider Guyanese public, that the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan, has presented us with such a map in Budget 2018, appropriately themed, *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, and in the absence of the Hon. Minister, I pause to applaud the work of this Minister and his dedicated team and it is worthy of a round of applause.

The Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) within the Ministry of Communities is tasked with executing Government’s housing programme and I wish to record my gratitude to

the team of committed professionals in this department who have worked tirelessly during the last 11 months to deliver to the Guyanese public a product and service they deserve.

Strengthening of the CHPA planning function: It is our opinion that even though planning is the most important function in any development, the state of planning in Guyana is not at the desired level that would ensure the quality of life in neighbourhoods and communities. A number of challenges have contributed to this scenario, such as the lack of awareness and understanding of planning; lack of capacity at the local level to meaningfully address planning issues; overlapping functions of the regulatory institutions; and weak collaboration among these institutions. The effect of these challenges are manifest in breaches of planning regulations and building by-laws, encumbrance and nuisances in neighbourhoods, and squatting and desecration of the environment, and that is just to name a few.

Therefore, planning is pivotal in pursuing orderly and sustainable growth and development. With this in mind, the CH&PA, recognising its critical role in this process, hosted a National Planning Forum in March, 2017, which resulted in improved collaboration among the CH&PA and the local democratic organs. This is key so that these entities will be in a better position to address the violations in their districts and they can do so through education and awareness on the planning issues to their constituencies, resolution of land use conflicts, appropriate appraisal and efficient processing of building permits. This resulted in CH&PA seeking the services of a consultant to complete an action plan.

Other areas in the planning process that attracted attention include preparation of local planning schemes for housing areas, preparation of spatial development plans and a national strategy.

Community designs were completed for nine areas for which sub-division surveys were executed and these were new communities in Providence, Peter's Hall and Perseverance, East Bank Demerara; Amelia's Ward, Linden; and Cummings Lodge, Greater Georgetown. A total of 765 planning applications were processed during January to November and I want to say that this is the highest.

Handing over of Schemes: We commenced the process of handing over 69 housing areas within the local democratic organs and much more to go. We have completed the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with three Municipalities. This exercise is necessary for

the effective management of these neighbourhoods by their respective local democratic organ. Applications received from January to the 15th November number 4,067, with the total interviews conducted being 4,192 for the same period. Effective from January, 2017, the minimum age requirement for an applicant was lowered from 21 years to 18 years. The agency interviewed 76 young people within this age group and this showed that our young people are ambitious and interested in acquiring their own homes.

Allocation: The agency revised its allocation target to 1,000. The agency allocated 1,161, which showed 16.1% above target, and beneficiaries were in all Regions with the exception of Regions 7 and 8, and there is a reason for that.

The CH&PA continues to work with the relevant agencies to complete the process of home ownership. To this end, transports and certificates of titles were processed for 1,962 applicants while the actual number distributed for the same period was 3,227, representing 61.35% above the 2000 target.

4.32 p.m.

These applicants were delighted to finally receive proof of ownership of their properties, many of them having had to endure lengthy waiting periods. I said “lengthy” because I want to put some weight on it; some of them since 1900s.

Community development and settlement regularisation: Unfortunately, I have to repeat this refrain to the general public. Squatting is the illegal occupation of State lands. It is unhealthy and cannot be tolerated. While some persons squat out of desperation - because some of these squatters have applications in the system since 1993 and 1995. **[Hon. Member: What are**

you doing about them?]

What you did not do with them.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Some people squatted out of desperation. Others did as a means of economic gain. The latter group will go and occupy a parcel of land, erect a structure and then rent it for as much as \$30,000 per month. Obviously, these landlords “must have other living options that they occupy”, which is another vexing dimension to this situation. That is the reason some of these squatters are in receipt of house lots.

We are cognisant of the fact that squatting was being allowed by the former Government for reasons better left unsaid, but, as a caring and responsible Government, we have to and will fix it. We will fix it. To combat this, we have decided on a menu of measures which were recommended - and I say recommended - by the community leaders themselves, resulting in a joint anti-squatting taskforce being formed with other major stakeholders, such as the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL), the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), the Guyana Police Force (GPF), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Mayor and City Council of Georgetown (M&CC), among others.

Discussions are ongoing regarding the development of approximately 1,148 lots at Plantation Cummings Lodge and Industry for the possible relocation of squatters from constituencies 5 and 6 reserves as well as from other zero tolerant areas on Georgetown and in its environs. This intervention requires an estimated investment of approximately \$2.65 million for infrastructure alone. Notwithstanding that, for the reporting period, 405 lots were formally allocated to squatters after payments were made, and that amounted to 2,025 beneficiaries. One hundred and ninety persons paid at least 50% of the cost of the lots and signed to commence processing of their titles, while 290 titles were already issued to persons in areas under regularisation. Some of these areas are Plantation Mount Sinai, known as Angoy's Avenue, where, to date, we interviewed 690 householders, issued 661 letters and completed verification exercises for 246 householders.

Middle Road, La Penitence: 104 householders were interviewed so far. Timehri North: As part of the regularisation process, a field verification exercise was conducted. Three hundred and eighty buildings were numbered; 316 persons were interviewed, to date. A block and occupational survey is in progress by the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission to facilitate the regularisation process and same will continue in 2018. Then we have Crane and Best at West Coast Demerara where we concluded the field exercise and found that 83 lots were occupied; 77 lots were verified for allocation and the occupiers issued with letters. Allottees have commenced making payments for house lots in preparation for the processing of their titles.

I do not know if I can adequately convey to this House the expression of joy on the faces of those persons when they realised that they were one step closer to becoming homeowners, but the

expression was priceless. In the case of the other areas, this exercise will be continued as we continue on this journey.

Further, the Central Housing and Planning Authority has partnered with Food For The Poor Guyana Incorporated to build houses for 72 underprivileged families, which will benefit about 360 persons of lots 17 and 18 Broad and Lombard Street, Barnwell and Mocha/Arcadia, among others. The CH&PA will provide infrastructural development, support the development of community facilities and provide 50% of the financing to construct the houses. The other 50% of the construction cost will come from Food For The Poor Incorporated.

The Central Housing and Planning Authority has partnered with a number of Ministries and agencies to sensitise these stakeholders on the intended relocation exercise. We are not just picking them up and throwing them somewhere; we will be doing that to discuss collaboration, to promote appreciation for diversity and to encourage networking for the building of a cohesive community.

The department held meetings with some of the intended beneficiaries. The Mocha/Arcadia Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) and the community, the M&CC, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Cohesion and the Ministry of Social Protection and the Ministry of Public Security. We also held engagements with civil society organisations like ChildLink Inc., Youth Challenge Guyana and Help and Shelter, all to give a good life to our citizens.

Under the Rural Hinterland Housing Programme, the Sustainable Housing for the Hinterland Programme, funded through a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), is aimed at completing beneficiary identification in participating communities, constructing 71 full houses and replacing 47 roofs in Regions 1 and 9. A total of 317 households, which would benefit about 1,902 persons, have been identified for full house subsidies and 86 households for roof replacements across 12 communities in Regions 1 and 9. Currently, in construction, 64 more houses in Regions 1 and 9 are expected to be completed by 29th December.

Housing for the Hinterland Programme, Region 7: Based on the lessons learnt from the IDB funded Rural Hinterland Housing Programme in Regions 1 and 9, an intervention was designed for rural hinterland housing for Region 7. This was never before. As such, in September, the

CH&PA Board approved the disbursement of 85 roof replacement subsidies in four Upper Mazaruni communities, in 2017 - Kako, Kamarang/Warawata, Kuribrong and Waramadong.

As part of the IDB technical assistance to develop a national housing strategy, the CH&PA has successfully hosted the initial stakeholders' session to support the initial diagnostic road map for the completion of this national housing strategy. This will take a period of 14 months.

Preparation and execution of designs and surveys were done in nine areas - Providence, Peters Hall, Amelia's Ward, Cummings Lodge, Perseverance, to name a few. A total of 765 planning applications were processed for 2017.

We commenced the process of handing over 69 housing areas and I do not have time to name all of them. The agency began upgrading of recreational areas within the CH&PA housing schemes, inclusive of the construction of fences, land filling and other upgrading works, construction of bleachers, construction of sanitary blocks in areas like Tabatinga, Lethem, Five Miles, Bartica, Perseverance and Amelia's Ward, Linden; design is in progress for those. Infrastructural development was terminated last year but we have retendered and all of those in Zeeburg, Lust En Rust, Little and Great Diamond, Farm Phase Two and Covent Garden are in progress. We have only positive things to report.

These works include, but are not limited to, the construction of roads, drainage, culverts, pipe network, bridges and land preparation. Our electrical installation is in progress right now in areas like Kilcoy/Chesney, Balthyock/Hope Experiment, Enmore and Paradise, Barnwell, Covent Garden, Diamond, Farm Phases One and Two, Eccles Industrial and Peters Hall, Lust En Rust, Onderneeming Phase Three, Zeelugt Phases Two and Three, Five Miles, Bartica.

Housing solutions: This is one that is going to *blow the minds*. Hold them down. In May of this year, CH&PA hosted a Housing Exhibition under the theme, *Housing Solutions 2017 and Beyond*. This exhibition captured, in one place, the Government's focus for its housing programme, which seeks to improve the housing delivery system with an emphasis on low to middle income earners, State employees and youths. It featured a cluster of 25 houses in a model village where CH&PA built six duplexes and two single elevated houses, encapsulating the President's stated vision for the sector. I remember when the Hon. Minister of Finance said that there was laughter on that side, but they did not understand that that was only for the model

village. We built six duplexes, two single houses and the other 17 were built by private exhibitors.

4.47 p.m.

Housing Solutions 2017 and Beyond has set the stage for what is to come. Under Housing Solutions, the following are the achievements, Hon. Mr. Dharamlall. Added to the eight houses that we have constructed in the model village at Perseverance, we are currently constructing 18 bungalows, 2-bedroom units and 40 flat concrete duplexes. As I speak, you can go on the ground and see them, 50 elevated, concrete, 2-bedroom units; 15 flat, 2-bedroom units; and 15 flat, 3-bedroom units. If you know mathematics, you can count them.

Further, we also have in progress the construction of 10 elevated, concrete, 2-bedroom units at Onderneeming, Essequibo; 10 elevated concrete, 2-bedroom units at Onderneeming, West Bank; 10 elevated and five flat, concrete, 2-bedroom units and five flat 3-bedroom units at Hope/Experiment, West Coast Berbice. We have left *no stone unturned* in the quest to make housing affordable in the 2018 Budget [An Hon. Member: Give us the price] Talk to me privately.

A tax exemption of the 14% Value-Added Tax (VAT) is proposed for housing units costing up to \$6.5 million that are built by or on behalf of the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) or any other approved entity. The House can refer to page 78 of the Budget Speech. Only a caring Government does things like this. This exemption will result in every household purchasing our duplexes, saving approximately \$910,000, which can now be used, and I calculated it, to purchase a double door fridge, a bedroom set, washer and dryer, a sofa, a four burner gas stove, one carpet with change left over. Oh my God, I love this Government!

The CH&PA also held engagements with a number of interested housing developers, like the GreenHeart Tree Energy (GHTE), a group of Canadian-Guyanese investors; Eco Energy (Guyana) Inc.; the National Milling Company of Guyana Inc. (NAMILCO); and China Dalian International Cooperation (Group) Holdings Ltd., among others, some of which will provide their own financing. Also, we have engaged a number of agencies, including the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and other entities such as the Guyana Co-operative Credit Union League, the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission (GLSC) and the General Contractors'

Association of Guyana (GCAG), to name a few. These have expressed an interest to design, build and finance housing projects, inclusive of both infrastructural development and the construction of housing units. Proposals are currently being evaluated. The Guyana Credit Union League is expected to assist in overcoming the challenge of cost of financing, particularly for the low and moderate income earners. In my meeting with these potential partners, we have stressed the importance of quality products, creating job opportunities for our people, particularly our youths and where possible, the employment of local indigenous materials, and the pursuit of a green agenda. Let me take the opportunity to announce to the National Commission on Disability (NCD) that we have heard your cries and we will be making some of our housing units' disability friendly. **[Ms. Wade:** Alright - caring Government.] A caring Government.

The new reformulation loan - \$30 million, and I know that this has some people's eyes jumping. The agency is currently awaiting final approval from the Inter-American Development Bank for a potential US\$30 million. When persons hear this, it is like when they are hearing about the oil money. The loan will be utilised for the upgrading of roads to asphaltic concrete surfaces; the construction of concrete drains, and walkways; earthen drains and shoulders; installation of solar street lighting; construction of core houses, which will take care of the low income earners; and the distribution of subsidies in areas such as Sophia, Diamond/Grove and Parfaite Harmonie.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have five minutes remaining.

Ms. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. I repeat these words *The journey to the good life continues*.

In conclusion, not only am I confident that my Government's goal to provide a good life to all Guyanese is achievable, I am assured that we are on the path to achieving it. We started this journey and we will continue this journey until the good life is delivered to every Guyanese, then we will start a new journey to the better life. It means that we are in there for a long time. When we are finished with the better life, we will have the best life. To borrow a few statements, I can boldly declare "We are not where we want to be, but we are surely are not where we used to be". The journey must continue. In the words of the American Author, Og Mandino:

"I will persist until I succeed."

[Mr. Dharamlall: I have never heard of that person.] Check it.

“Always will I take another step. If that is of no avail I will take another, and yet another. In truth, one step at a time is not too difficult... I know that small attempts, repeated, will complete any undertaking”.

The biblical builder Nehemiah said “I am doing a great work ... why should the work come just and still?” Mr. Speaker, we cannot stop now and we would not. The Minister of Finance has provided us with a workable plan that will ensure that the journey we have started must, and will, continue. Therefore, I support Budget 2018 and commend it to this House for passage.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Sitting suspended at 4.56 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The next speaker is the Hon. Nigel Dharamlall.

Mr. Dharamlall: Good evening everyone and good evening to those listening to and viewing our Budget Debate. I would like to commend my Colleagues so far, on this side of the House, on their adumbration of the reasons why the Budget 2018 is not fit and proper, for want of a better description, to the needs of the people of Guyana. Taking a cue from the Hon. Ms. Valerie Patterson-Yearwood, there is a biblical quote, Proverbs 29:18, which states, for those of you who do not know: “where there is no vision, the people perish”.

Going down this journey, which seems like we are headed to the horizon, I would like to share with you, and to those on the other side of the House, hoping that, in their listening and understanding to what we are saying, a sense of civility and a sense of humility will be instilled amongst the ranks of the Government so that changes to the Budget 2018 can be made for the betterment and to improve and enhance the lives of the people of this country. Since the installation into Office of the coalition regime, and I do not know, based on what I have been reading in the newspapers, whether the coalition is still the coalition, we have had four budgets presented to this nation, totalling almost \$1 trillion. Having invested so much money, what does the “coalition” has to say or show for a trillion-dollar investment?

I have, and I will just outline them, and I can provide examples of 12 different areas that this Government has to show for its trillion-dollar investment. One, I feel that there is still, and there is, rampant State corruption. I think there is sectoral mismanagement, particularly economic mismanagement. I feel that there is unrestrained crime, and may I add, perceived criminal conduct in high offices of our country, perpetuated by high officials on the people of Guyana. I feel that there is vindictiveness towards those who refuse to subject themselves to the dictatorial tendencies and the high command of the regime. I feel that there is unrepentant discrimination. I feel that there is massive unemployment and under employment in our country; that there is continuous downward growth; that we have an overtaxed population; that we have a Government that is disregardful of people, especially poor people, working people, hinterland people and the young people of this country; that there is gross incompetence in the actions of the Government in their management of the economy; and those are only *the tip of the iceberg*. You may want to join with me in adding that there is duplicity promulgated by the regime towards constitutional respect and implementation, towards constitutional...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will not permit the word “duplicity”. It is not a word that we should use here, so please withdraw that word and find another word in its space or proceed without it.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the word. I would like to, again, state that it is my belief that the regime is not forthcoming in its actions towards constitutional respect and implementation, towards constitutional reform and overall good governance, especially through transparency and accountability of its actions.

6.13 p.m.

As a matter of fact, I feel that the Government operates in deep secrecy. I would want to describe this as a very indecorous behaviour, especially where it concerns the multi billion dollars oil and in some cases, drugs and public infrastructure contracts.

The budget, therefore, I had hoped would have at least referred to these 12 issues, which I have outlined, at the very least. As I am on the issue of deep secrecy in the Government, I would like to share with you, Mr. Speaker, or bring to your attention, a payment that was made to the former Chairman of the Interim Management Committee (IMC) of the Linden Town Council, Mr. Orrin

Gordon, of \$4.4 million upon a request by the Hon. Minister of Communities, Mr. Bulkan, to the Cabinet on 13th November, 2017 and it was approved.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, you have had your strike. We will not call names of persons. You know that. Please do not let me correct you.

Mr. Dharamlall: I withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please listen to me. You know that. I am not to correct you on that. Please proceed.

Mr. Dharamlall: Unfortunately, the Government continues to pay scant regard for the issues germane to good governance and to enhancing the lives of poor and vulnerable people.

On the issue of their poor record of governance, I wish to substantiate this by the following information in the Budgets Speeches of 2017 and 2018, that the expected real growth in 2016 was projected at 4.4%. At the end of 2016, the actual figure was 2.6% growth, which is a 40% decline in our economy. In 2017, we do not have the exact end of year figure as yet, but the projection has moved from an earlier 3.8% at the start of the year to 2.9%, which is a 23.6% decline or further decline in our economy. For 2018, the real growth is set at 3.8%.

I would like to give you some further information. In the 2016 Report of the Auditor General, of the \$931 million withdrawn from the Contingencies Fund, \$696.3 million was withdrawn without due regards to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) 2003.

In 2016, there were massive shortfalls in the Capital Expenditure of and I will name some Ministries: Ministry of Finance – 12%; Ministry of Agriculture – 23%; Ministry of Business – 28%; Ministry of Public Health – 25% and no wonder we do not have facilities in our interior; Region 10 – 19%; Ministry of Public Infrastructure – 26%; Ministry of Education – 22%; Ministry of Communities – 35%; and Ministry of Public Security – 31%.

The projections for 2017, this is what we have: January to June, the Ministry of Presidency expended 32% of its Capital Expenditure. For the rest of the year they are expected to expend about 64%.

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure – January to June, expended 30% of their expenditure. Now it is claiming that it would expend the balance of the resources – the Capital Programme - in the last six months of the year. I could go through the entire list. The reason why I want to raise this is because I think, and these figures do not lie, that there is gross incompetence and genuine mismanagement of our country by the coalition regime. The people of this country, I feel are short changed by the regime, especially when the biggest sectors in our country are showing the worst performance.

In terms of the disregard for the poor and vulnerable, this regime continues to perform with great backwardness. We have had a National Youth Policy declared before us last year in this honourable House. The youth budget - \$1,104,000,000 out of \$267 billion, which is 0.37% of the National Budget of Guyana, goes towards the young people of this country in 2018.

When we disaggregate it further, only \$320 million would go towards the capital programme for the young people of our country. Of that \$320 million, \$250 million would be going towards projects that have already begun. These are basically roll-over payments. Seventy million dollars only is going towards the Youth Innovation Fund. That is the only new thing. The young people of this country, in the \$267 billion budget, are only receiving \$70 million in one activity called the Youth Innovation Project, which is 0.026% of the National budget. That is the respect that we have for the young people of our country. This is what the budget states about young people:

“Globally, young people are increasingly recognised as crucial partners for development and have the power to shape the future, not only for themselves but, also, for their organisations, communities and country. In Guyana, our young men and women are calling for meaningful, civic, economic, social and political participation.”

I do not think that any of the 60% and over of the young people of this country believe anything that this Government said about promoting and enhancing the development of our young people.

On the issue again, on poor and vulnerable people, we have more than 5,700 sugar workers who are without jobs and who will be without jobs by the end of this year. Christmas is bleak for thousands of people. Five thousand, seven hundred sugar workers, when multiplied by the households that they support, we are speaking about in excess of 30,000 people who are facing dire consequences this Christmas and moving forward – thousands upon thousands of people.

This budget states nothing about the upliftment of the families of sugar workers. I was just reading the news that the European Union (EU), with GuySuCo, is now funding a transition study, when, in fact, thousands of people's lives have already been destroyed. Now, the Government is working on a study to... [Mr. Greenidge: ...Inaudible...] Sorry?

I cannot see a turtle when I am speaking. This also reemphasises the backwardness that I was speaking of about how this Government operates. Why are you now doing a study on the transition when lives have already been dislocated and when people have lost their jobs? I visited the *back* of Wales recently and I hope that some of the Ministers could go there. There are children who cannot go to school because the parents cannot afford to feed them much less pay for them to take transportation to go to school. This Government does not go into the rural areas and speak to our farmers and our dislocated people. The Government does not budget for them either.

On the matter of housing – the Hon. Minister with responsibility for Housing spoke very glowingly of the performance of the department. I would like to bring to the attention of the Minister that the people of this country needs house lots and their own homes. They do not need split units. The people of this country do not support a tenement housing policy. The people of this country do not want to live in half of a home. They want to live in their own homes. The glowing tribute that the Minister paid to her Ministry does not suit the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes remaining.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further, I think that the regime's solutions to the low and middle income households – the young professionals, the PPP/C, while in Government, had an outstanding programme for young professionals. This is one of the considerations of this regime - shared ownership, phased equity. I want to know which young person in this House wants to share a house with someone else. There must be great concerns across this country regarding home ownership. I think that this regime is on a never-ending journey to create more destruction to the people of Guyana. I would like to invite the young people of Guyana, after the hypocrisy that this regime has ...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we are moving either higher and higher or lower and lower. We have “regime”, we have “hypocrisy” and we have “duplicity” all coming from one speaker. The speaker could do better and he will do better so please.

Mr. Dharamlall: I feel that and I would like to encourage the young people of this country, after having recognised what this Government is doing towards their interest, to come out in their numbers at the next elections whether it would be held in 2020 or before 2020 and vote for the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) and vote for a future to own their own homes. Thank you very much [*Applause*]

Mr. Carrington: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to debate Budget 2018. The APNU/AFC Government is working hard to ensure that *The journey to a good life continues* by presenting our 4th budget in 30 months.

A good life could only be achieved when you plant the seed of progress. Life itself begins with a seed – germinated and grown within time bearing more fruits than the one that was sown. A good life could only come with positive thinking, which would remove the mind-set of negative thinking of doom.

Guyana is a beautiful rich country with all that are needed to provide for our sustenance. I do not think that the Opposition truly realises this. If they did they would not try to paint a picture of hopelessness about the 2018 Budget. I support this budget wholeheartedly.

I must say thanks to the Minister of Finance for his generosity for increasing the Budget to \$93,287,771. It would help on the road to prosperity, especially in the area of education, health care, public security, infrastructure development, agriculture, job creation and so many other areas.

6.28 p.m.

I will speak on the budget for local governance but before I get going, I would like to explain my understanding of the system, and what took us to this place that brought us to this predicament, which we are now trying to fix.

Earlier, as I heard, the Hon. Mr. Irfaan Ali speaking he continued over and over.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

He spoke about sliding from left, right and centre – that our nation’s economy is sliding from left, right and centre. Mr. Irfaan Ali and the PPP Government had slide from the Government to the Opposition and are hoping to slide back to Government. The Hon. Irfaan Ali loves to slide, and it was in his debate speech that he kept on condemning this budget. This budget is not just the Hon. Mr. Jordon’s budget; it is the people’s budget. This budget was prepared by the people of Guyana. Let me explain. In all the offices, all the workers in those offices were part and parcel of the decision-making of this budget, including the PPP, in the regions. In all of the regions, the PPP had to vote for the budget for the regions before it came here. So, when the PPP is condemning this budget, they are condemning their own budget.

Article 13 of the *Constitution* of Guyana states:

“The principal objective of the political system of the State is to establish an inclusionary democracy by providing increasing opportunities for the participation of citizens, and their organisations in the management and decision-making processes of the State, with particular emphasis on those areas of decision-making that directly affect their well-being.”

This recommended system paves the way for Local Government Elections, to elect the people’s representatives of Local Government Authorities. These authorities cannot function without finance. The Hon. Minister Jordon is providing \$1 billion to assist the Local Government Authorities. I must say thanks to him. It is the duty of the people in the local authority areas to elect their council, and to make their contribution in rates to the council for the development of their areas. None of that revenue that the Opposition is crying about will go to Central Government; all will be spent on the development of the community.

Barking and braying in a negative way for systems which can bring... [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Carrington: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am sure that you can...

Mr. Carrington: I withdraw it, Sir.

...which can bring about good, can only tamper with the physiological mind-set of the people. New valuation for properties will bring new value to the communities; new roads, clean drains, garbage collection, social welfare, sport facilities for children, health care and cultural activities. The Local Government Authorities are failing because they are not financially independent, due to the devaluation of the Guyana dollar by almost 4500%. Since 1980, wages increased from around \$500 per month to \$60,000 per month, now, and in many cases more. The cost for services has risen by 1000%, yet the rate remained as though we are still living in the 1980s.

The previous Government selfishly refused to make any adjustments for the Local Government Authorities to benefit financially just to protect the vote to win an election. This caused great harm to those authorities. Some of them cannot even pay a just remuneration to their elected councillors, or have the type of finance to perform the duty to develop their area, in accordance with Article 74 of the *Constitution* of Guyana, which states:

“(1) It shall be the primary duty of local democratic organs to ensure in accordance with law the efficient management and development of their areas and to provide leadership by example.”

Where is the leadership of the PPP in the communities that it won? We are getting complains from their supporters.

“(2) Local democratic organs shall organise popular co-operation in respect of the political, economic, cultural and social life of their areas and shall co-operate with social organisation of the working people.”

Did they cooperate with the working class? No. It was the APNU/AFC Government that gave an increase in wages of over 50% in 30 months, and implemented better working conditions and discipline.

“(3) It shall be the duty of local democratic organs to maintain and protect public property, improve working and living conditions, promote the social and cultural life of the people, raise the level of civic consciousness, preserve law and order, consolidate the rule of law and safeguard the rights of citizens.”

In accordance to my understanding, it is the duty of these organs to assist with creating jobs in this country. Yet, we are hearing from the PPP's side – the Opposition's side – that it is Central Government. In the *Constitution*, it is clearly stated that it is the duty of Local Government Authority to develop their areas, and this is what is failing in our country. The PPP is failing their own people who have elected them. If one peruses the *Constitution of Guyana* he or she will see that it is only the local democratic organ that was given such broad duties. I have not seen such duties set out for Central Government in the *Constitution*.

The Local Government Authorities cannot even perform 25% of the duties that are stated in the *Constitution* because, again, of financial stagnation. The APNU/AFC Government will fix that financial problem, so that the people of all areas can benefit. We have already held Local Government Elections, amended Chapter 28:02 – the Local Government Act, established the Local Government Commission, and are now moving towards financial independence for those organs.

The Opposition is now giving me the perception, in accordance with their utterances, that they are preparing a web of propaganda deception to fool their supporters that Central Government will be... [Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Carrington, you would want to express yourself differently. You must withdraw that comment which is unnecessary; forgive me for saying that. We have to try to control our emotions here.

Mr. Carrington: I withdraw that comment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Carrington: It is the PPP's duty to develop the region and lower tier Local Government Authorities areas which they have won. They are putting all the blame on APNU/AFC Government when they have done nothing substantial to develop the value-added industry to create economic prosperity, so that the people can earn to pay the rates for development. The total budget for the 10 regions is \$37,933,080,000. The Ministry of Communities,

\$6,515,654,000, this will give us a total of \$44,448,734,000. The PPP had never budgeted for such an amount to strengthen the regions and local governance.

Oil and gas is coming on stream which will be bringing in much needed revenue to help us develop the green gold “agriculture”, so that we can help to feed the world. The green gold “agriculture” can only run out if we stop planting. But that is not possible because we have to eat. Agriculture processing and manufacturing of wood products from waste wood, jams and jellies, fruit juices, leather craft, ceramics and working to create cottage industry by establishing the Cottage Industry Act, will create more jobs than the oil and gas industry. So, do not let us lose focus as the PPP did. They are stressed out over the oil revenues, which will be well spent.

I must say thanks to the Hon. Minister David Patterson and his Ministry for the great job that they are doing. I know the biggest challenge the Ministry has is the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL), but many parts of Yarrowkabra will have lights for Christmas. They are trying. We already have a new primary school, 2500 meters of main road and water mains are already in place for persons to come and construct their houses. Thanks to Minister Bulkan and the Minister of Education for these developments. The developments in Yarrowkabra have given us great hope and energy so much so that, on last Saturday, at a meeting in Yarowkabra, we established the Soesdyke Linden Highway Green Development Association to develop agriculture and processing on the highway. It will be spearheaded by Dr. Simpson Da Silva, an expert in processing, and other citizens from the highway. The white sand on the highway will become green with vegetables, fruits, health foods, and plants to produce medicine.

The Small Business Council will be setting up a revolving fund of \$100 million. This will bring great help to small businesses in communities. The council will also be focussing on value-added industry training, such as processing, manufacturing and other areas of development, helping to create jobs. We already have funds for that purpose. The investment of \$350 million in two industrial estates at Lethem and Belvedere will create great opportunities for small businesses.

My advice to the Opposition is to work with Central Government for the development of Guyana. You are part of the system of governance for Guyana, and have a duty to perform, whether as Opposition or Government, in Local Government Authority areas. Your good

behaviour may put you back in Government in 2025. Do not waste your energy for the 2020; we will be in Government beyond that time.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have five minutes more.

6.43 p.m.

Mr. Carrington: I must say that this country is our country and for the fourth budget, all that I hear from the Opposition is doom. All that I hear from the Opposition are things to put people in a mindset to lose faith in this country. We are not prepared to take our country down that line. This country will prosper. This country will be better for the people of Guyana. They could cry and cry, but betterment will come to this nation.

I am happy to support this budget. I know full well that this budget will take us out of the darkness, which they are trying to spread, and make us a better nation.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Ms. Veerasammy: I listened intently to the Minister of Finance as he presented the budget for the year 2018. I listened in vain, hoping that the issues of interest to the working class and the underprivileged people of this country would have been addressed. Unfortunately, they were not.

Over the last years, the Government has been trying to create a perception in the minds of Guyanese that during the last tenure of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government that it did nothing for the Guyanese people. Budget 2018 clarified for Guyanese, the propaganda of the "good life", which turned out to be a "good lie", and I quote from my friend across there, and colleague. This propaganda misled our people into believing that Utopia existed. Guyanese today are griped by bitter regrets, and come 2020, they will turn back the clock.

The Government has cleverly toiled with workers' wages and salaries. They give with one hand and craftily took it away with the other. Workers have recognised this through their daily experiences at the market place. I was tutored to understand the philosophy of Christmas and I honestly believe that the season of Christmas is a season of hope, a season of giving and a season of new beginnings. The policies of the Government have caused our people to feel a sense of

hopelessness this Christmas season. Ask the workers of this country and they will tell you, that they are earning more, but buying less due to the taxes that they have to pay.

I commend the Hon. Minister. His Government has indeed increased the wages of lower income staff in the public service and the Ministers by Government by 50%. However, we must be mindful of this disparity in the levels of income. What the Hon. Minister forgot to do was to explain to this nation in his budget presentation how his Government, under his guidance, has ripped away the 50% increase from the workers through the almost 200 in taxes imposed in the last two and a half years.

Further, not only was value added Tax (VAT) imposed on all items, including schoolbooks, medications, baby items, it took away the \$10,000 “We Care” grant from parents. The VAT on fees on private education was removed, indeed so, but this happened because of political and public pressure. The Hon. Minister went on to make it sound as if he did those parents a favour. No Sir, it is not at all. Public opinion was against this negative tax burden which was imposed in the first place by the coalition Government.

This very coalition Government promised Guyanese in three consecutive budgets, a “good life”. As it turned out, it was a ‘good lie.’ Where is the “good life” and a “good life” for whom?

Let me explain this ‘good lie.’ Budget 2015 was referred to as *A Fresh Start to the Good Life in the Green Economy*. In that budget speech the Minister emphasised on transparency, accountability, partnership and anti-corruption. Well, I am waiting on Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) to investigate the D’Urban Park fiasco, the drug bond deal, the single sourcing of drugs of over \$600 million in violation of the tender board procedures and the parking meter fiasco, just to name a few. Where was the transparency and accountability in any of the above deals and so many more that followed?

Budget 2016 was presented under the theme, *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. The Hon. Minister said in his Budget 2016 presentation:

“...the policies, programmes, reforms and measures envisaged in this budget are designed to stimulate the economy to achieve higher growth rates... with the benefits being more equitably distributed, which will enable us to bring the "good life" closer to reality.”

The Minister further stated:

“...the Agenda for 2016 provides the building blocks for a resilient economy,... also establishes a pathway for our people to face the future with renewed hope and confidence...”

As we have witnessed, the reality is, by the end of 2016 revealed that the economy contracted several businesses close their doors and others reduced their staff. The lack of confidence in the economy resulted in many losing their jobs, adding to the thousands who were fired in 2015. At the end of 2016, only gold was showing a profit, and in order for the Government to balance its budget, almost 200 taxes were imposed on this Guyanese nation. The Government’s agenda in Budget 2017, taxed our people into prosperity and the “good life” beckoned for the favoured few are lying to the Government while our people were told a ‘good lie’.

Budget 2017 was presented with the theme, *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to all Guyanese*”. The agenda of this budget started off with the closure of Wales Sugar Estate, which was followed by Enmore and Rose Hall Estates. Does it this Government - I am sorry that the Minister is not here - that thousands of workers and their families are on the breadline by something called the stroke of a pen. Are sugar workers being punished because they are considered supporters of the PPP/C Government, then? Are they being punished because they are considered non-supporters of the coalition? These are some of the questions that are being asked out there. I could not believe my ears when the Hon. Minister said, in his Budget 2018 presentation on 27th November, 2017, that this Government never promised the nation, us Guyanese, a “good life”. Instead, he claimed that his Government promised, and it states, “...a long journey on a road with many a winding turns.” This is the most dishonest statement in the Minister’s budget presentation.

This nation recognises that the “good life” was a false promise. The Hon. Minister then realising this back-pedalled. This is what he said in the budget presentation, “We did not promise that the good life would be achieved in our first term...”

How pathetic? In the coalition’s manifesto, page 9, refers to the “Foundations for Development.” I wish to remind this honourable House about what was promised under “Equal Opportunity.” It states:

“APNU+AFC will reform and empower the Ethnic Relations Commission to provide Ethnic Impact Statements of Cabinet Decisions and Government departments, where necessary, and such findings will be acted upon in the best interest of all Guyana.”

Were the sugar workers given an opportunity to have a say in the closures of the estates? Was an alternative given to those workers to earn a living so that they could provide for their families? If so, what were those alternatives? Why they were not included in the budget presentation?

A song of democracy is sung at every juncture by the coalition, but, where and when is democracy practised? Democracy speaks to inclusivity, to transparency and to accountability. These are definitely not the tenets that the coalition Government is following. Actually, what is being witnessed in Guyana is authoritarian rule and unilateral decisions. Almost half of this population do not have a say in what is transpiring and I would like to answer Hon. Member Mr. Carrington. If the PPP/C Government that is representing half of the voting population in this country had anything to do with this budget, we would not have been sitting here today debating it. It would have received free passage.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I believed that we have passed this division. All Members in this House represent all citizens. I believe we have passed this division the first year. I would suggest that we do not go back there. Please proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Sir, excuse me.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I give you the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: Sir, could you please ensure that the statement is made on both sides of the House? It is because, Sir, there have been accusations on...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Ms. Teixeira, a Point of Order. You must rise, make the Point of Order and then you resume your seat. That is how we must do it.

Ms. Veerasammy: On one hand, the Government speaks of inclusivity and on the other hand its negotiations with unions ended in deadlock. Then, the Government unilaterally decided on the amount of increases it will pay to the workers and in the process emasculated the unions into toothless puddles. I could name a few - the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), the Guyana

Teachers Union (GTU), Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU). In a democracy, workers' rights are upheld and unions are allowed to thrive and develop. Workers that were and are pushed on the breadline have families, a mother, a wife, a daughter or a worker, who herself is an employee.

In 1980, the Government of Guyana signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In 1995, Guyana participated in the World Conference on Women, in Beijing, China. Out of which the Beijing Platform for Action was developed to encourage Governments to work towards improving the status of women in their individual countries. Further, there was the National Commission on Women, which paved the way for the Women and Gender Equality Commission, the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute and the Documentation Centre for Gender and Development were established. To support these initiatives were the national policy on women and a national plan of action and several pieces of modern legislation which were passed to this august House to improve the status of women and increase their political participation and governance.

At this time, I would like to take a couple of seconds to say today, this afternoon, I was made to understand that the Women and Gender Equality Commission signed an memorandum of understanding with the University of Guyana to establish the Institute for Gender Studies. This is a magnificent initiative that is going to be improving the status of women in our country. I would like to personally congratulate the Women and Gender Equality Commission for that initiative.

After 1995, women rights were exhilarated to afford them the opportunities to participate and influence decisions that affected their lives at all levels of society, so much so, that from 2001 inwards, parties contesting elections in Guyana must have no less than one-third of its candidates as women. The Guyana Women Leadership Institute, established in 1997, was the first of its kind in the Caribbean, developed and implemented training programmes to build the capacity of women leadership and governance.

6.58 p.m.

This resulted in widespread sprouting of and an overwhelming involvement of women in non-governmental organisations, community development councils and community politics.

After signing on to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, the PPP/Civic Government worked harder to improve the status of women in Guyana. For example, child mortality was reduced dramatically, maternal malnutrition decreased rapidly, because of mothers' increased access to health care across the country, education increased the number of women in the workforce and their financial independence improved their nutritional intake, which further decreased infant mortality. Women who are educated and financially independent received greater respect in their homes and suffered less incidences of domestic violence and we know what domestic violence in Guyana has been resulting in the last couple of years. Further, being educated and financially independent, women have greater privilege to enter the political arena and represent others.

The women's institute that was once given considerable support from donor agencies and the PPP/Civic Government is now languishing, doing almost nothing for women's development and empowerment, much less capacity building training programmes to increase women's political participation in governance. The 2018 Local Government Election is looming just ahead. We need to prepare our women to take up their rightful places in society to influence decisions that affects their lives, that of their family and community.

Women's empowerment has its own disadvantages. Due to cultural practices in our society, strong women are not easily accepted or tolerated. Women stop at nothing to take care and protect their families but when she cannot provide for her family's needs she becomes frustrated. I do not want to contemplate at this time on the economic and psycho social problems that has already gripped some families whose breadwinners have recently even been thrown out of their jobs.

How come after the litany of promises, the Hon. Minister failed to speak about what women can expect from Budget 2018? Maybe, the Minister has deferred the women question to another time.

I would like to ask all female Members of Parliament, the Women and Gender Equality Commission, women's organisations and women generally to take note of how women were treated in the Budget 2018. Although, the resources, technology and knowledge exist to decrease

poverty through improving gender equality, the Government seems to lack the political will to do so.

Putting up the monument of the Sustainable Development Goals on Camp Street is considered a political show. Can the Minister of Finance explain to the more than 50% of the people of this country, our women, us, why the budget had no plans achieve the gender equality of fifty-fifty by 2030? Sir, the SDGs are expected to offer hope to our people, especially our women, to move from reducing, to ending extreme poverty in all forms, by ensuring that no one is denied basic economic opportunities and human rights. Can the Hon. Minister explain where is the blueprint for economic opportunities to end extreme poverty in Guyana, especially among women, one of the most vulnerable groupings?

The economic plight of our elderly should be a source of concern for all of us. This section of our population is the most vulnerable. I am not speaking about those the Government considered fit and proper. I am speaking about those who toiled to develop this country by the sweat of their brows and because of their hard work we are reaping the benefits of that. The first blow was dealt in 2015 by the Government's removal of the electricity and water subsidy from the elderly. To add insult to injury, the Government imposed VAT on water and electricity, pushing these two basic necessities out of the reach of the poor and elderly. I wonder if there was any assessment done to verify whether the elderly has other means of income, before the subsidy was removed and VAT imposed on water and electricity. Are you aware that pensioners are being robbed of their pensions by their children and relatives, which cause many to live in destitution? Further, they are becoming easy targets for the criminal elements, who do not hesitate to kill them for that meagre pension.

In closing, I would like to implore the Government, I will like to implore the Minister of Finance, to give consideration to and find the fiscal space for the following: to postpone the closure of the sugar estates and look for an alternative approach, families have to eat, they have to pay utility bills, they have to provide their children with shelter, health care, education, school books, transportation, and all that goes with it, not forgetting house rent and VAT on everything; to reinstate the ten thousand dollars "We Care" programme to help parents with their children's education; to reinstate the electricity and water subsidy to our elderly and increase the old age pension so that they can live a life of comfort so they can die with dignity, for they have

worked to build this land of ours, one that we are all benefiting from; help our elderly by passing the necessary legislation to protect them from their selfish children and relatives, and at the same time, for them to enjoy the security that they should be provided by the Government of Guyana, so that they can also live without fear. After all the “good life” that should have been about making the people of this country happy, turnout out to be a ‘good lie’ and has ended up pushing our people further into poverty.

Budget 2018 failed to provide a single initiative or measure to rescue the economy and ease the burdens on the people of our beautiful country, especially our women.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Public Health [Dr. Cummings]: I rise to register my unreserved support for Budget 2018 which was recently presented to this august body by my erudite colleague, the Hon. Minister of Finance Mr. Winston DaCosta. Jordan. Budget 2018 is consistent with government’s plan to further advance the well-being of all the people of Guyana, through transformative programmes aimed at establishing and maintaining sustainable development. This budget directly embodies three tenets namely, compassion, caring and concrete results. These are not buzzwords. They are guiding priorities and core values. They help us both to close the gaps between the hinterland and the coastland on health disparities attributable to political, social and economic factors, utilising a social determinants approach, thus creating public health systems that translate efficacy into effectiveness in the communities, as well as help the Ministry of Public Health to order or step in ways that compel this Ministry to foster environs so that each person could access and reach their full health potential between the cradle and the coffin.

This Government continues to focus on valuing every Guyanese equally. As a Government, we remain steadfast in addressing the challenges of creating jobs, reducing poverty, further enhancing the education and health sectors, building our infrastructure and expanding our economy. Undoubtedly, Budget 2018 is the Guyanese people’s budget. It is a statement of hope and change. The year 2018 is the year of changing the climate in Guyana for public health.

By way of felt compassion, the Ministry of Public Health creating universal access to public health care that is of the finest quality for all persons living in Guyana. It remains a top national

priority, for this APNU/AFC Government. This priority is in line with Sustainable Development Goal number 3 which speaks to good health and well-being. This Government continues to show its firm commitment to the health and well-being of the people of Guyana, by allocating a whopping \$33.3 billion, 12.5% of Budget 2018 and 4.2% of the gross domestic product (GDP) to the public health sector. This 7% increase in the public health sector's budget is significant. It comes at a time when the Ministry of Public Health is resolutely set on an un-deviating course to ensure that the people of Guyana benefit from a patient-centred public health system that is organised around what patients need.

The health sector's transformation to value-based public health care began in 2015, and the journey is continuing. Budget 2018 budgetary allocation of \$33.3 billion will surely result in striking improvements in outcomes and efficiency, as well as further enhancement of patient experiences at all our public health facilities as the Government ensures value for money of the taxpayers' dollars. The strategic agenda for the Ministry of Public Health for achieving high value public health care is documented in Health Vision 2020. With this year's budgetary allocation, the public health sector will be in a better position to bridge the gap where the potential for delivering efficient and effective public health care meets the opportunity to realise tangible health gains within our society.

Transforming the public health care system through the use of modern technology: Non-communicable diseases (NDCs) consume 70% of the health budget. The Ministry of Public Health continues to address behaviours and living conditions linked to the development of risk factors. Moreover, this sector recognises that technology drives health care more than any other force, and in the future, it will continue to develop in dramatic ways. While some may glimpse and debate, the details of future trends in health care, we will be focusing on the technological drivers of public health care, so that we can align our strategies with them and actively work to ensure the best outcomes for our society as a whole.

Patients are the reason for health care. While technology plays an intrinsic role in the delivery of public health care in our modern world, patients remain the centre of health care. In that regard another mammography machine will be purchased in 2018 so that more of our women can be screened for breast cancer. Consequently, they can commence treatment as soon as possible after the results are arrived at. Women who cannot afford the prohibitive costs for cancer

screening at private institutions are already benefiting from the one mammography machine available at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) and soon there will be another to enhance capacity at GPHC.

7.13 p.m.

Considering the available data, mammography screening certainly represents one of the best investigated fields of medicine. Some schools of thought posit that mammography screening is the only method presently considered appropriate for a mass screening of asymptomatic women. Cancer registry data clearly show that early detection of breast cancer is associated with better survival. Therefore, in light of the foregoing, the sagacious decision to procure another mammography machine surely demonstrates the vision and judiciousness of our Government.

Viral load testing: Routine viral load testing helps to catch people living with human immunodeficiency virus/ acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) who are failing on treatment before they generate resistance to antiretrovirals (ARTs), and helps keep them less infectious. Viral load, which is the gold standard in antiretroviral therapy and ARTs monitoring, measures HIV levels in the blood and provides an indicator of the success of the drugs. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends viral load monitoring six months after a person starts using ARTs, at 12 months, and every 12 months thereafter. Viral load testing, although routine in wealthy countries, is scarce and expensive in developing countries such as Guyana. I am elated to inform this Assembly that we have a procured our own viral load machine and soon persons living with HIV/AIDS in Guyana would be benefiting from the services to be derived from this machine. As we move into 2018, we would be commencing a treat all programme or testing treat in line with the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) fast-track strategy of ending AIDS by 2030.

Our National Reference Laboratory has since built capacity to test for Zika and other re-emerging tropical diseases and no longer has to send these tests overseas at huge costs. Such are the investments being made by the Government to strengthen our public health system in Guyana.

Geographic Health Information Systems (GHIS) integrate patient databases with census data and other information on where patients live, where they receive their care, the availability of

community resources and other characteristics of their communities. GHIS could be useful in supporting the Ministry of Public Health's efforts to improve the experience of patient care, to improve the health of regional populations and reduce per capita costs of health care. A geographic health information system could also provide a comprehensive information base for community health assessment and intervention for care that is responsible and accountable and includes the entire population of a geographic area.

A GHIS pilot project has already commenced in 2017 here in Guyana. This project would be scaled up as we move into 2018. Working inter-sectorally and with support from our international technical partners, the Ministry of Public Health, we would be moving to introduce telemedicine programmes within the regions. This initiative indicates that this Government is embracing modernity in the public health care system. The introduction and the use of the various components of GHIS would realise significant improvement in the spread of health care services that we provide for all Guyanese.

Improving the quality and the delivery of regional health services across Guyana: Not only has this budget demonstrated felt compassion, but it has resonated with the Ministry of Public Health's culture of caring. This Ministry continues to work tirelessly to reduce the inequities of access to quality health care across Guyana. This year, we began a programme of placing specialist doctors in some of our regions. As we move into 2018, we intend to place additional specialist doctors in all our regions, so that those communities can have equitable access to the best possible care. These specialists would be from the fields of obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, and general surgery. The placement of specialist doctors in the regions would accrue numerous benefits both to the community they would serve in particular and the public health sector in general. It is expected that the number of medevac's will be considerably reduced, resulting in tangible financial savings. Also, it is expected that with the placement of these specialist doctors in the regions, our main referral hospital, the GPHC would see a reduced number of patients coming from the regions.

Recently we launched the Integrated Health Services Delivery Network (IHSDN) in Regions 1, 4, 9, and 10. This activity is in keeping with Health Vision 2020. As we move into 2018, IHSDN model would be scaled up significantly and would result in a renewal of primary care, which would ultimately lead to further strengthening of the public health care system. This mix of inter-

sectoral policies and health centre intervention is patient-centred and focuses on the patient holistically, involving the family and community in the patient's care.

In 2017, two new health centres were constructed at Plegt Anker and Number 76 Village, Corentyne in Region 6 at a cost of \$14.3 million and \$15, 048,229 respectively. Construction of the Eccles Health Centre would be commences soon. I was advised that works would be commenced on 15th December, 2017. The delay was due to problems with location and failure of the tender board, but we have it under control, and so we would have that work started.

For 2018, and with the help from the Indian Government, a brand new hospital will be constructed to serve the residents of Region 2.

We now have a new certified batch of medex graduating from the University of Guyana. These graduates are currently being placed throughout the regions to further boost the capacity of the various health facilities where they are assigned. The placement of these qualified personnel would contribute to a major upgrade of the human resource capital of the regional health care system.

Enhancing maternal and child health across Guyana: We recognise that mothers and children play invaluable roles in our families, communities, society and economy. Therefore the Ministry of Public Health continues to work assiduously through its Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Department to improve maternal and child survival. Work is currently being done through a US\$8 million project to enhance the quality of health care and health services available for pregnant women and babies in Guyana. Further, work is ongoing to enhance the capacity of health care workers in managing high risk pregnancies so as to enhance the survival rate of mother and child. In addition, obstetric and neonatal emergencies are being addressed so as to reduce infant and maternal mortality and morbidity.

The human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine was launched this year and is currently being rolled out across Guyana. As we move into 2018, it is expected that we would have maximised coverage. As we are on coverage, I really thought that instead the Hon. Member would have requested a clear understanding of the way coverage is reported or calculated. We need to correct a misrepresentation of the information that he share to this honourable House. The Bureau of Statistics would have sent further information provided for the third quarter, so it is 75% as a

projection for the year, but it does not cover the entire year. What was reflected is actually real time data and following the trend, we would be above 90% and 95% of all of our antigens. You would have known, or if you are not sure, ask, that most of our births, at least 30% to 35%, occur in the last quarter which is why it refers to as crop, season, so just bear that in mind. I needed to correct that.

Surveillance training for supervisors and regional staff country wide, including hospital staff at the Accident and Emergency Departments, Paediatric Departments and Outpatient Departments would be conducted in 2018. We continue to liaise with the Port Health Department, our Communicable Disease Department, Guyana Defence Force, Guyana Police Force and the Immigration Department to ensure that adequate systems are in place for screening to be done at all ports of entry.

A major undertaking that we would like to embark on in 2018 as it relates to MCH is the development and implementation of electronic vaccination records. The electronic management of patient data would be extremely beneficial in ensuring that every child is fully catered for in the vaccination process.

Expanding the mental health programme in Guyana: Ever since His Excellency President David Arthur Granger convened an emergency meeting early in 2016 to discuss the sudden spike in suicides. The Ministry of Public Health along with a number of concerned stakeholders formed a national task force to address suicide. Four strategic areas had been identified as stakeholders set out to comprehensively address the issue of suicide in Guyana. Making use of our suicide prevention strategy and our mental health action plan, four strategy areas were identified, namely, risk factors reduction, health promotion and prevention, reduction of access to the means of suicide, health systems response to suicide behaviour and surveillance and research.

The Ministry of Public Health has since established a Mental Health Unit, which has commenced working to deliver, with respect and integrity, collaborative and multidisciplinary services across Guyana to clients. The unit has also embarked on a number of training programmes for specific categories of staff within the public health sector, so that they can better address issues of mental illness. Training of four psychologists along with six social workers was conducted in psychology and social work services. Participants of this training exercise are currently located at

the following health facilities, namely, Kitty Health Centre, East La Penitence Health Centre, West Demerara Regional Hospital, Diamond Hospital and Grove Health Centre.

In a continuous process, training of more than 40 doctors in the Mental Health GAP Action Programme (mhGAP) Intervention Guide has already been completed, where these doctors were trained specifically to manage suicide and self-harm. Doctors trained, so far in the mhGAP, are currently located at various health facilities in Regions 3, 4, and 6.

7.28 p.m.

The initiation of the self-harm surveillance system was piloted in July, this year, at the Suddie, West Demerara and New Amsterdam Hospitals. In this system, all cases of self-harm will be managed according to protocols which include ensuring that each case is reported within one week of presentation and that each case is reviewed by a psychiatrist at least once.

This system is being managed at each location by a psychologist, a social worker, and a doctor trained in the Mental Health Gap Action Programme Intervention Guide (mhGAP-IG). With this new budgetary allocation, in 2018, the Ministry of Public Health will intensify activities in this vital area that threatens health and family life in a major way. To further support the key efforts of the Ministry of Public Health's drive to address mental health issues, the Mental Health Institute, located in Quamina Street, will be completed and opened. So far, 2018 Budget reflects felt compassion and a culture of caring. But there is more. It also zooms in on concrete results.

Implementation of Elderly Health Programme: As a testimony that this Government takes its responsibility seriously, and, as a showcase that we are promise keepers, the Ministry of Public Health is delivering concrete results. We will be launching a nation-wide programme to earnestly address the delivery of public healthcare to the elderly. We are cognisant that the provision of primary healthcare for the elderly improves their self-care ability, encourages healthy living, and strengthens family support, which, consequently, minimises illness and disability. As we strive to bolster our elderly health services, a more efficient system in identifying health risks and detecting diseases earlier will result in an improved quality of life for our elderly. Timely intervention and prevention of complications in a multi-disciplinary approach under best quality primary care settings will be the result of establishing best practices in elderly healthcare services.

Improving and expanding infrastructure: More results – concrete results - will continue to open the floodgates of quality of life improvement for our residents and citizens in the Republic of Guyana. The Ministry of Public Health will continue to develop and expand its building infrastructure to better accommodate staff as well as to assist in the delivery of healthcare services to the communities in which they are located.

Currently, after almost nine years, preliminary work has commenced at our Brickdam campus to rebuild a modern, state-of-the-art building which will be our new headquarters. In 2018, construction work will commence. Mr. Speaker, let me restate this for emphasis: the new head office building of the Ministry of Public Health will begin construction in 2018.

Rehabilitative work will be conducted on a number of health facilities across the country not only to enhance their aesthetics, but also to ensure that they are structurally sound and fit for purpose. These works to be conducted will be rigorously monitored and evaluated to ensure that the contractors give us value for money.

In addition, the Government of Guyana and the Ministry of Public Health will be working collaboratively with the Georgetown Municipality to ensure that quality healthcare is delivered to the health centres that fall under the aegis of the Georgetown Municipality.

Procurement of medicines and medical supplies: The Ministry of Public Health has a newly established Procurement Department headed by a manager and staffed with personnel who are trained, qualified and experienced in procurement. The Materials Management Unit (MMU) is now headed by a director who came highly recommended by the international organisation for which he worked.

We have toiled and wrestled with the beast called procurement. Under the sagacious watch of my Colleague and Comrade, the Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, procurement at the Ministry of Public Health has been brought under control. These industry best practices are not designed to slow things down as they are implemented to practice good governance and leadership mixed with accountability, fairness, balance and transparent deliverables through and through. Much work still has to be done. More changes still have to be made. But this perennial cry of drug shortage will no longer reverberate across this country. Strategic efforts are being made to effectively

establish a last mile distribution system that will see commodities being delivered in a timely manner.

The people of Guyana will not be allowed to suffer because of procurement issues at the Ministry of Public Health. May I sound the bell? Any deliberate attempt to stymie the procurement process at the Ministry of Public Health will be met with the harshest penalties, which will be applied to those concerned condignly and with extreme prejudice.

As I conclude, with so much felt compassion, demonstrated caring and concrete results, the Ministry of Public Health has created a context for smiles and a system that works tirelessly to ensure the people of Guyana have equal access to the best quality public healthcare available.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have five minutes remaining.

Dr. Cummings: Though we do not have a perfect system, we continue to make gains, despite the challenges we face. However, with our budgetary allocation and the help of our international technical and donor partners, we are devoted to reforming and transforming the public health sector in Guyana into a world-class entity that utilises evidence-based medical best practices to serve the people of Guyana.

The Ministry of Public Health will ensure that we provide quality management at every tier of our public healthcare system. We intend to apply quality management systems in a coordinated, consistent manner to ensure that we provide public healthcare, to all Guyanese, that is of uncompromising quality.

A progressive and successful nation can only be accessed by a healthy population that is serviced by a healthcare system that is modern, effective and efficient, and utilises cutting edge technology. Our budgetary allocation for 2018 will certainly buttress the work being done by the Ministry of Public Health to ensure that our Guyanese brothers and sisters become the healthiest in the Caribbean. With that in mind, I commend this Budget for passage. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Minister for her statement. Hon. Members, this exhausts our list of speakers for today. We had 15 out of the 16 speakers who were listed for today. Before I invite the Prime Minister to move the adjournment, I would like to say to Members that all of us sitting here took an Oath of Office. The words of that Oath is:

“I solemnly swear to bear true faith and allegiance to the people of Guyana.”

I say no more. However, I would invite all Members to be familiar with the language and words from the booklet which you received when you took that Oath, not accepted in this House as being parliamentary usage. Thank you very much. Prime Minister, you are invited to move the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: I move that this House be adjourned to tomorrow, 5th December, 2017 at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: The House stands adjourned until tomorrow, 5th December, 2017 at 10.00 a.m. Thank you.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.40 p.m.