



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

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2024) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN

77TH Sitting

Tuesday, 30TH January, 2024

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.09 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent – on leave]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (16)

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

+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
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+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
and the Public Service,
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Georgetown.

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
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Minister of Amerindian Affairs,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
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South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

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

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
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Kingston,
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+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
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+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),
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Ministry of Housing and Water,
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+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
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Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
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Georgetown.

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Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Fort Street,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

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East Bank Demerara.

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

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Central Rupununi,

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Georgetown.

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Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),

Lot 4 Public Road,

No. 66 Village,

Corentyne,

Berbice.

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

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John Street,

Campbellville,

Georgetown.

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

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Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

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

Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,

Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,

c/o Freedom House,

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Georgetown.

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Lot 340 East Street,

South Cummingsburg,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

55 AA Victoria Avenue,

Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

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

(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),

Lot 16-30 New Street,

New Amsterdam.

c/o Freedom House,

Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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Tuschen, North,
East Bank Essequibo.

Hon. Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.

* Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
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South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

[Absent – on leave]

* Hon. Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
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Bourda, Georgetown.

[Absent – on leave]

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Leader of the Opposition

Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,
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Campbelville,
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Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,
*Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,
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Lot 13 A, New Providence,
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[Absent – on leave]

Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,
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Craig Milne,
Cove & John,
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(Culvert City Lethem)

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Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
Lot 1282 Block EE,
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Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,
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[Virtual Participation]

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*Lot 18 Public Road,
Johanna Cecilia,
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).*

Hon. Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,
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Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,
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East Bank Demerara.*

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

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

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

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Greater Georgetown.*

Officers (2)

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

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Hansard Division Officers (16)

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Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor

Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor

Ms. Carol Bess,
Editor

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Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter

Mr. Tafari David,
Reporter (a.g.)

Mr. Daniel Allen,
Reporter (a.g.)

Ms. Hosia Halley,
Reporter (a.g.)

Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician

Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENT BY SPEAKER**Welcome to Queen's College Teachers and Students**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have with us teachers and students of Queen's College (QC). Welcome to the National Assembly, QC. Today, what you will witness is the examination of the Government's proposals for spending for each ministry, line by line, meaning subject area by subject area. It is an interesting process.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE [Written Replies]

Hon. Members, I had deferred some questions which you will see on the Order Paper. I am further deferring those questions due to the full participation of the Ministers in the budget process. I am sure that you are acquainted with Standing Order 22(9) which states, 12 days. I have been perusing the Standing Orders and looking at other countries, and there is no provision that I cannot do this, so we will take these questions after. The Ministers who have been asked questions, and those who are asking questions during this process, will have more than ample time to bring up some of these questions too. The persons asking will have a formal opportunity to put them.

Questions deferred.

PUBLIC BUSINESS**GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS****MOTION****APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER, 2024**

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2024 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 15th January, 2024, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73:02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2024 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2024, of a total sum of one trillion, eighty billion, five hundred and eight million, and six hundred and thirty-seven thousand, two hundred and nine dollars (\$1,080,508,637,209), excluding sixty five billion, three hundred and fifty-four million, one hundred and twenty-seven thousand and sixty-five dollars (\$65,354,127,065) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2024 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of thirteen billion, three hundred and sixty eight million, five hundred and seventy-five thousand and eighty-three dollars (\$13,368,575,083) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums

voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2024.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$240,059,490,286 equivalent to US\$1,154,250,087 to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2024 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance and the Public Service]

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve itself into the Committee of Supply to start the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we are starting a few minutes late at 10.14 a.m. I am inviting the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip, Ms. Teixeira, and the staff of the Parliament Office to take their place so that we can start with the first head. This was supposed to start at 10.00 a.m. We have 10 minutes to examine this particular agency. I invite you to turn to pages 80 and 81. This is Agency 07, Parliament Office, Current Expenditure. It seems that I am having a ‘Mahipaul’ moment. I am sorry, I am not having a ‘Mahipaul’ moment; I am having a ‘wrong-book’ moment. I was looking at 2023. So, we have not started as yet, Hon. Minister. I hope we are all on the same page.

Agency: 07 Parliament Office

Current Expenditure

Programme: 071 – National Assembly – \$2,156,835,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, before I begin let me join with you and welcome our friends from Queen’s College. I do recognise the Headteacher of that school who happens to be one of my former teachers at the Anna Regina Secondary School, Ms. Rajkumarie Lall. There is the sum of \$2,156,835,000 which is an increase of 233,160,000 from last year. Given this \$1.146 trillion dollar budget of which every line item has increased, may I ask the Hon. Minister to indicate what is the increase for the Office of the Leader of the Opposition, please?

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Good morning, Members of the Committee. I would like to ask the Hon.

Member to please point out the head that he is referring to; he knows the rule.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, this is a constitutional agency under line item 6041. It is a lumpsum of \$2,156,835,000 that is going to the Parliament Office. From that Office a sum is allocated to the Office of the Leader of the Opposition. There is where the Office of the Leader of the Opposition receives his funding to scrutinise Government’s spending. So, I am asking if there is an increase to the sum that was there last year and what is that amount?

Ms. Teixeira: I refer to Appendix T on page 660 which has the breakdown of the different categories under the Parliament Office. All the other constitutional bodies are in Appendix T on page 660. Reference to the Leader of the Opposition is catered for under the heading of Other Goods and Services Purchased, which is line item 6291 in the normal heads. The Leader of the Opposition increases has to do.... I am sorry, it is not line item 6291. I beg your pardon. It is line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. The Office of the Leader of the Opposition comes under that. The Leader of the Opposition has an increase under current; he has a capital budget which is separate. He has an increase of \$1.1 million which has to do with the 6.5% for salary increases for the Leader of the Opposition and the members of his staff. So, in 2023, it was \$28,211,000 and it is now \$32,564,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: That is a big increase. I have one other question on this head, the Parliament Office. Under line item 6011, Statutory Wages and Salaries, can the Hon. Minister indicate if the Parliament Office is still paying the salaries for the two Parliamentary Secretaries whom the court ruled cannot sit in the National Assembly?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member, you are well aware that the court ruled they cannot sit in the National Assembly. However, Parliamentary Secretaries are provided for in the Constitution and can be paid by the Parliament Office. The court has so ruled. Yes, they are paid under Statutory Wages and Salaries as the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Attorney General, senior Ministers, junior Ministers, and the Leader of the Opposition. When I talked about the Leader of the Opposition, his salary comes out of Statutory Wages and Salaries and not under the heading of Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. For Members of Parliament (MPs), Chief Whips, Parliamentary Secretaries, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Clerk of the National Assembly and the

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly, the total of those wages are \$503,443,000 million.

Programme: 071 – National Assembly – \$2,156,835,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us move to the Audit Office of Guyana. I invite you to turn to page 84. I am sorry. We are going back to the Parliament Office on page 491.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 071 – National Assembly – \$50,500,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could we have a disaggregation in terms of the amount here. We have the provision for furniture, equipment, and the upgrading of facilities. Could we have it disaggregated?

10.24 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: The \$50,500,000 is broken up in the following way: We are paving the eastern parking lot of the Public Buildings – \$4.5 million is to improve access to the parking lot; replacing the Parliamentary Library's wooden floors with concrete and tile, \$25 million; procurement of furniture and equipment for the Parliament Office, \$16 million; and constitutional office of the Leader of the Opposition, \$5 million.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Member indicate to this honourable Committee where in the Parliament Building these floors will be changed and how many square feet we are talking about?

Ms. Teixeira: I think I said the "Parliamentary Library". I do not know what the square footage is. Give me a minute. Let me see if they have it in the Engineer's estimates. We have not gotten the square footage, but I think all of us know the Parliamentary Library at the Parliament Office. It is rather large, and the floors are apparently in a bad condition; they are wooden and therefore are a hazard. They want to replace it with concrete and tiles so it will be safer and easier to keep clean. If you insist on the square footage, the Parliament Office will find out and I will share that with you, subsequently.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Project code 2512200 – Furniture and Equipment, could the Hon. Minister indicate if any of these equipment include the audio system in the Parliament Chamber on Brickdam?

Ms Teixeira: Chief Whip, from a quick look at the list of items, it does not appear to have anything to do with the

audio equipment of the Parliament Chamber. I am advised by the Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly that the audio equipment is catered under Current Expenditure, Maintenance of Equipment. The audio equipment is catered under that. We have just passed that.

Mr. Jones: Thank you Cde. Minister. Cde. Chairman, just to confirm, is this an indication after the expenditure of the current, to equip the parliament equipment, the Chamber would be completed in 2024?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised, yes, it will be done by the end of 2024.

Mr. Jones: I have a quick follow-up, for use by the National Assembly. When you say 2024, could you indicate a specific month or which quarter?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that it would be after the Budget passes, in the second quarter.

Mr. Chairman: I would just like to add, because I have some responsibilities in the area, that the Chamber is used for the Youth Debates and meetings. It is always being used.

Programme: 071 – National Assembly – \$50,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 08 Audit Office of Guyana

Current Expenditure

Programme: 081 – Audit Office – \$1,319,046,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Good morning, I just have one question. To the Hon. Minister, what mechanisms are put in place to ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the person holding the position of the Deputy Auditor General of the Audit Office and the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance and Public Service, and by extension the Government. Could you state what mechanisms are out in place to ensure that there is no conflict of interest there? **[Mr. McCoy:** Which line item? Which line item?] We are under Audit Office; it is a constitutional agency and there is one line item. If you want me to be specific, Wages and Salaries.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, this is rather a deviation from the norm under the estimates. We are looking at figures. This is a policy issue which the Hon. Member is maybe not aware of as she is not in the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). But I am sure the Members on her side of the House brief them from time to time on the developments in the PAC. However, if you go on the website of the Auditor General's office there are its policy documents including those that

deal with their manuals and guidelines for their staff. They are quite voluminous documents. They have been there – Ms. Lawrence could correct me since she was in the PAC at the time – approximately 2004/2005, I believe, when the Act was passed, and a lot of work went into it. The “conflict of interest” issue is clearly delineated in the policy of the Auditor General’s office. The Hon. Member may wish to refer to those policy documents which were brought to the House by the then Chairperson who was Ms. Lawrence. Ms. Lawrence, again, if I am misquoting you, I apologise, but those were all documents that were brought to this House, laid and approved by this House. Maybe the Hon. Member may wish to refer to the Auditor General’s website where you will find those manuals, *et cetera*.

Programme: 081 – Audit Office – \$1,319,046,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 081 – Audit Office – \$16,000,000

Programme: 081 – Audit Office – \$16,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 09 Public and Police Service Commissions

Current Expenditure

Programme: 091 – Public and Police Service Commissions – \$199,624,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, as you go to page 663 in Appendix T, under Statutory Benefits and Allowances, the actual for 2021 was \$0.271million, then it was budgeted in 2023 as \$5.608 million but only \$1.142 million... but now it is budgeted again at \$5.608 million. Could the Hon. Minister state what exactly is causing the fact that they are budgeting for such a high amount and such small amounts are being utilised at the end of the year and they are still budgeting a high amount this year?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member, on the Statutory Benefits and Allowances, as you remember, the commissions were not appointed at that time. Therefore, payments to the Commissioners and whatever benefits, the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) payments, *et cetera*, were not their either. The Police Service Commission was appointed in May, 2022 and the Public Service Commission was appointed in July, 2023. If I understand your question clearly, it is why it was such a low amount, in not spent, and presently there is an increase. There are now more staff. As I am advised they have hired a number of persons, and there

are eight new staff for whom they would have to pay NIS, *et cetera*.

Programme: 091 – Public and Police Service Commissions – \$199,624,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 091 – Public and Police Service Commissions – \$2,500,000

Programme: 091 – Public and Police Service Commissions – \$2,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 10 Teaching Service Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 101 – Teaching Service Commission – \$174,461,000

Programme: 101 – Teaching Service Commission – \$174,461,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 101 – Teaching Service Commission – \$10,000,000

Programme: 101 – Teaching Service Commission – \$10,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

10.39 a.m.

Agency: 11 Guyana Elections Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 111 – Elections Commission – \$3,408,386,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister indicate to this Committee under which subhead of the current expenditures was there a decrease? I noticed that the revised figure for 2023 is \$3.8 billion and that budgeted for 2024 is some \$3.4 billion.

Ms. Teixeira: We will remember that in 2023 we had a Local Government Elections. There are no Local Government Elections slated for this year and, therefore, that is the reason for the decrease in the allocation for the year 2024. Obviously, 2025 would be a different story.

Ms. Lawrence: Just a follow up: Could the Minister give me a breakdown in terms of which head? Is it administrative? Is it overhead, other expenses or maintenance? Where did we see this reduction?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, I am advised and I am looking at the data before me, if there is not one specific item that is responsible for the increase, except one item which the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) had proposed in 2023 in its budget to introduce a pension scheme for GECOM. However, that was removed from the 2024 Budget Estimates and, therefore, that was approximately \$314 million that have been reduced from the 2024 Budget. The rest were smaller amounts across a lot of the heads and subheads. I think this have been the largest amount.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I would be thankful for that information to be laid over.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, the breakdown to be laid over.

Ms. Teixeira: Do you mean across all the heads and subheads or only in relation to pensions?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, clarification, please.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I am trying to follow the Minister. If \$300 million was taken out for pension, that is a decrease in terms of the request budgeted for 2023 because it was \$5.067 billion. If we go down to \$3.4 billion, we are talking about a substantive increase. I am not asking for line items; I am asking for subheads, such as wages and salaries, materials, equipment and supplies. The Hon. Member did indicate that the decrease was due also to the Local Government Elections.

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that the allocation for 2023, in the previous year GECOM purchased a lot of the items or number of the items for the elections and it did not use all the moneys allocated for the Local Government Election in 2023. The reference I made to pensions is not the regular National Insurance Scheme (NIS) pension and benefits. This is where the GECOM had proposed in the budget in 2023 \$314 million for a pension scheme specific to GECOM. However, I am advised that GECOM has not agreed to proceed on that issue at this time. Therefore, it was removed from the Budget. There are small decreases in other areas, for example print and non-print \$197 million difference, due to there being no election this year, the materials are ballot sheets and all that sort of stuff would not be there. I could ask GECOM to assist me to provide the heads where there

have been reductions so that you can see what they are and the reasons for the reduction in the 2024 Budget.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, when you go to Appendix T on page 665, there is a significant increase at materials, equipment and supplies. Could the Hon. Member state what is being procured under this particular line item for \$210 million?

Ms. Teixeira: This heading under Appendix T refers to a number of subheads such as the drugs and medical supplies, field materials and supplies, office materials and supplies, and print and non-print materials. I just referred by answering Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, there was \$197.769 million not being included in this Budget, so the Budget in 2023 was \$233.2 million what was used and what is now in 2024 is \$35.497 million. That is based on the fact that GECOM said, at this point, in this year it does not need to print the volume of print and non-print materials as there is no election this. I see the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, looks a bit concerned. If we look at the line, in 2022 was \$216 million; in 2023, \$446 million was allocated, but it only used \$85 million. Now, it has went back up to 210 million. There has been an increase in terms of what it has used. In terms of what was allocated in 2023, it is a decline.

As I said, that heading covers several areas – as I repeated – drugs, materials supplies, field materials, office material and supplies, and print and non-print. It used less than what was allocated and it is getting back about 50% of what was allocated for last year to allow whatever preparations needs to be to be done. It does not feel that it needs that volume of money in 2024 as there is no elections.

Mr. Figueira: Could the Hon. Minister state under line item 6241, if there is an allocation here to cater for rental of buildings, specifically with respect to Region 10 and more so Wismar where there was an operational office of GECOM? It is no longer operational and most of the staff are at McKenzie. Would this line item cater for the rental of an office at Wismar to cater for the staff and more so the constituency on the Wismar shore?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you may sit to answer because your microphone is challenge. I am hearing you quite well. Hon. Minister, you can just pull the microphone down and we will be able to hear you.

Mr. Figueira: The rental for buildings was increased by over \$4 million and there is a need which is why I asked the question.

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that GECOM recognises the need and that it is looking for a land, a place, where it could build an office at Wismar. It is not included in the rental buildings for this year. We are hoping to get the land and build an office there.

Mr. Figueira: Am I to conclude, in the interim, the staff will remain at McKenzie?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Figueira: The Government can provide GECOM with the land. There is no need for GECOM to look.

Ms. Teixeira: I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. I did not hear that last comment. It was not meant for me to hear. Why did you say it?

Mr. Figueira: I said the Government could assist GECOM with regard to finding a plot of land.

Ms. Teixeira: They are in the process I am advised.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: You would know that one does not go and put stakes on land, because that is squatting. They are going through the legal process to acquire land in Wismar for the purposes of building an office. I am sure you would not want GECOM to go and squat.

Ms. Lawrence: If I turn the Hon. Minister's attention to 665. We were told that last year the Commission catered for the Local Government Election. We see wages and salaries at \$1.6 million. In the year 2024, where there are no elections, why do we see the increase to \$1.799 million which is almost \$1.8 million?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that the increase is due to the 6.5% increase in salaries and also the gratuity that is paid biannually to the staff. There are some people whose six months who gratuity would cross over into 2024 from 2023. Although the staff maintenance of those who are permanent staff remain. As you know, the temporary staff are paid separately and not under this.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, could I take the Hon. Minister to the line item rental and maintenance of buildings? There is no elections in 2024, why are we seeing an increase instead of a decrease?

Ms. Teixeira: Under the heading rental and maintenance of buildings in Appendix T, it covers rental buildings, maintenance of buildings, and janitorial and cleaning supplies. Under rental buildings, there is a decrease since no

additional buildings will be required in 2024, since it is not an election year. This is to do with the election purposes. The line item, maintenance of the buildings, has increased slightly. This has to do with the maintenance of the GECOM's owned buildings as well as rented ones. According to the data in the Parliament's records there has been a slight increase.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Final question. I was wondering under other goods and services purchased or the way we were before in terms of materials, equipment and supplies, whether or not GECOM intends to buy any biometric equipment this year.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, this is a decision for the GECOM. I assume if they decide to do that, then it will be included in the budget and, whether, if it is urgent, it would have to be included in a supplementary budget. It is not here. [**Ms. Lawrence:** (*Inaudible*)] No. The Guyana Elections Commission which makes the policy decision has not, as far as I am aware, decided on that issue.

10.54 a.m.

Ms. Lawrence: I want to take the Minister to Rates, Taxes and Subvention to Local Authorities. Last year, \$2.2 million was budgeted and only \$92,000 was used to pay rates and taxes and local subventions. Again, we are budgeting \$2.2 million. The question is why are we not paying the local subventions and the local authorities? Could you say which local authority is owed by GECOM and for how many years?

Ms. Teixeira: This would be for rates and taxes on buildings owned, I believe, by GECOM and not buildings that they are renting. As I assume, the landlords would pay the rates and taxes. The GECOM would provide me with the breakdown of which Neighbourhood Democratic Councils or municipalities received this money or would receive the money in 2024 and which ones received the sum of \$92,000 in 2023.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow-up to the Hon. Minister, could you kindly seek to ascertain from GECOM's personnels what is inhibiting them from paying on a yearly basis, the amounts owed to these local authorities? We are giving the moneys. Why are you not paying these local authorities so they can do their jobs?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman and Mdm. Lawrence, it is clear that the staff of GECOM did not follow through on this issue. They will have to show better in 2024 that they are able to address this issue. We do not disagree with you. I

guess the staff dropped the ball on this issue and they should not have. They should be corrected.

Programme: 111 – Elections Commission – \$3,408,386 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 111 – Elections Commission – \$100,000,000

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Mr. Speaker, if I may? For Agency 11, Programme 111, Elections Commission, project code 4000500 – Constitutional Agency, it has \$100 million for:

“Provision for building, furniture and equipment.”

Could the Minister tell us where are the buildings? What equipment GECOM would be purchasing? and give us a disaggregation of the three areas?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you very much, Hon. Leader of the Opposition. The sum of \$100 million is disaggregated in the following ways: concrete tarmac 90x120 feet (ft) at Nouvelle Flanders Registration Office; concrete bridge and gate, eastern perimeter of the compound at Nouvelle Flander’s Registration Office – \$850,000; off-road vehicles – six at a total of \$66 million to traverse the interior locations in conducting registration and field verification for new registrants and reduce operational cost; one all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) bike –, \$2.5 million, to conduct fuel operations in the interior locations and reduce operational cost; three electrical backup system at the cost of \$1.5 million to provide adequate supply through the GECOM offices; Public Address (PA) Systems to buy two totalling \$300,000 – these are to be purchased for civic and voter for the execution of duties and function of the Commission; uninterruptible power supply (UPS), 24 at \$480,000 – items to be purchased for various offices to protect the equipment; heavy duty UPS for Xerox Machine – \$350,000 to be purchased for civic and voter programme for the execution of duties and functions of the Commission; PC case mid tower, four at \$104,000 to be purchased for the information technology (IT) department and improve the operational performance; vertical filing cabinets, 24 at \$1,560,000 – to purchase cabinets for more storage; lateral filing cabinets, 13 at \$1.69 million – this again is for the orderly storage of documents by GECOM and their offices; two door filing cabinets, three at \$360,000 – to purchase again for the same purpose; pedestal fans, 34 – \$170,000 to be used in GECOM offices to provide a cooler environment; air condition (AC) unit 1200 British Thermal Unit (BTU), seven at \$770,000 – this is to be used at the GECOM offices to have better

working conditions; AC unit 1800 BTU, one – \$195,000 to be purchased for Charity Registration Office; AC 24,000 BTU, three – \$660,000, equipment to be purchased for GECOM offices in providing better working conditions; AC Unit 36,000 BTU, three to be purchased at \$1.6 million – this again is for the GECOM offices; server, to purchase one at \$700,000 for the information technology (IT) department to improve its operational performance; stabiliser 5,000 watts, two at \$50,000 – items to be purchased for the north sub-office in Georgetown; transformer, one at \$500,000 – to be purchased for the Mahaicony Registration Office; heavy duty guillotine, three to be purchased for the various departments of GECOM; heavy duty laser printer, black and white, one at \$150,000, for the human resource (HR) department to facilitate the printing of letters and reports, *et cetera*; heavy duty laminating machine, one, again for the human resource department for the execution of duties; binding machines, three, \$150,000 – items to be purchased for the various departments in GECOM; water dispensers, six, to ensure staff from various offices have adequate water supply; heavy duty laser printer colour, one at \$400,000 to be purchased for the Public Relations Department of GECOM; desktop printers, five at \$200,000 – to be purchased for the various departments of GECOM; desktop computers, five at \$1.2 million – items to be purchased again for the various offices and to replace damaged and old computers; laptops, 25 totalling \$6.5 million – to be purchased for the various offices the replacement of old and damaged computers; refrigerators, four at \$480,000 – again for the district offices of GECOM; stove, one at \$20,000 for Paramakatoi Registration Office for providing and to assist the staff there; microwaves, three at \$51,000 – to be purchased for the district offices; three water tanks totalling \$135,000, for the various offices; water pump, three at \$75,000 – to be purchased for the various registration offices to ensure adequate supply of water; brush cutter and weeding machines, two at \$400,000 – items to be purchased for various offices to maintain the environment surrounding the office; office desk, 20 – items to be purchased for the administration department for the replacement of old and damaged furniture; L-shaped executive desk, one at \$300,000 – to be purchased for the Deputy Chief Election Officer; semi-executive desk, five totalling \$650,000 – to be purchased for the various offices for the replacement of old and damaged furniture; ergonomic office chairs, six totalling \$720,000 – to be purchased for the various offices of GECOM; executive chairs, five at \$300,000 – to be purchased for the various offices; semi-executive chairs – \$365,000 for the various offices and replacement of old and damaged furniture; typist chairs, 15 totalling \$525,000 – to

be purchase for various offices for the replacement of old and damaged furniture; office chairs, 20 totalling half of a million – to be purchased for again old and damaged furniture; chairs without arms, 55 – to be purchase for the various departments; three seat lounge chair, one at \$150,000 – to be purchased for the Deputy Chief Election Officer to replace old and damaged furniture; folding chairs, 50 totalling \$325,000 – to be purchased for the administration department for the conduct of meetings and aiding inhouse training; folding tables, 10 at \$150,000 – to be purchased for the administration department for the conduct of meetings and aid in inhouse training; and a book shelf, one at \$80,000 for the Mahaicony Registration Office.

In terms of the summary: workshop, tarmac, fence, boat, shed and fence – \$4.3 million; vehicles, boat and engines – \$68.5 million; equipment – \$21.2 million; and furniture – \$5.8 million, totalling \$100 million.

Mr. Norton: The Hon. Member just told this Committee that they were looking for land to build a building in Linden. When I asked about buildings, the Hon. Minister mentioned all except that. Could the Hon. Minister tell us what is the truth? Is it that you are going to build this building and it is budgeted for or it is not?

Ms. Teixeira: I think I spoke earlier on this. I said, in response to Mr. Figueira, the matter was in progress and that we first had to acquire the land. Having gotten the land, I am sure that GECOM would approach the Government for a supplementary if required in 2024 to build the office. They did not put the building of an office in Wismar because they have not been able to identify the land as yet. It not being in 2024 does not mean were they to find the land, *et cetera* they could not approach for a supplementary. It is not included in the 2024 Budget because they do not have the land allocated as yet.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I heard the Hon. Minister made mention of a number of executive, semi-executive chairs and desks that have to be purchased for the local offices. Could the Hon. Minister state whether the Fort Wellington/Mahaicony district offices will be receiving those and how much?

Ms. Teixeira: Although what I read did not have a specific for Mahaicony, except their bookshelves, I am advised by GECOM that the chairs and other furniture will be shared with the various GECOM offices as all of them have requested the replacement of old and damaged furniture. When they do their tenders and they procure, they will then have to the deal with the allocation. I am sure that the offices

that have that are in bad condition and need furniture will get.

11.09 a.m.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I just want to clarify and have a commitment from the Hon. Minister. From my last visit at the Fort Wellington and the Mahaicony local offices, I recognised that the staff did not have any comfortable sitting chairs. I would like to know whether they will receive chairs this year or not.

Ms. Teixeira: I am assured by the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) that they will be taken care of; they will get allocation for chairs; and they will be able to work under a better and more comfortable environment.

Programme: 111 – Elections Commission – \$100,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister and the staff – the Chief Election Officer (CEO), his Deputy and staff at the Guyana Elections Commission. We now invite the staff of the Supreme Court to join the Minister to take us through their head. Hon. Minister, we are going to set up a next station on the right-hand side. Maybe after the first hour we could change, so that they can sanitise here. We are still having a bit of challenges.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I have to keep changing. I have a whole suitcase of documents. I cannot be moving between two stations.

Mr. Chairman: All right, it is your call.

Ms. Teixeira: If you would forgive me, I am sorry to make the sanitising a problem but there are too many documents. Thank you.

Agency: 55 Supreme Court

Current Expenditure

Programme: 551 – Supreme Court of Judicature - \$2,962,752,000

Programme: 551 – Supreme Court of Judicature – \$2,962,752,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 551 – Supreme Court of Judicature - \$1,700,000,000

Programme: 551 – Supreme Court of Judicature – \$1,700,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 56 Public Prosecutions

Current Expenditure

Programme: 561 – Public Prosecutions – \$385,774,000

Programme: 561 – Public Prosecutions – \$385,774,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 561 – Public Prosecutions – \$35,000,000

Programme: 561 – Public Prosecutions – \$35,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 57 Office of the Ombudsman

Current Expenditure

Programme: 571 – Ombudsman – \$67,252,000

Programme: 571 – Ombudsman – \$67,252,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 58 Public Service Appellate Tribunal

Current Expenditure

Programme: 581 – Public Service Appellate Tribunal – \$67,777,000

Programme: 581 – Public Service Appellate Tribunal – \$67,777,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 581 – Public Service Appellate Tribunal – \$900,000

Programme: 581 – Public Service Appellate Tribunal – \$900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 59 Ethnic Relations Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 591 – Ethnic Relations Commission – \$235,000,000

Ms. Hughes: Line items 6112, 6113 either, Hon. Minister, I know there are plans to establish the Tribunal that would assist in the work of the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) that has not yet been established. I did not see any

increases in Employment of Staff. I was wondering if you could explain if you are planning to recruit additional persons and maybe inform us about the status of funding for the Tribunal. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: First of all, to answer the question about the increase of staff; staff increased from 14 when the Board of Commissioners were sworn in on 21st March, 2023, to now 31 members of staff. There has been an increase in staffing.

In relation to your comment on the question of the Tribunal, this would have no impact on the budget of the ERC, because the Tribunal would be completely separate and has no relationship with the ERC, as it is an appeals body. Therefore, it has to do with the Court and that would be set up by the President, in terms of the judges on it. It would only take place if it were to set up. It would be with what matters are referred to it by the Commission that needs review. If or when the Tribunal is set up, it would have no impact on the ERC budget, as it would be completely an independent body of the ERC.

Mr. Ramjattan: What do we have as description of Staffing Details, why, instead of zero there, we did not have a 31?

Ms. Teixeira: Are you looking Appendix T, which has the breakdown of the numbers?

Mr. Ramjattan: I am looking at the Staffing Details. If you said that you have 31...

Ms. Teixeira: I am not responsible for putting that in. I can only say what the ERC is giving me. I did not print that. What page are you on, Sir?

Mr. Ramjattan: That is page 305 – Staffing Details – Administrative right up to Temporary are all zero for 2023 and all are zero for 2024.

Ms. Teixeira: They have done that with the Constitutional bodies because Appendix T are lump sum bodies. Do you remember the ruling? The breakdown of the actual numbers, that is, the budgetary numbers, are in Appendix T at the back of Volume I. If you want the breakdown of the allocations in terms of budget, you will have to go to Appendix T. They are placed in the Budget line items but not the Staffing. The Staffing would come from the questioning that we have here. We will find with all the Constitutional bodies that there are no Staffing listed there.

Programme: 591 – Ethnic Relations Commission – 235,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

11.24 a.m.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 591 – Ethnic Relations Commission – \$3,000,000

Programme: 591 – Ethnic Relations Commission – \$3,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 60 Judicial Service Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 601 – Judicial Service Commission – \$17,520,000

Programme: 601 – Judicial Service Commission – \$17,520,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 61 Rights Commissions of Guyana

Current Expenditure

Programme: 611 – Rights Commissions of Guyana – \$182,228,000

Programme: 611 – Rights Commissions of Guyana – \$182,228,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 611 – Rights Commission of Guyana – \$3,160,000

Programme: 611 – Rights Commission of Guyana – \$3,160,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 62 Public Procurement Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 621 – Public Procurement Commission – \$265,360,000

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman this agency has come for an allocation of \$270.9 million for 2024, an increase of \$35 million, 15% over last year's revised allocation. To get a full understanding of this request, permit me to ask the following. Sir, how many reports has the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) completed and published since its reestablishment in 2022?

Ms. Teixeira: Could we have a clarification from the Hon. Member, when he talks about the reports, is it the reports of monitoring or reports of investigations? There are two different types of reports. There is the annual report and, of course, the audited financial statements. So, which of the reports are you referring to?

Mr. Patterson: Right. The reports on investigations. If you look at Volume 2, Sir, the indicators, there is an indicator number two, "Number of reports prepared and shared with the Minister as well as on the website", specifically to that item. That is under Indicators in Volume 2.

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member, they have completed four investigations and have published two.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, this agency spent \$199.8 million in 2022, \$235.3 in 2023 and was only able to publish two reports during this period. Can we have an explanation why is this so?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member, this body was established in July 2022, after a long period from 2019. The PPC does not make up investigations. Matters have to be referred to it, whether by complaints or people requesting investigations. They have their own monitoring role. Therefore, if they have been able to complete four investigations that is based on the requests made to them. They may have two that they have published, but there was the issue of setting up a new office because by the time the PPC came in, the staff had dwindled to about six I believe they had to interview and hire new people, including a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and get to know the 'runnings'. I will say that, unfortunately, not in terms of this agency, but a number of constitutional bodies have noted that when they did an audit of the files of complaints that were made to them, those files had disappeared and there is no record in many of the agencies. I am talking from personal experience. I made a number of complaints and they disappeared. So, whoever did that wanted to cleanse the PPC and maybe other constitutional bodies of what were very interesting investigations that were required. The PPC started out from scratch, and this is what they are reporting, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, thank you for that explanation. I was very specific. I have limited myself, from July, 2022, to December, 2023, so thank you for that. As the Hon. Minister mentioned, can this agency provide this House with how many requests for investigations were received between then – very specific – July, 2022, and December, 2023?

Ms. Teixeira: Could you repeat, Mr. Patterson – July 2022 to?

Mr. Patterson: This current PPC has been for 18 months, so I am limiting my question from July, 2022, to December, 2023.

Ms. Teixeira: December 2023. Okay, fine. I did not hear that. I am advised that 12 requests have been made to the PPC.

Mr. Patterson: I will come back to that response just now. Can the Hon. Minister provide the monthly salaries, including benefits, for the Chairman, Deputy Chairperson and Commissioners, please?

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Member knows that the salaries were set by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) when the first PPC was set up and that the present Commission gets 6.5% increase like everybody else in the staff. I think you should get the minutes. You are a Member of the PAC, Sir, you know that. You know that the salaries of the Chairman and Commissioners were set by the PAC and brought to this House and approved. All the increases that they may get may be to do with the 6.5%. There has been no shift in the salaries. They are not allowed to do that. They have to come back to the PAC if they want it changed. They cannot on their own volition do that. It is clear in the legislation and in the Constitution. The salaries would be, yes, we can provide, and I think I may have a breakdown available. Give me one minute, please.

These are public records and, therefore, the Chairperson – \$1.3 million. They pay the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). The annual salary is \$15.6 million. The employers pay the NIS. Travelling allowance, they get \$140,760, that is yearly. We are talking about yearly figures: Entertainment allowance \$120,000; telephone allowance \$300,000; security \$3.9 million, which is part of the agreement totalling \$20.3 million. Deputy Chairperson \$1.1 million. They have their NIS contributions. The period is for 12 months – \$13.2 million. They have a travelling allowance of \$140,760, the same as the Chairperson; \$120,000 entertainment allowance, the same as the Chairperson; telephone allowance of \$240,000; to total \$13.7 million. Commissioners get \$900,000. They also pay NIS and their annual salary –

[**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)]

There are five Commissioners, Hon. Mr. Ramjattan, and you know all of them. Nine hundred thousand... The total annual salary is \$10.8 million, plus travelling allowance, sorry, plus entertainment allowance of \$120,000. The three Commissioners are able to get \$11.3 million. The total wage

bill for the PPC Commissioners... if you would stop talking and hear you might learn. The salary for the PPC Commissioners – these are the five people appointed and approved by the National Assembly – is \$61.2 million for salary. The are benefits and allowances of \$6.6 million – that is for their benefits and allowances. These are the salaries that you asked for, Hon. Member and they are public records.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, based on the response given by the Minister, quick calculations, for the 18 months that they have existed, the Chairperson would have received about \$30 million, the Deputy Chairperson received about \$24 million, and the three Commissioners combined, Sir, in the 18 months since they have been reestablished, would have received \$50 million in salaries and benefits. Sir, to produce two single reports. Does this agency consider that value for money?

Ms. Teixeira: I am not quite sure whether the Hon. Member is just playing politics, but if he is going to, I am on. The comparison of the Commission that was appointed in 2018 to 2020 that got an additional time, through the Hon. President Granger, produced two reports from 2018 to 2020.

11.39 a.m.

Sir, you know two of the reports. You know one very well. You know one extremely well which had to do with the new Demerara Harbour Bridge which you know now is a matter in the court. That was one of the investigations of the PPC then. It was made public and was then removed from the website. I believe it is now back on.

The second one had to do with the Ministry of Health and the purchase of \$600 million worth of drugs without going to the Tender Board and without getting the approval of a waiver from the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB). I am sure another Member of the House is familiar with this. Two reports were published by the then PPC who was getting salaries similar to this.

The present PPC, as far as I understand, is responding to the requests they get, the availability of documents, *et cetera*, to investigate. They said here that they had completed four investigations. There are two which they have published. That was between July 22nd, when it was appointed and December 2023. If my calculations of months are right, they did better than the original and first PPC.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, very much for the long explanation. I do not know if we have time... Sir, I still

would like an answer. Does this agency consider the amount of money expended, a total of \$435 million in 18 months, value for money for two reports irrespective of what has happened before. We are examining *Budget 2024*.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I will put it again.

Ms. Teixeira: I wish to...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, just give me one minute.

Ms. Teixeira: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I cannot dictate to any minister answering any question what type of answer he/she should give and if the answer is or must be acceptable to the person asking the question. Persons can save time rather than asking a minister, three or four times, the same question. Listen carefully to the answers that the ministers give. We have a very active session for the next four days. We are keeping meticulous time to ensure that there is sufficient time available for other areas. I want to assure the Chief Whips that we have a spreadsheet that tracks all the time and the savings. I will not allow a person to ask the same question over and over. I will evoke a repetition clause in the Standing Orders. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, very much. I wish to remind the Hon. Member that, under article 2(12) of the Constitution, the PPC has 13 functions, one of which is investigation. The Procurement Act also details its role on a number of issues in compliance with the Constitution. You are focusing on one issue. Do we think we are getting value for money? Yes, in the anti-corruption field, and in being able to investigate and have an authority that is constitutional and independent of the Government, of you the Opposition or anybody so be it. The money was well used because it allowed for that oversight function and being able to monitor what is going on. However, it is unfair not to ask questions about what else the PPC did in relation to its 13 functions. It has gone to seven of the 10 regions and had training programmes and outreaches. They have met with contractors, had training programmes and outreaches with public servants in various sectors, and have also been monitoring what is going on in a number of agencies. Please, do not restrict yourself. I know that you have a personal interest in this matter, Sir. The issue is that investigation is one of 13 functions of the PPC and maybe you may wish to ask questions on those other functions.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I will take your guidance. The Hon. Minister cannot tell me which questions I should ask, just as I cannot tell her how to answer her questions.

Just for the record, I think the Hon. Minister was incorrect when she said that the previous PPC only prepared two reports. Sir, if you go on the website, you will see more than two. I saw six. I just went on it. She may want to check on that just for the correctness of the record here. Can I proceed, though? Does the PPC...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, could I please... This Hon. Member is *gotaying* the issue. He loves to *gotay*. The issue is that he may have looked on the website and there may have been four but the two that I refer to relate to the 2018 - 2019 period of the former PPC.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, yes, you may proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Does the Public Procurement Commission have an investigation unit and, if so, how many staff are attached to this unit?

Ms. Teixeira: When the PPC was appointed recently, the staffing was done to a very small number of five or six persons. They have hired back and have two investigators in the investigation unit. They hope to increase that in 2024.

Mr. Patterson: Just for the record, did you say there are currently two investigators attached to the PPC?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, he wants a clarification.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. There are two investigators. One is a procurement specialist. Sorry, both are procurement specialists.

Mr. Patterson: That is right, I was coming to that. Does the PPC have an operations unit and, if so, how many staff are there? Secondly, are all the staff... First of all, let me allow the Minister...

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that there are five persons in the operations unit.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, either the operations or the investigation unit staff... You said they have two and five, that is seven. I am taking their word for it. Have they ever undertaken a field inspection? Have they even allowed their office to... in the 18 months they are there – any of the staff?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that they have not done any field investigations, if that is what you are asking. That has not been done as yet. They have been doing outreaches, training, *et cetera*, also investigating what reports or requests are made to them.

Mr. Patterson: They have not done any investigations in the 18 months. Great. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: No. I did not say that. Mr. Chairman, I do not wish for the Hon. Member to misquote me.

Mr. Patterson: My apologies.

Ms. Teixeira: I did not say that. He asked if they went out into the field and did investigations and I said no.

Mr. Patterson: So, they have not done any field investigations in 18 months. Mr. Chairman, I apologise. I retract my statement.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Can I ask then, are all five of these operations unit staff currently operating out of the Public Procurement Commission's building?

Ms. Teixeira: I am not sure what the Hon. Member is trying to get to. There is one office that they have. He knows where the building is. It is on New Garden Street. That is the centre and office of the Public Procurement Commission and that is where the staff is. Why would they be elsewhere? Is he trying to hint at something – what is it? Do not be conspiratorial, my dear Friend. They have an office. They have staff. Everybody goes to work. Everybody gets paid – done the story.

Mr. Patterson: I am sorry if I am upsetting the Hon. Minister. The answer is yes.

Mr. Chairman: Do not impute. I do not think you are upsetting her.

Mr. Patterson: That is fair enough. I take it that the Hon. Minister's response is yes. You and I inferred it is yes. Thank you, very much, Sir. I just have a couple more. I know my Colleagues want to get at this agency as well. Does the Public Procurement Commission have a legal department? If so, how many staff are attached to this department?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. It has a legal department made up of two lawyers.

Mr. Patterson: I assume the legal department is staffed with two competent persons. Could I ask the Commission through the Minister, if there are two competent lawyers, why is the Public Procurement Commission expending millions engaging in external private council? Secondly, could I ask how much was paid and is budgeted for external private council in 2024?

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Member, first of all, stressed on competence. I just want to make a comment before I answer the Hon. Member. That is, these are constitutional bodies. We as Members of the House have to have some trust in the bodies that are appointed through various mechanisms, including the Public Accounts Committee, to serve in the best interests in accordance with the Constitution. Therefore, for the two lawyers that were hired by the PPC, we trust that they would be the best that is available, so we do not have to be sarcastic – you are assuming that they are competent. That is rather low, Sir. For the second issue, yes, they did hire and paid US\$4,000 for an external opinion from the PPC when at the time they only had one lawyer. That is the only time it has done that.

Mr. Patterson: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I think my Colleagues had asked if you could provide the name of the external council. I also asked how much was budgeted for external legal advice in 2024.

Mr. Chairman: We have been shying away from naming people. We could do a bilateral.

Mr. Patterson: Very good. I have a final question on Volume 2 under its indicators. One of the indicators for this year states:

“Number of reports prepared and shared...”

This is on page 283. For 2024, it is five. Could I ask how did it arrive at five or is that all that this budget can cater for? I do not know. I thought the reports were based on complaints as opposed to a predetermined figure by the agency. Could I ask how it arrived at five? Obviously, they did none in 2023, they did two already in 2024, so we could only expect three more reports, based on their indicators on page 283 in Volume 2.

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Member is questioning projections. For every agency in this budget, if one goes to Volume 2, he/she would see projections. The five that are mentioned in Volume 2 on page 283 have to do with the investigations. These are indicators and what they are projecting that they will be able to do. In 2023, it was three. The target for 2024 is five. In some cases, some agencies meet the target, in other cases, they surpass the target, and in other cases they do not meet the target and explain what may have been the issues. This is their projection of the number of investigations they would have completed.

11.54 a.m.

In relation the issue of consultancies, at this point, we can see that there is no projection right now or in the budget for including consultancies for external lawyers in the PPC. That does not mean that if the PPC, under 'Other Goods and Services', wished to hire a consultant to deal with something else, a procurement issue, a technical issue, a medical issue, that is their right to do that.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, a final question. I see the Leader of the Opposition would like the floor. It is public record as well as stated fact that, investigations submitted to the Public Procurement Commission dated 3rd February, 2023, in two days it would be a year, have not yet been completed, have not yet received any reports, have not yet received... Sir, we are giving them this year... They are requesting \$270 million. Could the Minister provide this House a reason why it is taking a year and more for a report to be provided on these matters?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member you know, as I said, you are *gotaying* issues. You are very well aware, being a former Minister yourself, of the level of investigations that have to be done even within the Ministries. If documents are not provided, the evidence is not provided, or whether documents can be found, then it slows down the whole investigation process. I talked earlier about a number of the constitutional bodies in the hiatus between 2019 and when they were appointed recently, those documents are not there. They have been cleaned out and I can start to name some of the constitutional bodies where auditors have been called in. The issue is, Sir, you may be unhappy, it is 3rd February, 2023, but the point is, if the evidence is not there, all the documents that have not been submitted, it will protract the time for the investigation to be concluded.

I remember making a number of requests to certain constitutional bodies. I remember one, in particular, which you are very familiar with, it took over a year for the constitution of the PPC to be able to make a decision and to make the report not available to the House, but on their website months later. It took over a year to raise a matter of the Demerara Harbour Bridge (DHB) in which a number of persons were involved in 2018 and 2019.

Mr. Patterson: Just a follow up before I give the Leader of the Opposition the floor.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Hon. Member. You do not have the right to give the Leader of the Opposition the floor, I do.

Mr. Patterson: I beg, Sir, just to follow up. I beg your leave to give the Leader of the Opposition the floor.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, is the Hon. Minister saying that the request for investigation on 3rd February, 2023, has not been completed because documents are missing? I know she explained what happened pre-July 2022. Just for the record, are you saying that it was because documents are missing?

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Member, as I said, just likes to repeat over and over again. The issue is that the report for the investigation of 3rd February, was delayed because of lack of documents, evidence and so forth. It is now proceeding on a normal course. As unhappy as the matter may be, and if there is a personal matter, you should not be using the House's time to such an extent to be *gotaying* a personal matter of interest.

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

Mr. Norton: In the same line, Hon. Minister. You did indicate that the reports prepared will move from zero to five. Could the Hon. Minister tell us what are the factors that led to your conclusion that there will be five? What are the vicissitudes you envisage that could change that number?

Ms. Teixeira: Based on the Commission's experience over the last year and a half, they are projecting that moving from a three to five is in the realm of possibility, based on the number of interests, requests and I guess work they have done in the public sphere. It is a projection. What may impact on it, Hon. Member, Mr. Norton, is that people do not make requests, or they make requests with no documents or something sinister happens *force majeure* and they are not able to finish it. As with all projections, you can surpass it or you cannot meet it and they would have to explain what the circumstances were, but the availability of information, documents, *et cetera* is critical to any of the constitutional bodies, not just the PPC being able to do their investigations properly.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I think we have exhausted these questions.

Programme: 621-Public Procurement Commission – \$265,360,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Estimates

Programme: 621-Public Procurement Commission – \$5,500,000

Programme: 621-Public Procurement Commission- \$5,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the next agency is the Office of the President and that is supposed to start at 1 p.m. I am asking the Ministers to have their staff on standby because we do not know, we could be on time and at this moment, we are 16 minutes ahead of schedule or saved as of 12.01 p.m. So, it is 16 minutes saved. Let us resume and take the suspension now for lunch and be back at 1 p.m.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 12.02 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.12 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Coming up at this time is the Office of the President. Chief Whip for the Opposition, could I take back the time from the consideration of the Estimates that we went over for lunch? If not, I will start convening after a shorter break because we have to beg Members to come back in the House on time and already, we are starting 13 minutes late for the afternoon session.

Agency: 01 Office of the President

Current Estimates

Programme: 011 – Administration - \$1,498,453,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you may have the floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Minister, I ask that she turn her attention to the Staffing Details. At line item 6116, could you kindly indicate whether any consultants are employed here and, if so, could you kindly give the projects they are giving guidance on?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mdm. Lawrence. There are no consultancies here and no projects in this Staffing Details.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Hon. Members, both asking the question and Minister. If you prefer to sit rather than jumping up all the time, just press the microphone so I can recognise the microphone is on and that you want to raise a question. I will allow you to ask the questions from your sitting position. Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you may have the floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Maintenance of Buildings – 6242, could the Hon. Minister indicate which

buildings will this money be used for and what would be the major maintenance for these buildings? We are just going up every year.

Ms. Teixeira: Many of these buildings that are part of the complex of the Office of the President, including the State House and the Presidential Guard building, are not new buildings and most of them are wooden. The reason for the variance is related to the rehabilitation of works at the Presidential Guard building and the Special Protective Service (SPS) building at State House – the Presidential Guards building at the State House.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, I take you to line item 6272 – Electricity Charges, there is yet a significant increase again. Last year, \$249 million was budgeted and \$118 million was utilised and now \$249 million again. I remember, last year, when this question was asked, the Minister said that there were some arrears to the Guyana Power and Light (GPL). Is it that the arrears are still not being paid?

Ms. Teixeira: To answer the Hon. Member, the \$199 million is budgeted for arrears to GPL for the years 2022 and 2023 to be paid in 2024. Fifty million dollars is earmarked for electricity costs for the Office of the President for 2024.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I ask you to look at 6311 – Rates and Taxes. Here again, I see a large sum of money, I am not aware that any of the buildings are out of Georgetown. So, my question: is this \$8.5 million for arrears to the Georgetown Mayor and City Council (M&CC).

Ms. Teixeira: The buildings that we are paying rates and taxes on, Mdm. Lawrence, are under the Office of the President. The \$8.5 million is Vlissengen Road, Bourda; Lot 76 Upper Durban, Vlissengen Road Bourda; 164 Waterloo Street North Cummingsburg; Lot 22 Charlotte Street Bourda; Lot 57 Main North Cummingsburg; Lot 190-192 New Garden and Charlotte Streets Bourda; Vlissengen Road, Botanic Gardens; and Lot 65 High Street Kingston. We are not in arrears.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, you may have the floor.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Cde. Chairman, a follow up to that same question, line item 6311 – Rates and Taxes, we see a request for \$8.5 million in 2023 but the revised sum speaks to \$7.148 million. Why was the total sum not paid over?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you may have the floor.

1.19 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that, based on the rates that were charged, the amount of money due and paid was \$7.1 million, although they projected \$8.5 million.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, I am still at the electricity charges. The Hon. Minister just stated that they have budgeted to pay arrears for 2022 and 2023 this year. Last year, it was stated that \$199 million was budgeted last year to pay the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) for last year. I am trying to understand what the difficulty is in paying the GPL on time and why it is we are now two years in arrears.

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that, due to a number of pressing matters, the \$199 million was not paid and it will be paid in 2024. There were some other competing issues that had to be addressed and so the money was vired.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6281 – Security Services: I noticed the budget for 2023 was \$5 million. It has been increased to \$60 million. The revised amount for 2023 was \$53,960,000. For security services, are these persons from the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), the Guyana Police Force (GPF) or are they from a private company?

Ms. Teixeira: This amount of money, Hon. Member, covers private security services for senior officials in the year 2024. It is for their offices and residences. These are provided by two private security companies and there has been some increase in the rates they charge.

Dr. Cummings: Could you tell us the names of the companies?

Ms. Teixeira: The two companies are Kalibur Security and MMC Security Force Incorporated.

Dr. Cummings: A follow-up question. What is the rate of charge? What is the rate per hour?

Ms. Teixeira: Are you asking for the rate?

Dr. Cummings: Yes.

Ms. Teixeira: I am afraid they do not have it here, but we can provide that subsequently.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you very much.

Programme: 011 – Administration – \$1,498,453,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: We now turn to pages 38 and 39. We will do all the capital together. So, you do not have to change pages up and down. You just have to flip the page.

Programme: 012 – National Policy Development and Presidential Advisory Services – \$1,891,149,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: Could the Hon. Minister tell this Committee how many Advisors are listed here and what is the highest salary paid?

Ms. Teixeira: There is one Advisor under this heading, Mdm. Lawrence. There are a number of other persons such as the Director of the Guyana Technical Training College Incorporated (GTTC), the Commissioner/Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, the Deputy Commissioner/Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO) of the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, the National Security Advisor, Presidential Advisor, Director of Presidential Affairs, Special Assistant to the President, Head of Department, the Executive Liaison Officer and the Director of Press and Publicity Secretary. The highest paid person here would be the Director of the Guyana Technical Training College Incorporated, which is in the making. The others in this category, who are contracted employees, are Gardeners, Household Service Workers, Kitchen Assistants and Typist Clerks. Those are 10 persons.

Mr. Mahipaul: Would the Hon. Minister please state the salary and remuneration package for the Director of the Guyana Technical Training College Incorporated?

Ms. Teixeira: I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. I did not hear the question. I was trying to sort out something else.

Mr. Chairman: What is the salary for the Director of the Guyana Technical Training College Incorporated?

Ms. Teixeira: This is \$1,449,255.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, does that include the other benefits or is that just the salary?

Ms. Teixeira: As a contracted worker, it would include all the benefits – National Insurance Scheme (NIS), gratuity, *et cetera*.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I turn to line item 6321, which speaks to the Guyana Technical Training College Incorporated? There is the sum of \$50 million. I heard the Hon. Minister say it is in the making. Could the Hon. Minister say where this college will be operating from?

Could she provide the rental cost for the building that it will be utilising?

Ms. Teixeira: This institute, which is new, our Cabinet recently approved it, will be based at Port Mourant. The facility is there. So, the \$50 million is a startup for the college and the setting up of facilities, *et cetera*.

Mr. Mahipaul: Would they be renting a building at Port Mourant?

Ms. Teixeira: No. They would not be renting a building there. I believe it was raised by the Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, when he spoke on the floor during the debate, that this is a new institute and it would be close to the campus of the University of Guyana (UG) at Tain, Port Murant.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, for line item 6222, Field Materials and Supplies, I note in the staffing details that last year there were only five staff and in 2024, there are three. I am asking what field materials and supplies will be purchased to the tune of \$2 million for five staff.

Ms. Teixeira: We are still on Programme 012, as far as I know. Could the Hon. Member repeat the heading.? We are not seeing that.

Ms. Lawrence: Yes. This is on page 39 in the list of the staffing details. You had five. These are not the contracted employees. For Other Technical and Craft Skilled and Clerical and Office Support, you had five; now you have three in 2024.

Ms. Teixeira: That is not what we are seeing on page 39. We had four under Clerical and Office Support and now there are two. We have zero under Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled. Contracted Employees were 95 and now there are now 97. This is a total of 100.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, line item 6113 has one, line item 6114 has four and so that gives you five. If you go across to 2024, there is one at line item 6113 and two at line item 6114, which gives you three.

Ms. Teixeira: The total is 100. You are dealing with the year 2024. There are zero for Administration; zero for Senior Technical; one or Other Technical and Craft Skilled...

Ms. Lawrence: I am just looking at those two line items.

Ms. Teixeira: Which line items are you looking at?

Ms. Lawrence: They are line items 6113 and 6114.

Ms. Teixeira: Line item 6113 has one for 2023 and one for 2024. For Clerical and Office Support, there are four for 2023 and two for 2024. That is three with 97 contracted workers which make 100.

Ms. Lawrence: I am not dealing with the contracted employees. I am dealing with the administrative staff.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. The details are a total.

Ms. Lawrence: So, if you go across to line item 6222, Field Materials and Supplies, I am asking you, with this small number of administrative staff...The others that you called are already in an agency.

Ms. Teixeira: These are all the staff, Mdm. Lawrence.

Ms. Lawrence: The agency will get a lumpsum to deal with its administrative expenses.

Ms. Teixeira: This is a programme under the Office of the President (OP). The allocation that you are talking about at line item 6222 is for the entire staff of 100 and not just for the clerical or technical. The entire 100 people are taken care of with the \$2 million that is allocated this year for field materials – boots, batteries, *et cetera*. It is for 100 people.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Minister. Minister, I am at line item 6231, Fuel and Lubricants.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My apologies. Could you say how many vehicles make up the fleet?

Ms. Teixeira: Under this programme, there are 33 vehicles assigned to it.

Ms. Lawrence: Could you indicate the years – the oldest vehicle and what type of vehicle it is?

Ms. Teixeira: Could you hold on? [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]

Ms. Lawrence: I believe it is so when you look at the expense.

Ms. Teixeira: They have the list, but they do not have the age of the vehicles. We may be able to guess the ages of the vehicles, in some cases, by the licences' numbers. They will have to look for the ages of the vehicles. I cannot provide the vehicle numbers. They can provide how many vehicles are at so and so ages.

Ms. Lawrence: Could I follow-up with line item 6264, Vehicle Spares and Service? You are spending \$18 million a

year to maintain this fleet. I would like to ask when last a review was done in terms of the efficiency of these vehicles.

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised, Hon. Member, that an examination was done last year – an audit of the state of the vehicles. Out of this, they were able to board 50 vehicles that had been in use and were not in suitable condition for use at the Office of the President. That was just done last year.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, may I?

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

Ms. Lawrence: May I turn the Minister's attention to page 464?

Mr. Chairman: Is it page 464?

Ms. Lawrence: I am sorry. It is page 468.

Mr. Chairman: It is page 468, but we are not there yet.

Ms. Lawrence: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: I am sorry. Go ahead. You are on track.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. Minister, for the Office of the Commissioner of Information, could you kindly inform this Committee who is the present Commissioner of Information and how many reports were submitted for 2023? This is on page 468.

1.34 p.m.

There is a Commissioner of Information who was appointed, and he is functioning. He has an office, and he is working. As you would have seen from the press, a number of issues have been raised. The amounts assigned from the \$14 million are as follow: The salary, gratuity and vacation allowance for the Commissioner is an annual amount of \$8,206,708. The operational cost of the secretariat is \$12.5 million.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, the second part of my question is, how many reports have been submitted?

Ms. Teixeira: I am not aware of any being submitted at this point, madam.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. How many persons make up the staff complement and where is the office located?

Ms. Teixeira: It is the Commissioner and one staff; this is on East Street. I cannot remember the lot number for the office right now.

Ms. Lawrence: What is the name of the Commissioner?

Ms. Teixeira: His name is Retired Justice Ramson (Snr).

Ms. Lawrence: On the same page, under the same heading, there is the President Youth Advisory Council. Minister, \$75 million was budgeted last year and they only spent \$14.1 million. We are allocating another \$75 million. Could you kindly say what are some of the programmes that we will see coming out from the Youth Advisory Council?

Ms. Teixeira: I apologise for the delay in responding, Hon. Member. The programme of the Youth Advisory Council relates to a number of activities in empowering youths. For example, they would have countrywide exercises to showcase all of the programmes that are available to young people through the Public Service Ministry (PSM) or other institutions. That is one. They would also have a President's Youth Advisory Council (PYAC) plus Government fair. They would have a country for labour. That is under Scholarships and Youth.

The other programme is Labour and Youth. It would be a countywide exercise where the Ministry of Labour would be able to showcase all the programmes that they have to offer the young people. There would be one such activity in all of the regions. The larger regions may require geographic split and have more than one such PYAC plus Government fair. They would also have signs put up to encourage persons to attend the event and so those will have a cost factor.

Business and Youth: they would be having a countrywide exercise with the Small Business Bureau (SBB) to explain to young people the process that they will have to undertake in order to have their own businesses. Again, in larger regions, there may be a geographic split.

Under the Ministry of Housing and Water, this is particularly highlighted. They will make available applications and assist with processing at the Ministry of Housing and Water. The Ministry of Housing and Water will be a part of this activity as well.

Agriculture and Youth: there will be a countrywide exercise where the Ministry of Agriculture and its agencies would be able to showcase all the programmes to offer young people. Where there are larger Ministries, they would have a geographic split.

Human Services and Youth is a similar one where they are actively working with the young influencers who come under that Ministry to work in collaboration with them in support of training development and follow up.

Health and Youth: again, there would be a countrywide exercise with the Ministry of Health to showcase all the training programmes that they have to offer young people. Again, there will be a geographic split in the larger regions.

President's 23 would be another programme where \$23 million would be allocated. Twenty-three sports athletes will be sponsored by the Youth Advisory Council. This programme includes a direct investment into gears and other materials needed for them to excel at their games in which they represent our country. Each athlete will be sponsored with a sum of \$1 million per year. The selection of these athletes will be guided by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and His Excellency the President. The sports covered will be cross fit, boxing, cricket, football, table tennis, squash, track and field, body building, swimming and basketball. [Mr. Mahipaul: *(inaudible)*] That is okay. You wanted to hear and so you will hear. You cannot stop me when I am on the floor. Only the Speaker can, I admit. I defer.

Under the Agriculture and Innovation Entrepreneurship Programme (AIEP), which the Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, spoke about during the debate, the graduates from the Faculty of Agriculture would be employed to spearhead the shade house projects and also assist with the daily operations of the Ministry of Agriculture's projects on hand. This is so that there would be more shade houses in the 10 regions to facilitate the growth of high value crops. Obviously, this programme, as appointed by Minister, is to reduce the level of the agriculture import bill.

Innovation of Science and Technology Convention: This is to encourage innovation of youth from tertiary levels and different age groups. Innovative projects will be called for from every region and a grand exhibition will be held for the public. Projects will be aimed at real-time problems with the objective of finding solutions. Competition winners will be judged, and prizes will be granted to further develop their innovation. This is another \$4 million.

Community Development is \$10 million. This has to do with the development of five projects within five communities which aim to build the skills of the young people while establishing a sense of togetherness. One of the areas is Leopold Street. Youth activities will be developed to keep youths of the area engaged and out of trouble. I think this was an area which had a block-making project under the Ministry of Housing and Water. This will be in the form of community projects, sports education, vocational education and technical education. The innovation fund will be \$10

million. The fund will be in place to fund projects not taken into account during this budget submission. The fund will aim to support projects of the President's Youth Advisory Council.

Conference and seminars are \$6 million. This is a learning opportunity for young people to network while they learn the vital ways of society such as writing, planning for a career and finance monitoring.

Coffee nights – \$3 million. This is under the Advisory Council to host 'coffee nights' when young people are able to showcase their talents, spoken words, poetry and music. That is the proposal or the programmes for \$75 million for 2024.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Minister. Minister, how many times did the Youth Advisory Council meet last year? Could you also point me to where I can lay my hands on copies of its reports?

Ms. Teixeira: This body was appointed in the latter quarter of 2022. They meet monthly. It is less than a year. Although you are asking for a report, they have probably just made a year, and so a report will not be ready or required at this point. The members meet once a month.

Mr. Jones: A follow-up. The Hon. Minister indicated that this body was constituted in the latter part of 2022. We note that the request for allocation in 2023 was \$75 million and the revised sum was \$14.177 million. Is it a case that, last year, this body, which was constituted in 2022, did no work?

Ms. Teixeira: I would not say that \$14 million is no work. If they used \$14 million, it cannot be "no work". The issue is that they were newly formed, and they were trying to get their feet together, as far as I understand, and to define their parameters of responsibilities. As you know, the Council comes from different parts of Guyana. They are not all Georgetown-based. They did not use the amount, you are correct, but it is a good thing that they used \$14 million out of that in terms of trying to get themselves sorted out and positioned. In fact, I know that they went to a number of regions to visit and try to work out what their terms of reference were going to be and what they would do since these are young people who are taking on these leadership roles. I would not get too concerned. I would have been concerned if they had used money and they could not show anything for it. They only used \$14 million, which I assume was for travelling and moving around, *et cetera*.

Mr. Jones: I have two follow-up questions. Would the Hon. Minister agree with me that...Noting that this body only

utilised \$14.177 million, why are we requesting \$75 million this year? Last year, they requested the same amount and only utilised \$14 million. The second question is, do these members of the Youth Advisory Council receive a stipend?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, they do receive a stipend of \$40,000 a month. As you know, they come from different parts of the country. I think the \$75 million being put again is to allow them to do the programmes, which they have now gotten clarity and definition on, in 2024. A lot of their programmes will be going out, meeting young people and basically educating them so that they will know what is available and they will know what opportunities they could use and have discussions with young people on issues concerning them. That is the impression that I have gotten. Now that they have been able to clarify and define their programmes, this is a year in which you will see them doing much more than they have done before.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister indicate if there is a structure in place in terms of who is the head of the structure and what that structure looks like?

Ms. Teixeira: I do not have all the details here, but I know there is a structure. Dr. Kanhai is the head of it and Tracy Shamsudeen is the Deputy. They have a number of other people, such as secretaries, who are responsible for different areas, but I do not have that information with me here.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, I would like to take us to the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. Could the Hon. Minister state which lands have been gifted or sold to other agencies in the government over the last year by the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission?

Ms. Teixeira: I would like us to turn to the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission to see where that line item is. What line item are we dealing with?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: We are dealing with line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations.

Ms. Teixeira: I am aware of that. If we go to Appendix T, that is where the breakdown for Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission is. I am just asking you, in relation to the question that you are asking, where is it on the page? What item are you referring to? Is it statutory wages, other charges, rates and taxes? What?

1.49 p.m.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: The total revenue.

Ms. Teixeira: The total revenue. In relation to 2023, that is over a billion dollars. Is that correct? So, what is it you are asking? Is it to which agencies lands were gifted?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Which lands were gifted or sold to other agencies over the last year.

Ms. Teixeira: I would not have that information, as we do not usually question revenue. I apologise for not being prepared for that. The lands that would have been assigned by the Cabinet, through the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission for housing, *etcetera* would not have a cost in terms of Government paying the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission for the land. It is Government's land. However, I cannot say what private land may have been sold or not sold by the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission or processed by the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. That may be more suitable to ask as a question to a Minister during the normal non-budget period.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, Hon. Minister Teixeira is perfectly correct. We are examining the policies and the programmes for which the figure in 2024 is destined. I am allowing a bit of latitude in asking about performance for last year's expenditure. That is a little discretion I am giving, but we do not deal, technically, with revenues at this stage.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Understood, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, the Institute of Applied Science and Technology (IAST). I note that they are having a hefty increase in 2024, which we are very happy about. Could you kindly tell me what the Guyanese public can look forward to in terms of research and development that can be taken up by the private sector in terms of manufacturing and so on using our local products? What can we look forward to in 2024 from IAST?

Ms. Teixeira: In response to the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, a number of the research that is going on that would be of use and value added in relation to manufacturing include the rice-based projects that have been researched, the purple sweet potato nutrition drink project at Annai, the development of the Rupununi essences and the development of – I will not pronounce this correctly – Kaiambay bark moisturising cream and crabwood seed facial scrub. So, for those of us women, we may want to check on that one. Also, they have been working on fortifying soil with charcoal, for example, and other products to make the soil more fertile to deal with areas where the soil may have become depleted. So, those are a number of the initiatives

which may be of interest. I am sure the women in Parliament – maybe the men too – would be interested in the new facial scrubs that have been looked at by the IAST. Maybe, the IAST can bring some samples to show the Members of Parliament (MPs) how these products work.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what is the status of the board of directors of the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission?

Ms. Teixeira: The Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission's board of directors is not in place.

Ms. Fernandes: Can the Hon. Minister say how is it that the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission is operating, given that the Act, Cap 59:05, I believe, stipulates that there shall be a board and the board shall meet monthly?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that, although there is no board, the Chief Executive Officer, under the law, has certain things he can do without the board.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say why is it that from 2020 to now the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission did not see it necessary to put a board in place and if there is any plan in 2024 to have that board constituted?

Ms. Teixeira: It is a matter that is of importance, and we sincerely hope that in 2024 we will be able to have the board appointed.

Programme: 012 – National Policy Development and Presidential Advisory Service – \$1,891,149,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 013 – Defence and National Security – \$815,286,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings. There were no sums there in 2023 and 2022, but there is a sum there now of \$16 million. Could the Hon. Minister say which building will be rented and for what purpose, please?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Mahipaul. Due to security issues, I cannot give the location of the buildings that will be rented, but these are safe houses that will be rented for obvious purposes.

Programme: 013 – Defence and National Security – \$815,286,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 014 – Public Policy and Planning – \$473,672,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, line item 6265. Could the Hon. Minister indicate who will be using this amount to travel and to travel where and do what? There are no staff here in the staffing details.

Ms. Teixeira: It is the same as it was last year. It has not increased, and it would involve travelling for outreaches and other activities related to stakeholder consultations. This is all a part of a number of the presidential outreaches or outreaches of staff of the Office of the President. The staff that work in this section of Public Policy and Planning are already employed in the Office of the President (OP) but this is particularly where they are dealing with public policy and planning, which has to do, in many cases, with outreaches, discussions and community meetings to ascertain what people are thinking and what people would desire, *etcetera*.

Ms. Lawrence: Given your answer, Hon. Minister, and the answer which you proposed under Administration, I wish to ask you about line items 6221 through 6224. Since the staff are already catered for under Administration, why are we buying these supplies for them again when they are under Administration? I can understand the print and so on, but why are we buying field materials and drugs and medical supplies when they are already enjoying this under Administration?

Ms. Teixeira: This is to be used by other members of staff as well from Administration and not just the persons who are dealing with this.

Ms. Lawrence: So, we are catering twice for them. The same I will ask in terms of cleaning and extermination services at line item 6283.

Ms. Teixeira: Sorry. Could you repeat your question, MP Lawrence?

Ms. Lawrence: My question, Hon. Minister, is in relation to line item 6283 – Cleaning and Extermination Services. Since these persons are already staff of the Administration of the Office of the President, which part are we cleaning and exterminating again because this is catered for under Administration?

Ms. Teixeira: As difficult as it is to understand, which I agree, I am sure that this is not exploited in a large way; it is not a large amount of money. Where there may be cases where staff have to carry out additional responsibilities and

field materials and supplies are needed, they would pull from this. I do share the concerns of Ms. Lawrence.

Ms. Lawrence: I would like to draw the attention of the Minister to line item 6283. Given that the staff is already in the administration of the Office of the President and cleaning and extermination services is catered for there, why are we now catering for this expense here, where there is no building, no floor or no space? What is happening here? There is a little revolving fund here.

2.04 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: This is half of a million dollars for termite and pest treatment. I assume that termites and pests appear several places and any place. Maybe under Programme 1, they do termite and pest termination twice a year and they use this money to do it twice a year under this head.

Ms. Lawrence: I would like to turn the Minister's attention to line item 6321 and take her to page 468, GO-Invest (Guyana Office for Investment). Here, again, we have added a hefty amount, increasing it from \$318 million to \$375 million for 2024.

Mr. Chairman: Let us give the Guyana Office for Investment's staff time to... They are in place. We welcome Dr. Ramsaroop.

Ms. Teixeira: Could the Hon. Member repeat her question please?

Ms. Lawrence: I did not pose it Minister, so I will now.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, repeat please.

Ms. Lawrence: Yes, Minister. We have increased from \$318 million to \$375 million for the Guyana Office for Investment. When will the Guyanese public have a report showing how much investment this agency has brought to the country for 2023 and what is it proposing to do for 2024? If I go to your programme performance statements in Volume 2, I note that the "Number of new national projects developed" you say not applicable, the "Value of investment generated through GO-Invest" you say not applicable, and the "Value of exports generated through GO-Invest" you say not applicable. How are you asking us to vote for these sums and we are not seeing any report of the information based on the performance of this agency? Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: To the Hon. Member, she said that I do not publish these documents. I read what is in them as well. With regard to the issue of the number of public

consultations that have been posted, they only have one for 2024, I believe. And a performance report on the national development plan, they have one scheduled for 2024. They said they have reports that are available and will be sent to, I assume, the Cabinet, in a short while. They have...

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, please pull the microphone (mic) down so we can hear you clearly.

Ms. Teixeira: According to the advice, Go-Invest has brought in 215 investments between 2020 to now.

Ms. Lawrence: And for the exports?

Ms. Teixeira: They are not responsible for exports; they are responsible for investments.

Ms. Lawrence: Really?

Ms. Teixeira: I see what you are getting at because in Volume 2 it has:

“Value of exports generated through Go-Invest (G\$)...”

Ms. Lawrence: It is an indicator.

Ms. Teixeira: So, you are correct in asking the question. It is:

“Value of investment generated through Go-Invest...”

Ms. Lawrence: An indicator also with the economic value.

Ms. Teixeira: This may have to be clarified with the Director of Budget and the agency to see if it is correctly placed or not. [Mr. Mahipaul: You hurry and put it together.] It is not hurriedly put together.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, do you have a follow-up or can I put...?

Programme: 014 – Public Policy and Planning – \$473,672,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 015 – Environmental Management and Compliance – \$1,665,751,000

Mr. Ramsaroop: Mr. Chairman, I have a bit of a concern here. In 2023, there was \$14.5 million allocated to training. Only 20% of that was spent in 2023, which is about \$2.9 million. It is under the line item 6321, the lumpsum for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In 2024, there is \$3.5 million. Could the Hon. Minister say if this amount here is sufficient to build the capacity for the EPA staff given the

rise and the speed in which we are exploring our oil production, if they have the capacity, if she is quite comfortable with that amount?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that the agency has donor support to create permanent training programmes to assist in the capacity development of the agency. Hence, that is why in education and training, they had \$57,000, used \$51,000 and they will be having \$54,000 this year. But they will be having support from the donor in terms of creating permanent training programmes for capacity building and staff.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I now put the...

Mr. Ramsaroop: I was just trying to get the button. Thank you, Sir. My question is why is it in 2023 there was only 20% of that money being spent?

Ms. Teixeira: Is this under the same issue of training?

Mr. Ramsaroop: Yes.

Ms. Teixeira: The EPA did not use all of the allocations as it was able to pull support from one of the Canadian agencies that was able to provide some support in terms of developing structured programmes, as well as providing the advice/technical support free at this point.

Mr. Holder: Line item 6284 – Other Goods and Services Purchased: Could the Minister state if funds for legal fees for the oil spill, the parent company guarantee matter currently in the courts, will be charged under this line item? Could she say also how much was spent thus far? I will follow up based on her answer.

Ms. Teixeira: Under line item 6284, Hon. Member, there are consultancies for the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) under the Department of Environment and Climate Change in 2024, but this does not include legal fees or legal representation in any cases before the courts. That would fall under, I assume, the Attorney General's remit. We do not pay for any legal representation in court matters under this head.

Mr. Holder: Just a follow-up. Member of Parliament Datadin, who is also the EPA's lawyer in the environmental matter, stood in this House and emphatically stated that any citizen can walk into the EPA and view the documents relating to the \$2 million guarantee. The EPA since issued a press release. I am asking the Minister if she can confirm what the EPA said, and if she does, and if the answer is yes,

I would ask if you can ask the MP Datadin to apologise to the House for misleading all of us.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, you need to bring that matter to the Speaker's attention. You cannot ask the Minister to ask Mr. Datadin. If he breaches any matter, you can bring it to the House and take it to the Committee of Privileges if I am not able to pronounce on it.

Mr. Holder: I am so guided, Cde. Chairman.

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

Mr. Norton: Just checking the strategies, impacts, and indicators, could I ask the Minister if they draw a distinction between preservation and conservation?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: If a distinction is drawn between preservation and conservation... [Mr. McCoy: You need to (*inaudible*).] You need to go to school, common entrance times.

Ms. Teixeira: I am not aware that we are having this discussion. It would be a rather interesting one that the Hon. Member is proposing. However, in relation to environmental management and compliance, we are guided by the Low Carbon Development Strategy which this House approved. Under a number of items there are provisions for environmental impact studies and climate change related studies to allow us to be more *au fait* and more prepared in relation to what could be climate change issues which Guyana has touted at the international level and particularly at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP) 28, 27 and 26. The distinctions between conservation and preservation, I think the LCDS document guides on that issue and certainly it might be an interesting debate to have in this House in the future.

Mr. Norton: Could I ask the Hon. Minister if in the document, the focus is on preservation or conservation...? If you say:

“IMPACTS:

- Preservation of the natural environment through development of new policies on the environment and strict compliance with environmental regulations.”

If you say that, preservation, as I understand it, presupposes you will protect and not use; conservation is both protection

and use. I am trying to get the difference because it is important in a country that needs environmental space.

Ms. Teixeira: The overarching issue is sustainable development. Obviously, we have not as a country, under various governments, supported a position that we are quixotic. Therefore, when Iwokrama was developed, one view in the early stages, when President Hoyte was there and so on, was that we were not to touch the land at all. We were not to develop the land at all with Iwokrama and what was to be the expansion of the Kaieteur National Park.

2.19 p.m.

However, overtime that position was changed then and now to do with sustainable development. Therefore, as a carbon development country, we are preserving the forest, but we are also using the forest. We are mining but we have measures to ensure there is not degradation and destruction. We are a carbon-sync country, we have one of the largest intact forests in the world, therefore we are not doing what many countries have done, which is just to clear-fell the forest. What we are doing is sustainable, and management of the forest, management of our resources to make sure that we, as a people, live and we can develop as well as we can preserve the environment that we are blessed to live for the next many generations. It is not either or, we are preserving at the same as looking at sustainable development. I gave the example of Iwokrama because Iwokrama is one in which we decided, as a people, since 1991, in the Act of Iwokrama, that it would look at sustainable development for wood products, for value-added, as well as preserving the environment. As you would remember, you and I go back to those days.

Mr. Norton: That is why I want to correct the Hon. Minister and I think I should. First of all, as the person who headed the Environment at the Ministry at the time, the focus was never on protection; it was always on conservation. May I also add that Iwokrama was not 1991. It was 1989 but the...

Ms. Teixeira: I stand corrected.

Mr. Norton: ...critical point here is not that. The critical point is that we have a key document in which we are putting preservation, when, in fact, if you are saying that you are pursuing sustainable development, then you should use conversation as distinct from protection, because protection pre-supposes the non-use, as you were suggesting. What I am merely suggesting here is that it should be brought in consonance with the language of sustainable development.

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Mr. Chairman, I think that this is an argument of semantics, in the sense that sustainable development conceptually deals with the use of your resources in a way that is non-destructive, preserving balance, and equitable in a variety of ways you deal with it, so that we have forest cover, what you call net omissions. How do we preserve that and, at the same time, how do we still cut wood to make timber to live and to develop our country? The same thing with, whether it is even mining, how do we mine but make sure that the forest and the environment are not damaged?

It has to do with the conscientious and a principled management of our resources. So, I think, unfortunately, when the LCDS was brought to this House and a number of key persons were missing, including Mr. Norton, so we did not benefit from the depth of his knowledge. At the same time, I think that the LCDS captures that formula that we have made and is unique to the world of how do we protect our resources – and we are a natural resource rich country – at the same time, how do we live, how do we develop and how do we not become quixotical, so the tourists come and see us in the interior wearing traditional clothes and we are eating cassava bread and we have no water, no electricity, no schools and no health centres. That whole concept was rejected in the 1980s and 1990s by Guyana and by the political parties of that time – those who were in government and those who were not – that this was not the direction we wanted to go in. That is the same battle that is going on and some other issues to do with natural resources in Guyana. Do we leave it alone in the ground or do we use it to develop our country and to develop the future of our country? That whole debate of what you call preservation versus conservation goes on in the same case the Hon. Member was referring to with oil and gas.

Mr. Norton: The Hon. Minister puts it down to semantics, but it is not. Hon. Minister, with all due respect, I think we need to develop the concepts clearly. In the process, mention was made of a carbon sync. There are dangers in using that concept when we accept, in the same period that you are talking about, that our forest is a national patrimony. The danger of talking about it solely as a common sync, creates the condition for the developed world to argue that it is a global-commons, and you would agree we fought that. All I am saying is for us to put into these documents the precise language that will help us in the future because it has implications for oil and gas and others. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] I hope that at some stage you can curtail the unintelligent on the other side.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Based on what I understand the Hon. Member is saying, I will ask the editors or writers of Volume II, in particular the reference to the Environmental Management and Compliance programme of the Office of the President, to review the section and to see if they are, with the Climate Change unit and the EPA, in agreement with the point that you are making. If not, it remains as it is.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, fair comments and questions revolve along the policy for which the allocation is provided. Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. Line item 6321, could the Hon. Minister say under National Parks Commission, what are the allocations under this sub-heading that will be going to the various parks, for example, national parks, Kaieteur Falls, *et cetera*?

Ms. Teixeira: We are not hearing you well, Ms. Fernandes, Hon. Member. It is very low. It is not the usual, Hon. Ms. Fernandes.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you can sit and pull the microphone closer to you and we will hear you better.

Ms. Teixeira: National Parks Commission, I heard part.

Ms. Fernandes: Hon. Minister, I was asking you for a breakdown, under the National Parks Commission, for those allocations. It covers a series of different parks. I am asking if we can have a breakdown individually, a disaggregation of those figures.

Ms. Teixeira: Could I just ask in return, on page 651, is that breakdown not adequate or not helpful on the Appendix T? Not all the agencies which are subventions agencies are on Appendix T; some are and some are not. The National Parks Commission is, and it is on page 651 of Volume I. Is that sufficient or now do you want to ask questions on that information?

Ms. Fernandes: To be clearer, I do have this breakdown in front of me, but it does not give much clarity as to, specifically, the National Park. How much of this allocation is going to be used for the National Park and so forth?

Ms. Teixeira: Remember, this covers the Kaieteur National Park, the Joe Vieira Park and the National Park. What you are asking, as I understand it, is for a breakdown of the Kaieteur National Park, the Joe Vieira Park and the National

Park. Do we have that? I believe it is managed by one Board. They then deal with it programmatically, internally. That is my understanding. The allocation that is made for National Parks Commission, the Board will then decide how much will be for the Kaieteur National Park and for the Joe Vieira Park in their summations so that the calculations here to do with staff and their benefits and the infrastructural works are all based on all of them. We would not have, at this point, any kind of breakdown of how much they are going to give to Joe Vieira Park, to Kaieteur National Park and the National Park. Included in this too, remember Mdm. Fernandes, is also the Guyana Zoological Park (Zoo). The Zoo is part of this. I do not have that. That has not been provided. What we have is the total figures from the Commission.

Ms. Fernandes: Could I ask if the Hon. Minister could commit to providing that breakdown after, specifically when it comes to the Zoo, because we would like to see, I think the entire nation would like to see, significant investment when it comes to the Zoo right now, a complete overhaul and so forth. If that information could be provided, it would be very, very useful.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, that can be done. We can ask the Commission. I want to say this: when we go through these same data at page 651, there are a number of areas that would be of interest to you in terms of the Kaieteur National Park, what is being catered for in materials and equipment for example, or in the Joe Vieira Park and the Botanical Gardens, and the protected areas like Kanuku and Shell Beach, moneys that have to do with fuel and lubricants. Within the budget that is presented, they have a number of heads which include these other areas that fall under the National Parks Commission. They are also catering for maintenance of four new buildings in the protected areas and two new buildings in the urban spaces. They also have planned for local and international events, for the urban parks and the Botanical Gardens, the National Park tarmac, Botanical Gardens benches and walking paths, and the Kaieteur trails. They have an allocation there for maintenance of infrastructure of the various areas. I think in the sense of how they do it, for the Joe Vieira Park they have allocated... the increase caters for security and additional services to new buildings, *et cetera*, in the protected areas and in the urban spaces.

When you go through the heads on Appendix T there are disaggregations, not by individual areas but where you can see they are putting money forward for the various entities that fall under their responsibility. In the Capital

Expenditure, you will have a better idea of that one when we come to Capital Expenditure. They have a \$100,000,000 for Capital Expenditure [Ms. Fernandes: *(Inaudible)*] Not in terms of a line item. I know what you are talking about. I know exactly what you are talking about.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I do not know what the two of you are talking about.

Ms. Teixeira: We are talking about the Zoo.

Mr. Chairman: Please talk to me.

Ms. Teixeira: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. We are both advocates for the Zoo. Clearly [*inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question that... Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, as one of the indicators, I think at 9, it is stated that three risk assessments were conducted. Could we be told what are the three and how you arrived at the prediction or the forecast of five for 2024?

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Member asked about National Parks Commission. Is that correct? Yes, Sir.

Mr. Norton: You have in the Indicators for the Environment at “9 Number of risks assessment conducted 3”.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, I saw.

Mr. Norton: I am trying to find out what are the three risks assessments that were done. You then said that you are going to forecast for five. What are the factors that would have informed this particular number of five?

Ms. Teixeira: Give us a minute. These are not your normal number questions. Do you realise that? Which you are very kindly allowing, Sir.

2.34 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: It is a normal policy question.

Ms. Teixeira: You do have to give me a chance to get the answer.

Mr. Chairman: I am doing that, Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members: *(Inaudible)*

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please, she has done extremely well so far, leading us for the last four hours.

Mr. Norton: We are not criticising her, Mr Chairman. We welcome it.

Mr. Chairman: I see you are getting some consensus too.

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that in 2023 these three risk assessments were done. They were internal in terms of assessing the agency and what are some of the issues they deal with. The five that have been proposed relate to what are new areas that the agency will be addressing, such as chemicals, *et cetera*. They do need to open up and have additional areas where they look at risk assessments and what they have traditionally been dealing with.

Programme: 015 – Environmental Management and Compliance – \$1,665,751,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 016 – Police Complaints Authority – \$77,742,000

Mr. Ramjattan: Sir, I notice in line item 6241, Rental of Buildings was zero last year revised, and we had put aside \$18 million, and this year we have \$25 million. What is the cause of that non-spending? Did we not rent any buildings for or pay the rent?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, I think you are aware where the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) is right now. It shares the building with the Ombudsman, the Public Service Appellate Tribunal (PSAT) and the Bar Association on Brickdam. They put in last year with the hope of renting a building, but most of the buildings they were looking at were far too expensive and, therefore, they were not able to spend the money. They have come back this year trying to see if they can, again, try and rent a building for the purposes of the Police Complaints Authority.

Mr. Ramjattan: Could I ask then that, probably, that is what is going to explain security services? It was zero and now it is \$13 million again.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, because the Ombudsman is in the same building, and he takes responsibility for a number of the cost for the building. For example, the Ombudsman, whom we dealt with earlier this morning, would pay for a number of the costs. In this case, this particular one, line item 6281 for 2023, it is that there was no new building. They remained in the same building and the Ombudsman and the others paid the security for the entire building. The Ombudsman, PSAT, Bar Association and PCA all share the building on Brickdam.

Mr. Ramjattan: Any special effort this year to get another building and *(inaudible)*.

Ms. Teixeira: They need to advertise and see what they can afford. The cost of rental is very high.

Programme: 016 – Police Complaints Authority – \$77,742,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 011 – Administration – \$962,950,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, project code 1702300, Men on Mission Programme (MOM). Sir, last year the Hon. Member was kind enough to indicate that this is a new programme and that they were putting the measures in place to ensure the structure is there for the expenditure of \$500 million and we see that the \$500 million were all spent out and this year another sum of \$500 million is budgeted, bringing the total for the programme so far to \$1 billion. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what is the structure that is now in place to ensure the proper spending of this money?

Ms. Teixeira: (*Inaudible*) Hon. Member, there is a structure under the National Committee which has been created, headed by the President; the Committee Chairperson, who I believe is the Chief-of-Staff; the Vice Chairman; Regional Committee Chairmen from the 10 regions; secretaries. They have a number of programmes heads underneath, strategic health, administration, business and employment is the third one, planning and marketing, education, training and sports. There is a structure; there is a National Committee that meets, and they have, in terms of last year, what their programme was and what they used the money for. We have a report on that. If you would like me to share that, we can do that on what they use the half of a billion dollars for, and their programme this year for what they intend to use the half of a billion dollars for.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. The Hon. Minister was kind enough to say that she is willing to share the programme for what the money was spent on last year. I would like to say that, yes, we will like a copy of that programme and if she is willing to also share the plan for this year's sum of \$500 million.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, I also believe that these hearings are public and, therefore, I can read it out whilst you also get a copy. You have read about a number of prefab houses that were built to help persons who were very poor and indigent. There were 50 of these built in 2023; the supply of building materials to various regions to assist with... [Hon.

Members: (*Inaudible*) I am sorry you do not like to

hear this. You would like this to be surreptitiously shared around.

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Chair, this is a public document.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I would like to hear this. Please talk to me.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Mr. Chair, this is a public document, why I cannot read it and only hand it out in here? Why the public cannot know? The public needs to know that 50 houses were built, prefab houses, two-bedroom each, for people who were very poor and indigent. We saw photographs of this in the newspapers. We helped supply timber and materials that were given to Regions 4 & 6 in a number of the projects that had to be done and the building of the different facilities. There was a Guyana Defence Force (GDF) officer's 'fallen heroes' assistance of \$2 million, in terms of the support for the various families, in terms of assistance to those, and there is a breakdown of that as well coming up to approximately \$29 million, with the assistance to the various families. Humanitarian assistance was \$20 million. Logistics support for the MOM: a 15 seater, including fuel, lubricants, and maintenance for one year, this was \$11.4 million; an enclosed canter to be able to move fuel, lubricants, and maintenance for a year, \$12 million; double cab pickup, again, fuel, lubricants, and maintenance; the purchase of a prefab building for the MOM's office and this will be erected at Base Camp Ayanganna, the site is to be identified; a thirteen-seat minibus or bus for \$18 million. So they were able to, in 2023, spend the money in a number of areas that are transparent and people are able to benefit. And this can be circulated afterwards.

For 2024, they have a number of activities for the Republic: essay competition for boys 8 to 12 and secondary 14 to 18; provision of homes and assistance with construction for various facilities for elderly persons with disabilities. They have programmes relating to International Women's Day, World Tuberculosis Day, *et cetera*. World Health Day, particularly to do with men's health fair, men and physical health issues; World Day for safety and health; Mother's Day distribution of hampers across regions to single mothers in particular; Independence Road Relay; World Tobacco Day, Father's Day; United Nations Public Service Day; World Hepatitis Day; youth camp, one in each county to culminate with a big event – so this will be in August during the holidays. International Literacy Day, mainly focused on boys for obvious reasons because Men on Mission is relating to trying to make males more engaged as change agents in our

society; spelling bee competitions; a number of issues relating to mental health and male mental health; the anniversary is 28th October of MOM; the issues of diabetes, particularly to do with men and World AIDS Day, and so on. They have a number of areas they want to focus on for this year and so the half of a million dollars, of course, as I said, and as is described, is to do with humanitarian assistance, vocational education and social training, but also trying to ensure that men, males are getting more involved in their communities, their families, *et cetera*, as was the original intent of this programme.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chair, we are very happy to hear that 50 new homes were constructed, two-bedroom homes for persons who could not have afforded it. We have also heard of other items that were purchased for the enhancement and betterment of the lives of the vulnerable. May I ask, the procurement of these goods and services requires us to follow the Procurement Act of 2003, and one would have expected to see public advertisement so that one can bid to provide the services, especially when it comes to the construction of these homes, the purchasing of the enclosed canter, the prefab building, and the 13-seater minibus; all of them fall within the limit that requires the Procurement Act to come into play. May I ask the Honourable Minister, why is it that the Procurement Act of 2003 was not followed for the procurement of these goods and services, and would it be followed in the spending of the \$500 million for this sum that is now for 2024?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member, I think the assumption you are making is that the Procurement Act was not followed. The Procurement Act provides for a variety of ways in which one procures goods and services for the government and, of course, one is open tender, two is selective tender, three is restricted tender. There is also, if the threshold is not over a certain rate it can be done by the Ministerial Tender Board, which could use restricted or selective or even open tender. You also then have sole tendering in specific cases as provided for by the Procurement Act.

2.49 p.m.

I think your assumption would not be correct. In fact, I am assured that they did follow procurement laws as required by going to, in some cases, selective tendering and, in other cases, restricted or sole tendering.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, this is my last question on this line item. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to layover the documents to show that the construction of the 50 homes and the purchase of the 13-seater bus went to the National

Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) for approval? I believe the Hon. Member said that it was a \$18 million purchase. The Procurement Act does spell out when one utilises what system, whether it is sole sourcing, three quote or public tendering. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to layover the documents to support the main capital items in this purchase?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. I will ask the Permanent Secretary (PS) to advise me and provide the information for me to circulate.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Minister, the law provides for each project to have a project profile. I assume you have built these 30 or how many houses there are. Could you layover for us the project profile for 2023 and give us the project profile for 2024?

Ms. Teixeira: Any submission to the Ministry of Finance to do with a budget must have a project profile of some sort. Therefore, what is in Volume III is just one sentence in terms of Men on Mission (MOM) but it had to provide some documentation. We will have to ask the Office of the President and Ministry of Finance to provide us with that.

Mr. Mahipaul: Project code 1214100 – Office and Residence of the President: There is a budgeted sum of \$67,950,000. The breakdown tells us it is for the payment of retention and upgrading of facilities. Could the Hon. Minister say which of these facilities will be upgraded? What specifically are the works to be done and whether it is at the Office of the President (OP) or the residency of the President?

Ms. Teixeira: There is a rollover project from 2023 – the construction of the new training centre for the presidential guard in the Castellani compound for the sum of \$3,180,000. For new projects, there are the upgrade of the electro system for both the OP and State House at \$21,820,000; extension of the training and administration building at the Castellani House for \$2,949,000; remodel of the kitchen and barracks with sand filling at the bottom of the building at the Castellani House for \$30 million; and extensive rehabilitation works to the special protective services office at State House for \$10 million. That is a total of \$67,950,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: Project code 2405200 – Land Transport: In 2021, \$67,600,000 was spent for the purchasing of vehicles. In 2022, \$70,882,000 was spent for the purchasing of vehicles. In 2023, \$100 million was spent for the purchasing of vehicles. Here again, we see another \$100 million for the purchasing of vehicles in 2024. Could the Hon. Minister tell

us what type of vehicles will be purchased here and why do the Ministry need to purchase so many vehicles since 2021 to now?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Hon. Mahipaul. I am sure you heard me earlier when I spoke of when we were dealing with the Office of the President under the current expenditure that it had done a review of the vehicles. I think was an asking question from Ms. Lawrence. A total of 50 vehicles, as a result, were boarded in 2023. That is to just give you an idea that 50 vehicles were boarded and a continuous need to keep upgrading the vehicles. After all, it is a number that relates to the President himself. In this case, there are two Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) Presidential guard vehicles, one Sedan, one 4x4 double cap pickup – this is for the new training institute, the Guyana Training College for International Skills (GTIC), one 15-seater minibus, two 4x4 pickups retrofitting for rugged terrains and one canter with a hydraulic lift. These are all for the Office of the President. These are vehicles that come under this heading for \$100 million.

Programme: 011 – Administration – \$962,950,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Let me thank the students of the Queen's College (QC) for joining us. They have some additional responsibilities. They will shortly leave.

Programme: 012 – National Policy Development & Presidential Advisory Services – \$153,000,000

Programme: 012 – National Policy Development & Presidential Advisory Services – \$153,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 013 – Defence and National Security – 196,500,000

Programme: 013 – Defence and National Security – 196,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, do you want to go back?

Mr. Ramjattan: [*Inaudible*] the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) [*inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: No. The Guyana Defence Force is coming up. You are ahead of the game.

Programme: 014 – Public Policy and Planning – \$17,295,000

Programme: 014 – Public Policy and Planning – \$17,295,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 015 – Environmental Management and Compliance – \$209,644,000

Programme: 015 – Environmental Management and Compliance – \$209,644,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 016 – Police Complaints Authority – \$3,000,000

Programme: 016 – Police Complaints Authority – \$3,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister and staff of the Office of the President and the several agencies which you have just defended. Thank you very much, staff. Now, we could invite the Guyana Defence Force to join the Hon. Minister as their agency come up. Just to keep us on track, we have used up all the time allocated for all the heads this morning. We are back on even keel. This agency has 30 minutes. We will start now.

Agency: 53 Guyana Defence Force

Current Expenditure

Programme: 531 – Defence and Security Support – \$21,724,676,000

Programme: 531 – Defence and Security Support – \$21,724,676,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 531 – Defence and Security Support – \$20,509,661,000

Mr. Ramjattan: Under project code 5100400 – Defence Support Programme, I notice \$16 billion for support initiative from India. Could the Minister indicate whether that is the sum that we will get the four bell helicopters from?

Ms. Teixeira: This sum of \$16,234,661,000 relates to the provision of two aircraft which are foreign funded. It is for the procurement of helicopters – these are all billions of course and not millions – vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) long-range drone systems of another \$1.3 billion and Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) of \$7 billion – this is to

procure a second boat, well, it is an OPV for the coastguard. This will increase our military infrastructure and equipment.

Programme: 531 – Defence and Security Support – \$20,509,661,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

3.04 p.m.

Agency: 06 Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance

Current Expenditure

Programme: 061 – Policy Development and Administration – \$185,432,000

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, may I ask the Minister to go line item 6231 and indicate to the Committee how many vehicles comprise for fleet?

Ms. Teixeira: We have three cars, two motorcycles, and one bicycle now and again.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister indicate whether any of those vehicles, bicycles or tricycles that she has named, whether any of them were purchased in 2023?

Ms. Teixeira: Sorry, Member of Parliament. We purchased those vehicles prior to 2023. There were no vehicles purchased in 2023.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow up: would the Minister be able, through you Mr. Chair, to indicate the oldest vehicle? How many years would it be and that includes the motorbike?

Ms. Teixeira: The one vehicle that would be older than the others is a want of entry vehicle we got in 2022 to add to our one vehicle we had at that time.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. Line item 6265, I notice a 50% increase in your other transport, travel and postage. Could you explain to us the fact that you have all these vehicles, bicycles and tricycles in working condition, why is it your other transport is going up? I see your staff just went up by one person.

Ms. Teixeira: At line item 6265 deals with Other and this is really not your regular run around Georgetown. This is more to do with out of town or in the interior. This caters for a number of charters into hinterland areas including the region that I am responsible for.

Ms. Lawrence: Which region is that?

Ms. Teixeira: It is Region Seven. This includes travel outside of Georgetown as well as where we have to have aircraft, boats, *et cetera* would be covered under this line item 6265.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister am I to assume that your staff have been paying an increase in fares for travels out of Georgetown to the hinterland, Region Seven, *et cetera*? Increase in terms of fares for the aircraft, boats...

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. In terms of the cost, for some of the distances, we have to go and include the cost of fuel in some interior areas.

Ms. Lawrence: We could understand the plight of the people in those regions.

Ms. Teixeira: We understand the plight of many of our people and we have to reach them to be able to address their concerns.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, line item 6281, Security, is this a private security or is this the Guyana Police Force (GPF)?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member, this is a private security through the Office of the President.

Ms. Lawrence: How many security personnel are we talking about here?

Ms. Teixeira: On a daily basis, it is one off one building, there should be one from morning to evening and then the other one takes over. It should be at least two guards at the building.

Ms. Lawrence: Are they working 12-hour shifts?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. Two guards at the...

Ms. Lawrence: Are they given baton or armed?

Ms. Teixeira: They are unarmed.

Ms. Lawrence: Line item 6284, Other, I know approximately 100% increase in this line item from \$56.4 million to \$100 million. Could the Minister indicate to the Committee what additional expenses will be incurred under this line item?

Ms. Teixeira: In 2023, we hosted the Commonwealth Caribbean Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies (CCAICACB). We were also the host of the institute visit by the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption (IACAC) in assessing our six-cycle report to the Commission (OES)8.30

as well as institute visit for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) that came in December on a promotion technical visit. We had a number of those. We also have or Ministry Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Expo that started in 2022 as a Human Rights Expo last year and became a Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Expo. This will continue as well as other areas of stakeholders, conferences, workshops and consultancies that we will use under this head – line item 6284.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Minister. Minister, all of those you did in 2023 and you only spent \$56.4 million. You have not indicated to the Committee what else you are doing to incur the other more than \$45 million budgeted here.

Ms. Teixeira: Part of this was, in terms of what was not spent... As a Ministry who will collaborate and work with the Attorney General's Chambers in relation to constitutional reform, Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC) and hopefully in terms of assisting. Moneys were put in our budget to assist with what would be regional stakeholder outreaches by the Constitutional Reform Commission. As you know, that has not been set up as yet. That was part of the reason a large chunk of money came back. It was not used by the Ministry. This year, we believe that as soon as the nominees come in from the various agencies and political parties who have been invited so that the commission can get up and running very quickly and that we have put back in money because part of our Ministry deals with national stakeholders, and we work with over 100 National Coordinating Coalitions (NGOs) in terms of stakeholder collaboration. This is where we will work with the Attorney General's Chambers and with the Constitutional Reform Commission from our budgetary and otherwise respect.

Dr. Cummings: At 6224 – Print and Non-Print Materials, I noticed there is over 200% increase from the Revised Budget for 2023. It was \$700 million and now it is \$2.5 million. In this technological and digital age I thought we would try to be paperless and make use of the technology. In addition to that, I noticed that under the staffing details, zero is under Clerical and Office Support. Are you outsourcing these materials?

Ms. Teixeira: First of all, all of our employees are contracted employees. They are all young and they have chosen to be contracted so there are no persons that are on the... There is only one person who is on the fixed establishment.

At line item 6264, Print and Non-Print Materials, we have placed advertisement and so on in the public information but

we used a lot of the social media for that purposes. Included in this, Dr. Cummings, is the printing of our reports. We have to submit as a treaty country to a number of international treaties: both human rights, anti-corruption and others. We have to submit our reports and I will give you an example of the submission of the second assessment to the United Nations (UN) Convention Against Corruption was over 380 pages plus... Although we send the reports electronically, we have to also have hard copies and the appendices also.

What we have decided to do is instead of only having everything electronically be able to print them and have actual bound documents that become records of the Ministry as well as the electronic. This is where there is going to be an increase as we have a number of reports that are pending to be published, so that they can become available for research purposes as well as putting them on our website so people can look at them. The reports are submitted already.

Programme: 061 – Policy Development and Administration – \$185,432,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 062 – Parliamentary Affairs – \$14,182,000

Programme: 062 – Parliamentary Affairs – \$14,182,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 063 – Governance – \$157,785,000

Programme: 063 – Governance – \$157,785,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

3.19 p.m.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 061 – Policy Development and Administration – \$5,825,000

Programme: 061 – Policy Development and Administration – \$5,825,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 063 – Governance – \$5,000,000

Programme: 063 – Governance – \$5,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Let me thank the Hon. Minister for her tenacity; her staff for being with us; and the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, for being so agreeable. Thank you very much, Hon. Members. This is a good time to take the break for an hour and then come back with the Hon. Prime Minister.

Assembly resumed.

Assembly suspended at 3.21 p.m.

Assembly resumed at 4.29 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Agency: 02 Office of the Prime Minister

Current Expenditure

Programme: 021 – Prime Minister's Secretariat – \$517,888,000

Ms. Lawrence: To the Hon. Prime Minister, line item 6131, Other Direct Labour Costs, I note almost 100% decrease from the revised sum of 2023. Could the Hon. Prime Minister indicate why this amount has decreased?

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: To the Hon. Member who asked the question, there has been a reduction in staff and, therefore, a reduction in the request under that sub-head.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I have a clarification. There is no reduction in staff. In 2023, the Staffing Details depict 51 staff and in 2024 it depicts 51 staff. Is the Prime Minister referring to a change in the line item?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There has been a reduction as stated here. There is a reduction in this allocation as a result of non-approvals for one Expenditure Planning & Management Analyst's (EPMA's) acting allowance for the Principal Assistant Secretary-Finance (PAS-F) with effect from 9th September, 2023 – \$93,739; one Accounts Clerk with an acting allowance as an Accountant with effect from 1st January to December 31st, 2023 – \$47,113; one Clerk III acting allowance as a Chief Accountant with effect from 1st January, 2023 and that amounts to \$51,631; Electrician acting as the Superintendent of Works with effect from 1st January to 31st December, 2023 – \$13,839; and one Confidential Secretary as a Procurement Officer with effect from 1st January to 30th June, 2023 – \$25,925. There was a non-approval of these requests and that led to a reduction in the projection.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I still need clarification. I do not follow all that the Prime Minister said. There has been an increase in line items: 6111, Administrative, from one to two; 6112, Senior Technical, remains the same; 6113, Other Technical and Craft Skilled has been reduced by one; 6114, Clerical and Office Support has been reduced by six; 6115, Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled has been reduced by one; and 6116, Contracted Employees increased by seven.

There is a balancing off here – 51:51. You had a change in the line item.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chair, I think your question was in relation to line item 6131 and, therefore, the given answer.

Ms. Lawrence: Prime Minister, I asked why the 100% decrease in the budgeted allocation. You said – it was because there has been a decrease in staff. I am pointing to show you that there has not been a decrease in staff. You still have 51 staff as of last year.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised it is a non-approval of what was requested. There was a change to contracted employees.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you very much. Could I move to line item 6284, Other?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Prime Minister, I see you have some \$82 million increase here. Your staff has not increased so what is this extra \$82 million going to do for your Secretariat?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The allocation caters for the hiring of the Consultant for the Hon. Prime Minister – \$39,600,000; annual subscription for the Human Resource Management System for the Office of the Prime Minister – \$2,020,000; payment for Advisor/Consultant to the Office of the Prime Minister; purchase of items such as flash drives, hard drives; payment for consultancy for the Amila Falls Hydropower Project – \$24 million; provision of Support Consultant and Advisor for the gas-to-power plant and other facilities – \$96 million; other Advisors to the Prime Minister – \$11,850,000; Ministerial Tender Board (MTB) member – \$504,000; flags, lapel pins, banners, *et cetera* – \$2.8 million; caps; national and other events – \$3.5 million; Mashramani 2024 related activities – \$6 million; and the purchase of miscellaneous items and other expenditure – \$4,200,000. That is the explanation.

Ms. Lawrence: The Prime Minister mentioned other Consultants. Could the Hon. Member say how many is catered for in that category of Other?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I foresee at least three other Consultants because of the nature of the projects. Therefore, we catered for them in this initial request.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow-up: Prime Minister, what other projects are you referring to?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am referring to the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. As you would understand, there are several components of that big project that will require the employment of different Consultants – different technical personnel.

Ms. Lawrence: Just for my clarification, are you saying that you have budgeted within this amount a sum for a Consultant for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and there are several other components of that project for which you will have to employ three more Consultants? Will it be four Consultants in all?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We are at a stage where we must go through the evaluation of these projects. So, we have to cater to pay the Consultants. We do not have all the information right now but what we did is to provide money in this Budget to cover the expenditure so related.

Mr. Patterson: Prime Minister, good afternoon. I was told specifically by your staff to ask how you are doing. How are you? Are you good? Prime Minister, I think you said you had \$92 million in there for gas-to-shore Consultants. Have these Consultants been hired? If so, when was this?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Some of the Consultants were hired, based on where we are now with the project. The money that is allocated will be utilised throughout the financial year 2024 as we engage other Consultants.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, could the PM be more specific about who you hired and who you intend to hire, Sir. You have hired some, so you could say we have hired a Geological Technician and so forth.

4.41 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I think we are jumping the gun here. We are coming to Programme 022 which deals with the gas-to-energy project, and, at that time, I will have all of the details.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect, I was not even going to ask any question under this head, but the Prime Minister said that he hired consultants for the gas-to-shore project under line item 6284. That is the only reason I am asking. If I let it go now, he will say, and, rightly so, that I had an opportunity.

Mr. Chairman: Do not anticipate. I think we have a Standing Order on anticipation.

Mr. Patterson: That is very good. With your advice, I will hold my question and I am hoping that I will get a full answer at that stage.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, for my clarification, if I heard correctly, under the same line item 6284, the Hon. Prime Minister indicated that it is for the hiring of a consultant for the Hon. Prime Minister and, in addition to that, the hiring of other consultants for other projects. Is there a specific consultant that is being hired for the Hon. Prime Minister?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: While it falls under the Office of the Prime Minister, there is a Gas-to-Energy Project Office that these consultants will operate under – the gas-to-energy task force.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I point you to last year's answer which was provided for this same line item. I am quoting from the *Hansard*. The Prime Minister said:

“Concerning the figure mentioned, the increase is related to consultancies related to the gas to shore project that has spiked that subhead. The allocation caters for the hiring of a consultant for our Hon. Prime Minister...”

And for,

...payment for advisor/consultant to the Office of the Prime Minister ...”

That specific consultant that the Prime Minister repeated, “hiring of a consultant for our Hon. Prime Minister”, did we not go through with that? Are we going again this year for the consultant? Did we not get that specific consultant then?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I think we are mixing up several things here. There are several consultants hired by the Prime Minister for different projects. I have consultants for Information and Communications Technology (ICT), I have consultants for the Amalia's Falls project, I have consultants for the Gas to Energy project.

Programme: 021 – Prime Minister's Secretariat – \$517,888,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: As usual, I will go through all of the current and then we will come back to the capital expenditure.

Programme: 022 – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$7,585,967,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Prime Minister indicate whether the five staff members, not stated here for 2024, represent vacancies in his Ministry?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, a decrease in staff by five. Is this a reflection of vacancies?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, quite rightly so, it indicates vacancies to be filled.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you Prime Minister. I point you to line item 6222 – Field Materials and Supplies, could you kindly tell the House what has caused this 100% increase in this amount from \$6.6 million to \$13.6 million for 2024?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The reason for the increase is in order to provide support to staff and volunteers with adequate and appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), inclusive of safety boots, safety gears, helmets, uniforms and emergency equipment to conduct damage assessments and response during various hazards. The sum of \$3.8 million is to provide emergency kits to four communities in Regions 1, 2, 6 and 7; after Community Based Disaster Risk Management training – \$2 million; and to stock and restock three Civil Defence Commission (CDC) warehouses with mattresses, sheets, cooking utensils, hammocks, *et cetera*, for shelter management – in Lethem, \$2.8 million; in Mahdia \$2 million; and CDC Headquarters on Thomas Lands, Georgetown, \$3 million.

Ms. Lawrence: Line item 6255, could the Hon. Prime Minister tell us what entails Maintenance of Other Infrastructure?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: This entails to ensure the effective maintenance of all infrastructural facilities on the Civil Defence Commission locations. These works will be undertaken: reinforce two large gates at the Lethem's Warehouse – \$1,080,000; enhance the security of the compound at Lethem by installing 20 solar lights around the perimeter – \$3 million; and the routine electrical maintenance of all facilities, the remaining \$1.5 million will be utilised for that.

Ms. Lawrence: How many facilities are we talking about for this \$1.5 for electricity maintenance? I would like to know where you are buying your materials from.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We are talking about three locations, CDC, Headquarters – Thomas Lands, Georgetown; CDC Warehouse and Training Establishment

and Operation Centre at Timehri; and CDC facility at Lethem.

Ms. Lawrence: Is \$1.5 million adequate?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The sum of \$1.5 million is adequate because it is just the usual annual maintenance of existing serviceable electrical facilities.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. Line item 6272, Electricity Charges, Hon. Prime Minister, could you kindly indicate whether this increase for electricity charges is as a result of an increase in the tariffs?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The increase is related to a projection. We have a new warehouse that is under construction and will come into use in the second quarter this year. Therefore, we have requested to cover the electrical charges associated with the existing facilities, plus this new warehouse that will come into use.

Ms. Lawrence: Line item 6302, Training, Prime Minister, I would like to take you to page 29 of Volume 2. Earlier, you mentioned about volunteers working whenever there are disasters, *et cetera*, your Impact, the very last one,

“Public is aware of disaster preparedness and response protocols”.

I would like to ask you what programmes are in place and how many persons are engaged in training?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, we have the information here. This increase will accommodate routine training and proposed training in 2024. We have two by mass casualty management courses, \$2.7 million and we intend to train 80 participants on those two courses; basic first aid training course – \$1,120,000 and we intend to train 30 participants on that course; Training for community engagement, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)- \$1,660,000, we intend to train 40 participants on that course; Shelter Management Training – \$1,760,000 and we intend to train another 40 participants on that course; \$4.7 million is for CDC training and evaluation seminars, which will be conducted throughout Guyana within the different regions. We intend to capture and gain another 40 participants on those seminars.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Prime Minister, do you have a structure on how this training will be taken down to the ordinary Guyanese in the various communities so that they too can become aware of how they operate in any form of disaster?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We have what is known as the Community Emergency Response Teams. They are basically trained and then they go out to communities and sensitise them about disaster related matters and what they can do during times of disasters. That has been very effective. Even now, as we would have endured the dry season, many of these teams went out into different areas that were affected and educated people on how to conserve water, for example. In addition to that, they have distributed black tanks and taught persons how to treat the water, *et cetera*.

Ms. Lawrence: Does this also happen in the townships and on the coastlands?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: This happens wherever persons are affected by disaster. They do the damage assessments and then, based on the impact analysis, we do the necessary interventions.

Ms. Lawrence: Is it reactive instead of preventative?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: No. There is a reactive part because if there is a disaster, you have to mount a relief operation. But then there is the mitigatory aspect which is more long term as you prepare people, facilities and infrastructure to minimise the effect of any future disasters. There are two parts for any disaster management activity.

Ms. Lawrence: How can we identify these people in the communities? Can we go to your website or something?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please. Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you just ask the question and allow PM to answer.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The CDC works through the established administrative structure. There are 10 Administrative Regions. Each region will have its regional democratic council (RDC), there is the regional executive officer (REO) and staff. Basically, we work through those administrative structures. For example, Region 9 is a perfect example of CDC working with the region, putting the facilities in place, training everyone there and, initially, they respond within 24 hours to any disaster-related matter. Within 72 hours, the CDC is on the ground. This has been within 72 hours, which means that they were on the ground before 72 hours. This has been exercised and during times of disaster, this has worked well for us at the CDC.

4.56 p.m.

Ms. Lawrence: Prime Minister, you did not answer how can I, as an ordinary citizen, contact the person who is assigned to my community. I go on to your Indicator number 2. Your

Indicator number of Regional-Level Disaster Risk Management and/or Preparedness Plans, is actively being implemented. In 2023, you said 9 were implemented. Are you speaking about in the nine regions?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: In relation to your answer, we are speaking about nine regions. However, permit me to answer the question which you said I did not answer properly. The CDC has a database with everybody who are trained, the regions where they are located, *et cetera*. From time to time, the CDC will pull back these people, conduct follow up training and exercise them in going out on outreaches to different communities to sensitise people about disaster awareness.

Ms. Lawrence: Clarification, Mr. Chairman. So, Hon. Prime Minister, are you saying that if I would like to know who the person is in my community that is responsible for my community, I should go to CDC or to their website?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: You can go to the website but, at the same time, you are identifying a gap in our operation which we will take on board and ensure that, through our public relations process, we will ensure that we actively communicate throughout the country as to who are the contact persons within each region. Thank you for that suggestion.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, PM.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, you have the floor.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Are we at capital expenditure?

Mr. Chairman: No. We are still on the current expenditure.

Dr. Cummings: Okay. I will wait.

Mr. Jones: Line item 6294, Others, we note that, in the revised budget, we have \$5,332,293,000 and we noticed, for 2024, requests for \$7,072,000,000. Could the Hon. Prime Minister indicate what has occasioned this increase? And what does this line item cater for?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: This catered to address several areas. As you know, we had a prolonged drought, the rainy season is now coming in and there are several mitigatory activities to help people throughout Guyana get back on their feet, those who are affected. So, you have to address food security issues for vulnerable groups affected by floods and droughts, we have \$5 billion. Also, we have to cater for the migrant communities throughout Guyana that we support.

Janitorial hampers, relief supplies for flood victims throughout Guyana, we have put \$1.5 billion. Relief supplies to assist in rebuilding homes affected by freak storms and high winds, both in coastal and hinterland areas, \$120 million. This particular activity, we have had to, on many occasions, in 2022 and 2023, go into communities that were affected by these freak storms and literally assist them in re-roofing their homes, and structures. To train, prepare and equip 24 communities in community-based disaster risk management, equipping the Disaster Operation Centre and purchasing other equipment like helmets, life jackets, and long boots which may not be accommodated under the subhead that we discussed earlier. The requirement to upgrade the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, we have to upgrade and exercise that plan in 2024 to cater for national activities, including Cricket World Cup, Mashramani, *et cetera*. The CDC has a role in creating a safe environment for those activities – working with the security forces and the Ministry of Health to mitigate against mass casualty incidents.

Mr. Norton: Just to indicate this Hon. Prime Minister. You indicated that there are nine Regional Level Disaster Risk Management and Preparedness Plans. I inferred from that at least one is without. Which one and why does it not have one?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Well, I am advised that we have finished all the plans for the nine regions, except for Region 4, which we are still working on. As you would appreciate, it is a little more complex to put together the plan for Region 4, they need more time to complete that. So, we have finished nine and are still working on Region 4.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have a follow up with the Hon. Prime Minister. You mentioned that there is an allocation for the migrant community, but you did not say how much. Could you tell us the sum?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Allocation for?

Ms. Walton-Desir: In the breakdown that you gave, you said there is a sum allocated for the migrant community, but you did not indicate how much that was. Could you advise us?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The sum for the migrant community is included in the \$5 billion. I gave the breakdown for the seven, but there is one part that talks about food hampers, and we had \$5 billion to address food security issues for vulnerable groups affected by floods and

droughts, as well as for migrant communities. It is captured there.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Hon. Prime Minister, could you indicate to us exactly what are the communities that you were referring to in the breakdown, in terms of the migrants? Which regions? Where are they – is it Regions 1, 2, 3, where?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised that we have migrant communities in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 9 and we are catering for all those communities.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Hon. Prime Minister, the number of persons that you catering for, what informed the figure that you eventually came up with? How many people are you targeting exactly?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We have a figure here – 250,000 families. That is, hampers to 250,000 families. There are 250,000 hampers, so, it is one hamper per family.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, I am trying to understand – 250,000 hampers.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Yes.

Ms. Walton-Desir: One per family. Are these migrant families that you are referring to or just a vulnerable population?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: When we plan, we plan, and we outline it for vulnerable families. Captured in the vulnerable families are the migrants. The migrants or migrant community are included in that subhead – vulnerable families.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I hate to prolong this, but certainly we cannot be spending the people of Guyana's money without specifics. And so, my question to you is, somewhere in there, we ought to in our planning stage have said that we have to cater for 50,000 migrants. This is what I am trying to get a sense of, exactly how much of that is for migrants? Have you done the disaggregation? And again, how many migrants?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We have utilised the 250,000 as the vulnerable group that we must cater for. We understand that in the group will be a migrant population. That population is not static, it can increase from time to time and, therefore, the effort is to capture them in the vulnerable grouping. Efforts to disaggregate and arrive at a number for the migrant population are difficult at this stage.

Ms. Walton-Desir: There certainly has to be a base before you could speak about fluctuation, and I appreciate that. What is the base, Hon. PM?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, *ad nauseum*, the base is 250,000.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Prime Minister, are you aware that the last census said that there are 250,000 households in Guyana and by logical deduction, you are suggesting that all of them are vulnerable?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We have to be careful here. The vulnerable population is not static. We are talking about during times of disaster, some people who are not vulnerable because of a disaster become vulnerable and you have to intervene and bring relief supplies to them. So, it is not a case where you have 250,000 vulnerable people in Guyana waiting for our assistance all the time. We as a Government have to plan. Our projection is that we are catering for 250,000 cases of vulnerable people in Guyana. It may not amount to that, but then if it amounts to that we are ready to bring relief to them. This is planning.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Prime Minister, in your indicators, you indicate that there are a number of Regional Level Disaster Risk Management and/or Preparedness Plans. Could you say how many are (*inaudible*) Regional Disaster Risk Management and Preparedness, how many are just risk management and how many are just preparedness?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Again, if you could measure it, you can manage it. This is an attempt to manage it. So based on our projections, that is how we arrive at these numbers, and we plan around the numbers that we have here. This is what we are using to prepare for disasters in Guyana. This has worked in the past. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has never failed the people of Guyana during any disaster because we always have a plan, and the plan is not cast in stone. The plan is flexible and, as things unfold, we intervene and bring relief to the people. So, this is just for planning purposes.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I do not think that the Hon. Prime Minister listened and recognise I have changed from the previous issue. The question here is, one – you indicated that there are both risk management and preparation plans. How many of them? In some cases, you said they are risk management, and they are just preparedness plans. How many are risk management by themselves? How many are preparedness plans? That is the question I asked as it relates to Indicator 2.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There are all plans in preparation for disaster. They are one and the same. There are just a lot of technicalities the guys will use as they prepare, but they are all planned for one purpose, to intervene and bring relief to the people during times of disaster.

5.11 p.m.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Prime Minister say how many persons are catered for in one hamper?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: One hamper will feed four persons for one week. I hope that answers the question.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Prime Minister please say, if hampers are given to one person or to those four persons every week, what is the consistency that is being planned for?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: During the time of a disaster, you do your damage and needs assessment, and you identify who are affected, who need the hampers and how long you may have to give them the hamper for. Some people may just need one hamper and then they get back on their feet. Another family may need a hamper for a little longer period of time. For example, if you go into the hinterland, for some communities, if it is flooding, it means that you may have to support them over a longer time because food security becomes compromised, so you have to wait until the water recedes and the land can accommodate cultivation again. Then you may have to, in addition to hampers, expend some money in getting like cassava sticks and other planting materials to help them to get back on their feet. You would go into more or less like a mitigation role there. While it may appear simple, it is a more complex and well thought out approach when it comes to disaster management.

Ms. Fernandes: Given the number four – and I did ask the Hon. Prime Minister because the last mid-year population for 2023 was 778,400 – if you divide that by your number of 250,000 hampers, that would be catering for three persons per hamper. Could you say what is the distribution mechanism that you employ to actually get the hampers to these individuals? What is the structured system in place for persons to register and who are the individuals that actually go out and distribute these hampers?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: This is a teaching moment. You cannot take the population of Guyana and divide it by 250,000 to arrive at that. We are dealing with people who are likely to be impacted by a disaster. At no time would the whole country need hampers. In your projection

20...[*Interruption*] Are you going to allow me to teach her and teach you at the same time??

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

For 2024, the projection is 250,000 hampers. Then we may have a disaster that will affect a particular community. In dealing with that community, you may just need 2,000 hampers and then they are back on their feet. Another community may need a little bit more, a larger community, and because of the peculiar nature, you would have to give them some support until they get back on their feet until the next crop. You may need like 30,000 hampers there. All we are saying is that, for the year 2024, our projection is that we must have allocations to cover 250,000 hampers for those interventions in communities that are affected and have this need. I hope that answers your question.

In regard to your second question, the Civil Defence Commission works in an inter-agency setting. In fact, before disasters, they have their training, they have their exercise, and the training and exercise inter-agency setting, and they work through the Regional Democratic Council. The Civil Defence Commission, at the headquarters, are always in contact with the Regional Chairman and the REOs. If there is a disaster in Lethem, they will set up their emergency operation centre and the central emergency operation centre at the CDC headquarters will be in contact with them. They will send in people to help them identify Damage Assessment and Needs Analysis (DANA) and based on that, if there is any requirement for relief supplies from Georgetown, it would be sent in there. In a case like Lethem, what we did and what we intend to do for every region, in the future, Lethem has a disaster management facility that always have hampers and they always have an area that is a shelter-area where you could bring people in who are affected. Therefore, any little disaster in Lethem, they can start by dealing with it at the regional level, while they ask for support later on from the central level.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Prime Minister, why is there not a committed effort...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, I do not think that the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, is exhausted. so...

Mr. Ramjattan: I am sorry.

Ms. Fernandes: Give him my... [*inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: Are you done?

Ms. Fernandes: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Sir.

Mr. Ramjattan: The question as to accountability moments, apart from teaching moments, why is it we do not have the names of all the beneficiaries of these relief programmes on the website? Is it difficult to have?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The accountability resides with the CDC and their accounts. All of their records are subjected to the Auditor General's annual exercise in accounting.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much...

An Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: It is subject to public's scrutiny.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: This is a matter that can be ventilated at the Public Accounts Committee. Every year, the Auditor General reports on the activity of the Civil Defence Commission, like any other Government agency.

Programme: 022 – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$7,585,967,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 023 – Power Generation – \$6,178,453,000

Mr. Patterson: Hon. Prime Minister and staff, let us start from the very beginning, Volume 2, page 31:

“Programme Performance Statements

Indicators:

1. Proportion of population with reliable access to electricity... 2023 Est. 92.2%”.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister what does this Government consider as reliable electricity; two, what is his baseline; and three, how did he come up with this? I assume this is for the entire Guyanese population, that is, the hinterland coast and everywhere. It is a three-part question that I am starting with.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, it is a three-part question.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The figure is based on the 2012 Census.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, sorry. It is a three-part question.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: You asked the question.

Mr. Patterson: Not the figure, Sir. You are saying that the 2012 Census of the entire country is that 92% of our population has access to reliable electricity. Could I ask you, Sir, as the head of the portfolio, what does the Government of Guyana deem reliable electricity?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I think you could answer that better than I do. The fact is, the electricity today, when you turn on your switch, you would get electricity. That is happening in Guyana today. There has been a reduction in power outages over the last three months. The electricity is getting more reliable. In the short term, we have investments that have increased the reserve and, in the medium to long term, things will get better, and the price of electricity will go down in just a matter of 18 months from now.

Mr. Patterson: The Prime Minister has carried us off on a different tangent. I think he is talking about GPL. If you wait, I will get there, Sir. I am asking the Prime Minister and let me slow it down – reliable electricity. Sir, the people in the hinterland do not get GPL. They do not know anything about this up and down and so on. What is the Government of Guyana's indicator for access to reliable electricity? I am asking on behalf of my Friend. I do not see Mr. Vincent Henry here.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Every hinterland utility is peculiar, and the people knows fully well what we set out to do in their individual communities. If it is 20 hours electricity and we give them 20 hours electricity, that is 100% reliability. If it is 16 hours electricity for a specific area and we give them 16 hours, it is reliability. We have, since 2020 to now, moved those numbers closer to 24 hours electricity. Go to Kwakwani – 24 hours electricity. [An.

Hon. Member (Opposition): (*Inaudible*.) Who said that? No. I purchased generators for Kwakwani. Go and check your information. So...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, go ahead.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The electricity, in terms of reliability, has been improving from August, 2020 to present, especially in the hinterland communities.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I mean obviously the Prime Minister is on a different... All right then. I would...

[**Mr. Duncan:** The Twilight Zone.] The Twilight Zone. It is not a teaching moment. Let us go to your 2024 projections. You are saying that, by the end of 2024, 99% of our population will have access to reliable... [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

My apologies, Sir. His target, at the end of 2024, in Volume 2, and I quoted page 31, 99% of the population will have access to reliable electricity. I commend you for that, Sir. I am asking him about the 1% now. I do not want you to go to 99% because that is a big number. Who are the 1% that will not have access to reliable electricity?

5.26 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Let me tell you what we have done in 2023. In 2023, we distributed 30,000 household photovoltaic (PV) systems. There are 30,000 households in the hinterland, riverain and other remote areas of Guyana that are now experiencing electricity in their homes. That is why the figure has gone up. The 1% that you are talking about, we are actively studying where it is located, and we will address it in 2024 and beyond. There are pockets of unserved areas that will be addressed this year, in terms of ensuring that they are connected and that they have electricity. We are aware of that. That is why we cannot put 100%. We are aware that there are pockets of unserved areas, but we are committed to addressing those areas in 2024 and beyond.

Mr. Patterson: I really do not want to belabour this point nor do I want to put the Hon. Prime Minister on the spot. Each community is different. There are different number of houses, infrastructure, the means of generation are different, *et cetera*. Obviously, I assume that the Prime Minister is working from a plan. He said the 92.2% came from his census. Therefore, he went to each community. From that census, he extracted how he was going to get the 7% to make it 99% this year. I am asking the Prime Minister, after he did that extraction, what areas were left? Is Baracara, where the young Shamar Joseph is from, where the 1% was left out? What about Fair View Village, Puruni Landing? Sir, obviously, in developing this plan that is budgeted for here, you would have had to count how many persons you need or whatever it is, rather than just giving us these fanciful numbers. Which are the areas that you have left out?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member's information is dated. We have since given out household solar systems to some of the same communities that the Hon. Member called – Baracara and all those places. Your information is dated. We are addressing the gaps. The 1% gap, we are addressing it. Every day the picture is getting clearer, and we are making our necessary interventions.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Prime Minister, could you tell us how many communities in the Pomeroon are without electricity, how many have and what percentage there is?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I cannot tell you how many communities in the Pomeroun are without electricity. What I can tell you is that we did distribute the same solar household systems throughout the Pomeroun.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Prime Minister, I visited Hackney recently and they complained that they got no panel. Could you confirm to us that Hackney got panels?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, is Hackney in the Pomeroun catered for?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We will check the database and get back to you with an answer. We have the database.

Mr. Patterson: I am still on the indicators, Sir. Number six of your indicators, PM, states, install capacity of renewable energy – solar, hydro, wind and off grid. That is 62.51 megawatts. Could you identify these projects? For Hon. Minister, Mr. Persaud, the numbers I am calling are written here.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The answer to the question by the Hon. Member is we have the Bartica Solar Farm and the Lethem Solar Farm. Mahdia's is under construction, Kumu's is under construction and Moco Moco's is under construction. [An. Hon. Member: (*inaudible*) Mabaruma.] Mabaruma. I did call them already. Prior to 2020, solar PV capacity at public buildings stood at 5.35 megawatts, with 310 solar PV systems installed. Between 2020 to 2023, the Government increased its investment in solar PV technology, including utility scale, solar PV farms and solar mini grids. This has resulted in an increase from 5.35 megawatts, prior to 2020, to a whopping 14.62 megawatts in 2023, a 173% increase in installed solar PV capacity. Details are as follows: At the end of 2020, this capacity increased by 626 kilowatts to 5.98 megawatts, with the addition of the 0.4-megawatt Mabaruma Solar PV Farm, 18 solar PV systems at government buildings, four solar PV mini grids at Yarakita, Hotoquai, Chinoweing and Phillipai and a solar PV micro grid at Moraikobai.

In 2021, the solar PV installed capacity increased by 630 kilowatts to 6.61 megawatts, with the addition of a 0.4 megawatts solar PV system at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, 22 solar PV systems at public buildings and five solar mini grids at Akawini, Bethany, Kabakaburi, Monkey Mountain and Achiwib.

In 2022, the solar PV installed capacity increased by 1.35 megawatts to 7.96 megawatts, with the addition of the one-megawatt Lethem Solar PV Farm, 10 off grid systems at Loo

Creek in Region 4 and 59 solar PV systems at public buildings.

In 2023, the solar PV installed capacity increased by 6.61 to 14.62 megawatts, with additions that included the 1.5-megawatt Bartica Solar PV Farm, completion of 21 solar mini grids, 22 solar PV systems at public buildings and distribution of 29,398 solar home energy systems. Should I read more for you? Are you okay there?

Mr. Chairman, in relation to the false information presented by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, our database is showing that Hackney received 158 solar household systems. He said Hackney and so I am saying that Hackney received this.

Minister in the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Just to add to the Prime Minister's answer to the Leader of the Opposition, I have confirmed two times over the phone that Hackney received from our Cde., Mr. Ramraj...Hackey and every other village in the Lower Pomeroun received the solar PV systems.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. ...[*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Chairman: Let us hear the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. We have had a precedent of the Parliament visiting a particular bond a few years ago. We will go to Hackney soon. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. I was not going to Hackney. I asked about indicator number six. and not number three. I am just quoting what the Hon. Minister's Ministry put out – 2.51 in solar, hydro, and wind for off grid areas. He did not answer that. If he wants, he could lay it over because he told us about solar panels and things like that. Just for the record, the Hon. Prime Minister would want to know that I opened the solar farm and the (*inaudible*) at CARICOM Secretariat. So, I do not know why he quoted it. I opened it upon completion, Sir. It was a grant from Japan. You can *Google* it. [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] Pardon me? It was in 2020, in the CARICOM building. So, he can *Google* it if he wants.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for the information. Hon. Prime Minister, proceed.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Just a point of correction. You probably signed the document, but my memory placed me right there with His Excellency at the opening ceremony at CARICOM. For the purpose of bringing some clarity to this issue of the household PV systems, in Region 2, St. Monica

– 135, Karawab – 138, Kabakaburi – 200, Wakapoa – 420, Akawini – 130, Bethany – 139, Mashabo – 130, Capoey – 143, Mainstay – 60, Tapakuma – 137, Dredge Creek – 90, Jack Low – 135, Siriki – 170, Abrams Creek – 78, Warapana – 55, St. John – 38, Hackney Aberdeen – 158, St. Vincent/Heathfield – 118, Providence – 89, Friendship Canal – 92, Nile Cozier – 365, and Rivertown/Three Friends – 2. A total of 3,022 were distributed in Region 2.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Prime Minister. Hon. Members, I now put the question ... Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: We have not even started, and you have gone there, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: You have to be as quick as the Prime Minister.

Mr. Patterson: I was sitting and waiting on him, Sir. Let us move on. Line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. We start with the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA). Could the Hon. Prime Minister disaggregate this allocation? Do you want me to call out the figures for you too, Prime Minister? Sir, if you check on page 468, the Prime Minister could look for the number two and then, at the number three, there is GEA.

5.41 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Subsidies and contributions, \$400 million; revenue from operations... Mr. Chairman, can the Hon. Member repeat the question?

Mr. Patterson: Sir, the GEA will be getting \$400 million in 2024. Obviously, they would have given you a breakdown to get this. Not the items, but the heads are what I am getting at.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: It is a subsidy, I am advised, to support the operations of the GEA.

Mr. Patterson: I am very well aware of that, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, please give the Prime Minister a chance to consult because there is a lot of information on page 652 too. There is a big disaggregation. In fact, it even shows revenues too.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There is \$400 million that is coming in from the Government. When you add that to the revenue, we arrive at a figure, and I can now give you the breakdown of the total expenditure. Out of \$1,899,150,000, recurrent expenditure alone is \$1,144,150,000. That will break down as follows: employment costs – \$598 million.

Wages and salaries alone are \$480 million from that \$598 million.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, I can direct the Committee's attention to page 652 and as you read, we can follow too.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Okay. In the interest of time, Appendix T has all of the information that you are requesting.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am quite aware of page 652. I particularly asked that to move to my next question. With this investment in the GEA, I particularly want you to extract the projected savings from the interventions – not any of the interventions under this current budget – to our electric grid. I know they have different programmes such as cars, solar, and things like that. What are the projected savings we will garner from this intervention?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, we will ask if the Hon. Member can repeat the question.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, a request for repeat.

Mr. Patterson: Yes. Sir, my colleagues are mindful of the time. I hope the repeat gets an extra minute.

Mr. Chairman: Once it is you, Hon. Member, you have the Chair's flexibility.

Mr. Patterson: Most gracious, Sir. There is a total revenue of \$1 billion. We are injecting \$400 million. At the end of all of this, what the projected savings or reductions that would come back from these interventions from the inputs to GEA? They are doing projects.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I am advised that the \$400 million is to meet the recurrent expenditures of the agency. As you know, this is an agency that earns some revenue. The \$400 million will complement what they earn and that will cover or, as much as possible, meet the expenditure related to the operations of the agency.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I think I will have to move on, but I know that, from experience, you say this is the expected outcomes. Save time, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Are you sure you do not want to try one more time?

Mr. Patterson: No, Sir, because obviously he is not understanding what the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is saying – I am assuming – and is putting to him.

Mr. Chairman: I think my application on my phone tells me how much my savings is with respect to carbon, trees planted...

Mr. Patterson: Sir, maybe you can do a better job than I.

Mr. Chairman: You can ask the next question.

Mr. Patterson: Maybe you could do a better job than I at another time to get that information from him, or maybe...

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: In an effort to answer the Hon. Member, we will have to compute that information and present it to you at a later date. We do not have that information now. I understand fully well what you are talking about in terms of the savings and the value of what is saved.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. I move on. Under the same line item, the next one in line that I particularly want is the Lethem Power Company. The Prime Minister indicated, very lyrically, that the solar farm is installed. Can I ask the Prime Minister what is the annual savings to the community with the installation of the solar farms?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Thank you. The savings: 31,000 litres of fuel are saved per month due to the installation and working of the solar systems. It is 31,000 multiplied by 12 multiplied by whatever is the current cost per litre of fuel.

Mr. Patterson: Can I ask the Hon. Prime Minister why the savings are not being passed on, by a reduction of the tariffs, to our colleagues in Lethem or St. Ignatius? Firstly, can the Hon. Prime Minister tell the Committee what are the rates charged to our colleagues in Lethem? Secondly, if you are saving 31,000 litres by 12 by whatever the current rate is, why is this savings not being passed on to our residents in Lethem?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: In relation to the question about the tariff, the first 15 kilowatt hours (kWh) are free, from 16 to 50 kWh, they pay \$60 per kWh, and from 51 kWh and above, they pay \$80 per kWh at Lethem. The reality, in regard to the next question, is that we cannot pass on the savings because we start from a position where we have to provide a subsidy for Lethem. It is already heavily subsidised. So, by saving 31,000 litres per month with the solar system, that helps us to keep the lights on in Lethem and so there is nothing to pass on. It is a subsidy.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, the operational cost went down. So, I cannot understand the Prime Minister's argument that if you are (*inaudible*). There has always been a subsidy to every single power utility in this country, including Guyana Power

and Light (GPL). Sir, for GPL, there is a fuel rebate and these things like that in Georgetown. Why can that not be our colleagues in the hinterland? Why can that subsidy not be applied, or the band raised? You said it is the first 15, why do you not carry it up to the first 25 free?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, it is more complex than that. That is a simplification of the whole issue. The Government is providing \$476,714,000 as a subsidy for Lethem in 2024. The peak demand at Lethem moved from 1.1 megawatts, before the installation of the solar farm, to 1.7 megawatts presently, an increase of 54.5%. Fuel price went up from \$165 per litre in 2021 to \$255 per litre in 2022 and it was holding steady at \$240 per litre at the end of 2023. So, fuel consumption went up because there was an increase in demand. Fuel consumption went up from 159,200 litres per month to 165,000 litres per month.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, my final question on this. I have other questions, but we want to move on before time. Sir, with this budget, we would be giving the gas-to-shore project – and I am not asking any questions – almost \$800 million to reduce the...

Mr. Chairman: Are you not asking a question?

Mr. Patterson: No. I am just making a point, Sir. It is a subsidy.

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Sir, to augment Regions 3, 4, 5, and 6, we are committing \$80 billion to the gas-to-shore project, with the hope and the dream that there would be a reduction. We are supplementing that for these four regions. Sir, the government understands that you have to contribute to keep these things... Why is it that we cannot do it equally for our colleagues outside? With a \$1 trillion budget, if you could provide a subsidy for this gas-to-shore project, you can lower the cost for our colleagues, because they are under the same constraints as we are in this region.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, you can make a point too.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, the entire country, every Guyanese on the coastland and the hinterland, will benefit from the gas-to-energy project. Some will benefit directly; some will benefit indirectly. When the gas-to-energy project comes on stream and the price goes down by 50% on the coastland, the savings will be utilised to ensure our brethren and sistren in the hinterland benefit too. This is a well-thought-out project. This is not a piecemeal

operation. We have been done with piecemeal operation since 2nd August, 2020.

Programme: 023 – Power Generation – \$6,178,453,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: This is just to let the staff know that we still have the capital expenditure to go on all of these.

Programme: 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation – \$5,556,765,000

Ms. Hughes: Hon. Prime Minister, line item 6222 – Field Materials: Could you explain the more than 100% increase?

5.56 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: It is \$268,000. The breakdown is: long boats – \$31,250; safety boats – \$83,750; hammocks – \$57,750; torch lights – \$19,000; work gloves – \$10,000; and backpacks – \$66,250.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Prime Minister. Prime Minister, Local Travel and Subsistence. Could you explain in the context of the increases we have seen from 2022 right through to now – \$5,500,000? I do not know if you could explain the activities, and whether this travel has been specifically to hinterland areas as part of your expansion programme. An explanation of the increase.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The activities related to Local Travel and Subsistence are: concept sprint at Anna Regina – \$162,000; ICT awareness and sensitisation region wide in Region 2 – \$180,000; apprenticeship programme in Anna Region – \$315,000; ICT road show – \$120,000; ICT awareness and sensitisation – 60,000; apprenticeship programme at Vreed-en-Hoop – \$72,000; innovation challenge in Georgetown – \$61,000; ICT conference in Georgetown – \$72,000; road show region wide – \$60,000; apprenticeship programme region wide – \$60,000; innovation laboratory in Georgetown – \$60,000; road show – 216,000; apprenticeship programme region wide – \$60,000; concept sprint in New Amsterdam – \$252,000; ICT awareness and sensitisation – \$180,000; road show in Bartica – 360,000; and road show in Lethem – \$360,000. The list goes on. Regions 1 to 10, travelling to various regions to engage in routine inspections evaluation ICT connections and internet needs assessment – \$1,680,000; and Community Development Officers' (CDOs') visits to regional ICT hubs for day-to-day monitoring and evaluation – \$1,170,000.

Ms. Hughes: Great, Hon. Prime Minister. That sounds good. Could I go to line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to

Local Organisations? I want to start with the National Data Management Authority (NDMA). In Appendix T, there are Materials, Equipment and Supplies. It has actually moved from \$32,056,000 to a whopping \$233,799,000. I am wondering if you can give an explanation for that excessively large increase.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The increase is related to materials, equipment and supplies. The provision increased from \$201.7 million, which caters for additional maintenance and replacement of hardware and installation accessories; communications equipment; tools; safety gears and other field materials. *Budget 2024* provides \$214,300,000 for field materials and supplies; \$12.6 million for office materials and supplies; \$5.9 million for print and non-print materials; and \$0.9 million for drugs and medical supplies. Sections of the NDMA network infrastructure, which support Safe Country initiative and other critical services, were constructed around 2013 and are now in need of continuous maintenance and additional repairs. That is the reason for the increase.

Ms. Hughes: Just under that, again under Appendix T, there is Other Goods and Services Purchased. Currently, in this year's budget that is \$2,990,335,000. It is up from \$2,176,257,000. Again, could you just give some details on that?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The increase of \$814.1 million caters for the maintenance and servicing of equipment and infrastructure critical to support additional 'Safe Country'; cellular; generator; solar and satellite installations. *Budget 2024* caters for \$1.2 billion for connectivity charges from Guyana Telephone and Telegraph (GTT) Company Limited, E-Networks, Digicel, Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS); \$500 million for software licenses and other goods and services purchased; \$1.2 billion for equipment maintenance for data centres, fibre optic, Long Term Evolution (LTE) and satellite network; \$68 million for security services at 10 locations; and \$16 million for cleaning and extermination services.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, PM. I was happy to hear about the satellite charges. Could you say if that has increased from last year's allocation and does that increase go to the maintenance of the ICT hubs? You talked about expanding those. Are those charges associated with that?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am happy to inform you that there has been no increase in satellite charges from 2023 to 2024.

Ms. Hughes: Actually, Prime Minister, I meant in the department. Have you allocated more funds so that you can accommodate increased satellite charges that would be incurred if you are expanding to other hinterland areas?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised that there has been and will be no increase in the satellite charges. However, the whole system will be redesigned to accommodate more locations. In other words, at the same charge, a redesign and reworking of the system will help us to accommodate more areas.

Ms. Hughes: Okay, Prime Minister. I want to go to the Guyana Telecommunication Agency. Again, for the same line item, Subsidies and Contributions to Local and International Organisations, I am wondering if you could disaggregate that. In the interest of time, I would like to say that we observe that, last year, you spent only \$23,676,000. The previous year, you had budgeted \$401,339,000. Last year you only spent the \$23,676,000. This year, again, you are coming back for \$401,339,000. Could you explain what happened? You budgeted for a very large amount then you have used a very small...

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: My understanding is that there is no budget line for that. It is zero. Could you say what you are looking at?

Ms. Hughes: I am looking at page 656, Appendix T. That is the Guyana Telecommunications Agency.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, there is no appropriation. Therefore, I am constrained in answering a question since there is no appropriation.

Mr. Chairman: You are not only constrained but you are not obliged whatsoever to answer for an allocation that has zero.

Ms. Hughes: On page 656, it is listed under...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, just tell us where you are. Now, we are at pages 58 and 59 –Telecommunications and Innovation Programme.

Ms. Hughes: The Guyana Telecommunication Agency has more than one programmes. One programme is the NDMA, which I was asking questions under, and then the next programme is the Guyana Telecommunication Agency.

Mr. Chairman: Under the Subsidies and Contributions to Local and International Organisations, the Prime Minister has the Telecommunication and Innovation – NDMA, the Government Information and Communication Services –

National Communications Network, and Department of Public Information.

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Hughes: I am actually looking under the recurrent expenditure. I figured that I could ask the question there. Could you correct me if I am not...

Mr. Chairman: Which recurrent expenditure?

Ms. Hughes: It is on that same page; the Guyana Telecommunication Agency is on page 656.

Mr. Chairman: I am just trying to find that line item in Programme 024. Then, from that, it has to be, from my limited knowledge, under Subsidies and Contributions to Local and International Organisations. I do not see it on page 468.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I have searched this document. There is no appropriation or subsidy. Therefore, I do not see how I could answer a question on this.

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Chairman, help me. Let me explain. If you go back to page 59, my understanding...

Mr. Chairman: Give me a chance to get to page 59.

Ms. Hughes: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: What is the line item?

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, if I could assist...

Mr. Chairman: Give the Hon. Member a chance.

Ms. Hughes: I am on page 59. Then, if we go to line item 6321, there is Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. That total this year is \$5,426,926,000.

Mr. Chairman: I am with you.

Ms. Hughes: The breakdown for that should be on page 654, if I am correct. Correct me if I am wrong.

Mr. Chairman: As far as I understand, the breakdown for that should be on page 468.

Ms. Hughes: Could you see Appendix T, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Let us not jump to Appendix T.

M. Hughes: It breaks down the contributions.

Mr. Chairman: We are at line item 6321. The total being asked for is \$5,426,926,000. My understanding is that those contributions are disaggregated on page 468, Subsidies to Local Organisations. When I go there, I see the total sum of \$5,426,926,000, but there is no Guyana Telecommunication Agency listed here. So, it is not here. Then, I cannot allow you to ask a question under this line because there is no allocation here for it. I would invite the Hon. Juretha Fernandes to further explain because she seems to have an inclination as to where the answer is, and then, PM, I would like to invite the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service to proffer a solution. Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes.

6.11 p.m.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I was just directing you to the numbers that Ms. Hughes was calling because persons were not seeing it. She was just referring, on page 656... actually that heading, if you go under recurrent expenditure, it is the fourth from bottom, Subsidies and Contributions to Local and International Organisations. I was just directing to where that was.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, and yours truly has that and he was on the page too.

Ms. Fernandes: Yes, you see it there.

Mr. Chairman: Now for the Hon. Senior Minister.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and Public Service [Dr. Singh]: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman. We are required by the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) 2003 to include in the annual national budget estimates a summary of the budget of all statutory bodies; there is a special part in the FMAA that addresses statutory bodies, irrespective of whether those statutory bodies are receiving a subvention or not. The Guyana Telecommunications Agency (GTA) is an agency that is self-financed, they generate their own income, and they meet their expenditure out of that income.

If you examine page 656, which is the page on which the Hon. Ms. Catherine Hughes and the Hon. Ms. Juretha Fernandes are looking at, you will see that under the first row, Subsidies and Contributions from Central Government, there is a zero there because the Guyana Telecommunications Agency does not receive a subvention from the Government of Guyana; they finance their operations using their own revenue. As a result of which, if

you turn to page 468, as you quite rightly have pointed out and as the Hon. Prime Minister himself pointed out, there is no subvention being sought for the Guyana Telecommunications Agency, and so the Prime Minister is absolutely correct that because an appropriation or an allocation is not being sought for the GTA, there is no basis for which a question can be asked on the [inaudible] because there is no appropriation for the GTA. The GTA's estimate there is provided for the information of the National Assembly but an appropriation is not being sought for them.

Now, were the Hon. Member desirous of tabling a question in relation to this matter, I am sure that we would be willing to answer that question. Without researching this matter further Mr. Chairman, I rather suspect that this relates to a contribution that the GTA makes to a number of international telecommunication organisations to which we subscribe, whether the International Telecommunications Union or the Caribbean Association of National Telecommunications Organizations (CANTO) or one of those, but an appropriation not being sought for the GTA, there is no basis for a question to be asked during the consideration of the Appropriation Bill and that is exactly what the Hon. Prime Minister said when he said an appropriation is not being sought for the GTA and, therefore, there is no basis for a question to be asked. Thank you very much. I hope that helps.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Dr. Singh. Hon. Member Ms. Catherine Hughes, you may have the floor.

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Chairman, I am going to move on. At 6116, Contracted Employees, could you tell me the position? I know you have an increase here; could you give me the positions? Yes, the positions really, I do not really need the salary.

Brigadier Ret'd Phillips: The answer to the question of the Hon. Member: Director of the Industry and Innovation Unit, Coordinator of National and Other Events, Outreach Coordinator, System Development Officer, Outreach Officer, Outreach Officer, Outreach Officer, Coordinator Web Service, Outreach Officer, Outreach Officer, Information Technology Officer, Outreach Officer, Outreach Officer, Outreach Officer, Office Support Officer, Office Support Officer, Driver/Mechanic. Seventeen positions.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, PM. And PM, if you prefer, you can pull the microphone to you and you do not have to stand; so you might be able to get the appropriate volume. Hon. Catherine Hughes, you may have the floor.

Ms. Hughes: Yes, PM, we could also just say Outreach Officer four or five, instead of bringing it that way. Anyway, 6302, Training (including Scholarships), could you give me an idea of the areas of training that are going to be covered here and under what regions?

Brigadier Phillips: Mr. Chair, basic community level information and communication technology (ICT) training. That is the introductory level training that will target all selected regions. The topics include an Introduction to Computers, Introduction to the Internet and Web, and Microsoft Office Suite; and that training will be conducted from February to August, 20 hours per community, and we are hoping to reach 850 persons. The total estimated cost is \$10 million. Justification of results and an ICT literate country is a cornerstone of a modern knowledge-based digital society and, as such, must be given prominence if we are to become an innovative and competitive nation. To this end, the Government of Guyana in its Manifesto has highlighted ICT training as one of its major ICT related promises because of the fact that Guyana has the potential to become the technology hub of the region.

However, a fundamental challenge is the low level of basic ICT literacy; this, in addition with the lack of awareness, can stymie the growth of the sector. While training has been done in communities across Guyana, there are still a large number of communities remaining to benefit from basic training including communities that are considered remote, hinterland, and disadvantaged. There are also constant requests from community-minded individuals and groups for the extension of training opportunities to their communities. Therefore, the unit must take the necessary steps to expand its ICT community-level training programmes to capture the majority of communities in Guyana. Basic ICT skills are also now more relevant given that the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has forced us to utilise ICT as a replacement for many physical tasks. This training has targeted 30 communities across the country and will cover coastal and hinterland communities. The result will be a more ICT literate population that can contribute to a knowledge-based society.

Next area, intermediate and advanced level training. These are mid and upper-tier training that will include more advanced level content including advanced word processing, internet computing, cybersecurity, web development and programming. These specialised training will be delivered online and face to face content such as JavaScript, Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML), Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), front end frameworks, Structured Query

Language (SQL) and Transact Structured Query Language (TSQL) will be covered; and this will be done from July to August. The amount of persons that we are targeting is 110, and the total cost is \$3 million.

There will be advanced training workshops in animation, artificial intelligence (AI), graphics and cyber security. One advanced training workshop will be held in Georgetown for persons throughout Guyana, and the content to be covered include animation, artificial intelligence, graphics and cyber security. This will run for two weeks to target 30 persons and we intend to spend \$1 million there. Guyanese Girls Code, this is a girl's coding camp where girls will be trained in programming and coding. It is using a collaboration between lecturers at the University of Guyana (UG) and the Industry and Innovation Unit. Focused areas include programming with scratch, robotics with VEXcode, disaster recovery (DR) programming challenges and projects, problem solving and decision thinking. This will be conducted during the period July to August; and 250 persons are targeted there, and we intend to spend \$3 million.

Information communication and technology innovation camps. These are special academic camps where children will learn to become innovators; training in basic IT, animation graphics, coding, programming robotics, and stem among other things will be done. These ICT innovation camps will be held in Regions 2, 4, 6, 9 and 10 during the period July to August, one week for each camp, and we intend to train 200 persons there; and we will utilise \$5 million to cover the cost associated with training. Then we have the train the trainers workshops, and this will be held in the remote and hinterland communities in Guyana. These training will look to equip persons with the skills to become ICT trainers within their communities. This will be done between February to April, 40 hours per community, and 300 persons will be trained utilising \$6.5 million.

Job Access with Speech (JAWS) training. Special training will be held with persons who are blind using the JAWS software. Modules include keyboard orientation, basic information about the computer, learning about JAWS settings and commands, word with JAWS, internet with JAWS and video conferencing platform. This training will be done between May and October; 30 persons will be the target group and we intend to spend \$1 million. Then along with the disability commission and the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD), we will do some special training, ICT training for persons with physical disabilities; special training will be held during the month of June with persons that have a physical disability, a

target group of 30 persons, and we intend to spend \$1.5 million. That brings us to a total of 1,800 persons who will be trained to a tune of \$31 million.

Mr. Ramjattan: Sir, I come back to the Guyana Telecommunications Agency, and under the FMAA this body makes its money out of fines and fees, and all of that is not beyond parliamentary scrutiny. Notwithstanding its subsidy and subvention being given, I am going to ask a question on that on page 656...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you could ask a question in another form and forum. In the Committee of Supply you have to ask a question on an appropriation being sought and none is being sought. This is the wrong forum, an appropriate question, and if you do submit it, I will ensure I deal with it immediately.

Mr. Ramjattan: Very well, Sir.

Programme: 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation – \$5,556,765,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

6.26 p.m.

Programme: 025 – Government Information and Communication Services – \$1,112,727,000

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, under line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, when you go to the details it states the National Communications Network (NCN) and the Department of Public Information (DPI). When you go to the Appendix, again, there are no details. So, is it a case that this is a lumpsum but there is no information as to what this money is going to be spent on?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: What is the line item?

Mr. Jones: It is line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. When you go to the details of Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, it states, the National Communications Network and the Department of Public Information. When you go to the Appendix for details, there is nothing listed.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chair, for line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, there is \$713,290,000. There is subvention for the National Communications Network – \$336,750,000; and for the Department of Public Information – \$376,540,000. It is expected to cover salaries, daily operations, *et cetera*.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Prime Minister is it the increase that caters for salaries and wages?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: In both cases, yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Jones: Could you indicate if the DPI or the NCN are going to be employing more persons during this year?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised that the DPI and the NCN have vacancies to fill this year. The DPI has indicated that it has five vacancies to fill and the NCN has 70 vacancies that it intends to fill in 2024.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister indicate if the 70 and added persons for the DPI will cater to access to the Opposition on the NCN – as in, how many hours will the Opposition have access per week or per day?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I wish to advise the Hon. Member and the entire Committee that we are committed to balanced coverage every day – 356 days in every year in Guyana and 366 during a leap year.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, could the Hon. Prime Minister indicate who the Opposition should make contact with a view to facilitate its airtime on the NCN?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Minister Mr. Kwame McCoy, in his role as the Minister responsible for information is easily contacted by all in Guyana.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Jones, you have the floor.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Members, this is good time to...

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman...?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you have the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Prime Minister provide the Committee with the salary and remuneration package for the head at the Department of Public Information. I think they call the person a director. It is the Director. What is the salary and benefits?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We have someone employed as Director acting at a basic salary of \$527,238. There is a duty allowance that goes along with that salary – \$50,000; an entertainment allowance for \$15,000; a phone allowance – \$20,000; and the fact that he is acting, he is receiving an acting allowance of \$61,612.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, can I ask the same question for the National Communications Network?

Mr. Chairman: It is the same question for NCN, PM.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) acting is the designation at a monthly salary of \$676,893, with an acting allowance of \$326,680. For monthly allowances, he receives \$52,000 every month.

Ms. Hughes: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: This increased by two persons. Could you say the positions that come under that category and also the salary of the two persons?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: For the two positions in question, there is the Senior Community Engagement Officer that came on board with effect from the 8th August, 2023, with a monthly salary of \$202,640; duty allowance – \$10,000; transportation allowance – \$15,000; telephone allowance – \$5,000; the yearly gratuity will amount to \$547,128; and the vacation allowance – \$405,280. The second position is a Research Document Officer with effect from the 18th September, 2023, with a monthly salary of \$159,750; duty allowance – \$10,000; yearly gratuity allowance – \$431,323; and vacation allowance – \$319,500.

Programme: 025 – Government Information and Communication Services – \$1,112,727,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Estimates

Programme: 021 – Prime Minister's Secretariat – \$44,800,000

Programme: 021 – Prime Minister's Secretariat – \$44,800,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 022 – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$150,000,000

Dr. Cummings: I have two questions under the Civil Defence Commission (CDC). This is a very important department. We all can recall the 2005 flood and so on. With the global warming and climate change, we have to keep it on the front burner. So, for project code 2606400, Civil Defence Commission, I noticed that \$294 million was initially budgeted for, and \$144 million was spent pre-2024. So, we have \$150 million now. In 2023, \$76,717,000 was spent. I wonder why there is almost 100% increase. What is the reason for that?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chair, we have the construction of a multi-purpose building and bond which is a roll over project. That amounts to \$45,262,000 for its construction in 2024. There is supervision for the construction of the same bond – \$3,022,000; supply and installation of furniture and shelves for the storage of equipment in the bond – \$6,000,000; construction of guard hut for the multi-purpose bond at the CDC headquarters – \$4,797,000; construction of guard hut at Lethem – \$5,991,000; construction of male and female outdoor washroom facility at Lethem, Region 9 – \$18,500,000; construction of concrete surface for containers and heavy equipment at the CDC headquarters, Georgetown – \$21,860,000; construction of western section perimeter fence at the CDC headquarters – \$10,735,000; purchase of forklift – \$20,000,000; multi-purpose printers – \$2.7 million; security camera system for the CDC headquarters in Georgetown and Lethem – \$5.4 million.

6.41 p.m.

Professional camera with accessories – \$160,000; televisions – \$340,000; mini refrigerators – \$408,000; microwave – \$103,000; bookshelves – \$595,000; executive chairs and executive office desks – \$700,000 and 598,000; office chairs for Regions 4 and 8 – \$1.2 million; office desks for Regions 4 and 8 – \$842,400; weeding machines for Region 4 – \$152,000; power saw – \$55,000; pressure washer for Region 9 – \$295,000; leaf blower and vacuum cleaner for Regions 4 and 9 – \$115,000 and \$63,500; and the total amounts to \$150 million.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it not only at the national level but also the regional level. I am assuming that you would not be using the bond at Mandela anymore when this would be completed. Am I correct?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, again, the Hon. Member's information is dated. We have stopped using the Gymnasium at Mandela as a bond some two years ago. Everything is now operated from Thomas Lands and from Timehri.

Dr. Cummings: Very well, Sir. I have one more question.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Dr. Cummings: Yes, under the Indicators at number four, we looked at effects of disaster, be it damage, losses, floods and so forth. You did say that you have a database, but do you use it to assess the money to be spent? As you said you are flexible, so as the need arises you will spend money. Best practices, disaster preparedness, should be like 7-17% of the

Gross Domestic Product (GDP). I noticed on the Indicator it is not applicable. I hope the next time around, we will have some figures and percentages under this Indicator.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, will we?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: In all fairness, we looked at what happened in the past and we utilised that to forecast what is likely to happen. So it is a combination of information from the climate office, also information from past experiences and weather patterns in Guyana. We are able to determine if you have heavy rainfall through floodplain analysis and the areas that are likely to be affected. Therefore, all of that will help us to make informed decisions. During the actual disaster, as I mentioned before, the Damage and Needs Assessment team will be deployed quickly to the impact area and, in the shortest possible time, will prepare the report which again will help to guide us in our interventions in brining relief and delivering relief supplies to those affected in those areas.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chair, last year the Hon. Prime Minister indicated that this project, the completion of the multipurpose building and the bond at Thomas Land, would have been completed in December, 2023. Could the Hon. Minister indicate why it was not completed?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I remembered that I indicated last year that it is a multiyear project that will be done over two years. The deadline for the completion of this project is July, 2024.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Sir, I am quoting from the *Hansard*. The question was put by Dr. Cummings.

“...is it a new building or is it being retrofitted?

...The completion date. Do you have a projected date for the completion of the building and the bond at Thomas lands that is being built?”

The Hon. Prime Minister responded:

“It is December, 2023.”

Perhaps, the Hon. Prime Minister may want to withdraw what he just said. Could he provide us with an answer as to why it was not completed on this date and when exactly did the project begin?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, I have been very intolerant of persons usurping the power of the Chair. Request for withdrawal, you should have asked me to ask.

Mr. Mahipaul: My apologies, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: The question could have been, has the bond been completed or is the roll over catered for? We have to be careful. We have been going great so far. Hon. Prime Minister, go ahead.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The contract document has July, 2024 for the deadline or the completion date. Obviously, the contractor would have been very optimistic and assured us that he was working towards December, 2023. Maybe that is the reason why. We were equally optimistic but, technically, nothing is wrong because the contract document gives the contractor until July to complete the building.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much PM; thank you very much, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could he tell us when the project began?

Mr. Chairman: When did the project begin?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The project started in July, 2022. Yes, it is supposed to run for two years to July, 2024.

Programme: 022 – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$150,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 023 – Power Generation – \$85,412,110,000

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. You put all the heads and just in case we run short, I will start with the country's favourite project, the gas-to-shore project. Sir, may I ask the first question for which the Prime Minister said he will answer on the air?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am asking through you. Prime Minister, the consultants that you have retained, obviously I assume they are permanent (perms). Could you tell us who they are, what their consultancy involves and their contract sums?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chair, consultants: Engineers India Limited (EIL), the commencement date of their contract was 12th January, 2023 and the contract price is \$4,660,137, 966; expenditure as at 31st December, \$1,390,807,869; estimated amount due as at 31st December, 2024 will be \$1,578,410,100; estimated local funding will be \$1,578,410,100. The next consultant will be Stantec Inc.: supervision, transformers, transmission lines, sub-stations, control centres. The commencement date was 29th November, 2023, and the contract sum, \$1,490,312,719; expenditure as at 31st December, 2023, \$80,199,724; estimated amount due as at 31st December, 2024,

\$1,410,112,993; and the estimated local funding would be \$1,410,112,993.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, with due respect, when the PM got up and spoke under Current which only had \$400 million, if I could recall correctly, he said there are a series of consultants under it, and he said when we get to this point... Obviously, these two consultants are bigger than the moneys allocated there. I would like to go back to the question that you said you would allow.

Mr. Chairman: I would.

Mr. Patterson: If you do not mind, could you redirect the Prime Minister?

Mr. Chairman: PM, while we have passed the Current and there was the issue of the consultant and the names and consultancy fees, we did make reference to this particular intervention. I would allow you to proffer an answer to the question posed.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chair, those were the consultants for the geotechnical consultants, for the gas-to-energy project, and the environmental consultants that were dealt with under recurrent expenditure.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, he cannot be saying “were”; this is 2024. We have not even approved [*inaudible*]. The Prime Minister was very specific and he listed these things. He said I am premature. But they are listed, and he did call out and you could recall that, Sir. These are persons to be paid for in 2024 and he said oil and gas for the gas-to-shore project. That is what he said, Sir. It cannot be, “were” because that would have been in 2023.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chair, it is quite clear that, as I mentioned before, I was referring to the consultancies that will be paid for under the gas-to-energy task force. That is what we mentioned earlier. We talked about Amalia Falls; we talked about the gas-to-energy task force.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, maybe we can ask the *Hansard* to repeat it. I know I got up and asked the question immediately. He listed Amalia Falls; he listed a gas-to-energy, and he listed advisors to him. I asked who the consultants are and what is the consultancy under that current item. The PM said I am premature and when we get to gas-to-shore I will ask your leave, Sir. The PM is now... I know time is probably [*inaudible*].

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There are several consultants. I already indicated two just now. I have a consultant for information and communications technology (ICT), which I

mentioned earlier, and we have consultants who work specifically with the gas-to-energy task force. I did mention geotechnical, I did mention environmental consultants. We have consultants. We have to do evaluation of the Amalia Falls; we had a request for information, for proposals. We have to do evaluation. So we have to engage consultants. It is a lot of consultancies. I am sorry if you find it confusing.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, that could be a little bit imputing on the person, the Hon. Member.

6.56 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, I do not want to delay, but I know who you heard and my Colleagues are reminding me, if we can just replay exactly what the Hon. Prime Minister said and exactly what he is repeating now. Obviously, for some reason, the Hon. Member does not want to name the consultants paid on in the current. Even if they are assigned to any task force, Sir, it is a simple thing. If they are assigned to the gas-to-energy task force and if they have been paid under that ministry who was responsible to give us those consultancies and what they consultancies are. It is obvious but I do not want to delay the Committee and the Prime Minister for his thing. I am sure you are aware of what transpired there. Sir, could I ask a question now? We have expended, locally, \$72.96 billion up to 2023. Could we have a breakdown of those expenditures? There is no need to repeat the consultants because you have already told us the number of consultancies.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: In addition to what was mentioned earlier, in terms of the consultants, these are the components we are talking about here: \$1,578,410,000 That is the Engineering, Procurement and Competitive (EPC), LINDSAYCA; commencement date 13th December, 2023; contract sum \$159,920,740,123; transformers, Cummings Electrical, commencement date is 23rd May, 2023, and the contract sum is \$2,103,774,431; the transmission lines and substation, Kalpataru Power Transmission Limited (KPIL) commencement date is 19th July, 2023, and the contract sum is \$33,651,703,332.

Mr. Chairman: I just want to, before you go, draw your attention. We have exhausted in 90 minutes allocated to the Prime Minister and we have 71 minutes in savings. We just have nine minutes remaining under savings.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, according to my time, we were supposed to be stopping at 2.47 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Your time is indicative. This time is official but you can come and double-check. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister for the three contracts that have been awarded. I asked how we expended the \$73 billion. Obviously, the \$160 billion, \$2.4 billion and \$33 billion are way more than the \$73 billion.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Expenditure as of 31st December, 2023, for LINDSAYCA, \$55,727,498,293; for Cummings Electrical with the transformer, as of 31st December, 2023, \$631,132,329; and transmission lines and substation, KPIL, expenditure as of 31st December, 2023, \$8,532,519,230.

Mr. Patterson: The numbers 55 and eight equal to 63. When you add the consultants \$1.3 billion, \$1.9 billion and \$1.4 billion they do not add to the \$73 billion expended. Correct me, I know the Hon. Member said that we are bad at Mathematics but, could you correct me there? The numbers you gave to me are \$55 billion for LINDSAYCA; Cummings Electrical \$0.6 billion; \$8.5 billion for the T&B, which is approximately \$64 billion; \$1.3 billion for the EPC consultant; and Sandtec at \$1.5 billion.

Mr. Chairman: Too many zeros.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, we will lay over that information.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Even the Hon. Prime Minister is cooperating with you to give you not only accurate information, but we can say full.

Mr. Patterson: The Prime Minister's response promoted one of the questions I was going to ask. On 11th November, 2022, via a notice paper we asked the Prime Minister. Could Hon. Prime Minister inform the National Assembly if any agreements we have signed with Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL) in connection with the Whales Gas-to-shore? Two years ago, the Prime Minister responded that he would present to this honourable House those agreements when they have been agreed upon and executed. This is just in connection with his laying over. Could the Prime Minister now say, you will lay over the agreements that you promised two years ago?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised that the three agreements were signed and they could be laid over.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, thank you very much and I hope you can recall that. We have here in the project profile, funding from the United States of America (USA) to the tune of \$40 billion. I expect that the Hon. Prime Minister is assuming that \$40 billion will be forthcoming. Could I ask the Prime

Minister, why is it only \$40 billion since it is on record stating that you are getting retroactive funding, whereby whenever this loan is approved or if it is ever approved, it is retroactive and it will cover all the moneys that were paid before? That is the record there.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We have already budgeted \$40 billion from our Government funds to pay and the other \$40 billion that you see here will be paid from the external funding.

Mr. Patterson: That I can see and that is obvious if you look at the capital. I read that. The question is retroactive funding. Your Government has claimed that whenever Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) approves the loan it will retroactively fund what you have done before. I am asking, why is the retroactive funding not included in this? Is it that there will be no retroactive funding? It is a simple response.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chair, the \$40 billion that will come from external funding is to pay for current year expenditure. A policy decision on how we deal with retroactive funding will be forthcoming.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, let us move on.

Dr. Singh: May I please?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, senior Minister. I stopped the clock.

Dr. Singh: Very good. Might I, for the second occasion, say that the Prime Minister is absolutely correct. We are considering the Estimates of Expenditure. The Prime Minister correctly said that the \$40 billion represents \$40 billion worth of the expenditure that will be made this year. If instead or additionally we were to look at table four in the national estimates, we will see – Here I pointed specifically to pages nine – that \$40 billion is reflected under project loans as the Prime Minister correctly indicated, so that is \$40 billion that will be incur this year. On page 10, under a broad heading that we describe as Balance of Payment (BOP) Support Loans, which essentially is non-project loans and, in this instance, we are classified like the Hon. Prime Minister quite clearly said. We are classifying the reimbursement, in a manner that is different from the project loan component. The reimbursable part, which is the retroactive financing to which the Hon. Member refers, is reflected on page 10 against the USA.

There are actually two components there. The component shown on page nine and the component shown on page 10 of the Estimates of Revenue, which in this instance refers to

inflows, revenues and other inflows. Thank you very much. I hope that sheds some light on the matter, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, you have three minutes to wrap up the head.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, could I ask for insurance? Insurance for the current work – is there insurance in place for the current work? Is there a bond in place by the consultants? You have five consultants here that you call a performance bonding place. If there is, would you lay those over?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised that each EPC contract has its insurance policy.

Mr. Patterson: Right; I asked if you could lay that over.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Certainly, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Patterson: Going to the settlement of land acquisition and court matters, on this project, could the Hon. Prime Minister provide an update?

7.11 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, remember we have to link it back to this allocation, so you have to say something like...

Mr. Patterson: Under this line item, Sir, ...

Mr. Chairman: ...is it catered for?

Mr. Patterson: All right, then.

Mr. Chairman: Under this line item.

Mr. Patterson: I am so guided, Sir. Is it catered for?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, dealing with land acquisition is a multi-agency operation. The gas-to-energy taskforce is leading that operation and it is ably assisted through the Attorney General's Office and that is going smoothly.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, the field development approval by ExxonMobil, is that in place? Is anything catered for in the event that is not there and what is the extent of ExxonMobil's insurance for the installation, as you said, of all the Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) Services? There are EPC contractors. Is there insurance in place for the pipeline and, of course, will you be willing to lay that over as you were before?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised again that ExxonMobil has insurance coverage with the contractors. That is catered for.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, will you be willing to lay that over? I am restricting yourself to the EPC's thing, just as you did before for the construction work and things such as that.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We will lay it over.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, thank you very much. I would not want to delay any more. If any of my Colleagues have any gas-to-shore questions.

Mr. Chairman: I will give you two minutes to wrap up because I will have to put the rest of Power Generation, Telecommunications and Innovation and Government Information and Communication Services, capital, all at once. Are there any other questions?

Mr. Patterson: Could I ask the status of the Kato Hydropower Project, the funds disbursed and when do we anticipate that being completed?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Kato Hydropower Project is a failed project. The contractor failed to deliver. We have since taken the decision to utilise the force accounts and complete that project by August, 2024.

Programme: 023 – Power Generation – \$85,412,110,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation – \$4,368,130,000

Programme: 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation – \$4,368,130,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 025 – Government Information and Communication Services – \$188,700,000

Programme: 025 – Government Information and Communication Services – \$188,700,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Hon. Prime Minister, thank you and your staff very much for taking us through those gruelling last three hours of examination. Thank you very much. We will now invite the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs and his staff and you could occupy the western portion.

Agency: 52 Ministry of Legal Affairs

Current Expenditure

Programme: 521 - Policy Development and Administration – \$206,215,000

Mr. Forde: In relation to line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: We notice that for *Budget 2024*, as it relates to last year and the previous years, there has been a considerable increase stated there. Could you explain the reason for this?

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: The variance is due to the employment of 11 staff. Those staff include the Permanent Secretary (PS). Sir, we had a Permanent Secretary who was on the permanent establishment and that person resigned. The new Permanent Secretary who is seated to my right was hired on a contractual basis. We have a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Coordinator, M&E Officer, Assistant Secretary, two Drivers, three Typist Clerks and two Clerks. I am also informed that one of reasons these persons had to be hired on a contractual basis was because the Public Service Commission (PSC) was not in place at the time when these hirings took place. The Public Service Commission, as the Hon. Member may be aware of, was sworn in on 14th July, 2023.

Mr. Forde: In relation to line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: There is also a considerable increase in relation to this year as opposed to the previous years. Could you explain this please?

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, certainly. [Mr. Duncan: *Yuh bruk up the building.*] No, no. The Attorney General's Chambers, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Office of the Public Trustee/Official Receiver and the Office of the State Solicitor are all housed in a singular *edifice* located at Lot 95 Carmichael Street, Georgetown. A building that is made of wood, it is old, was constructed in the 70's and requires maintenance. We have an unusually high spate of fires in the country. This building houses a lot of the important legal documents of the Government of Guyana and the State of Guyana, so we have to ensure that those documents are safe and the building is safe. As a result, we have commissioned a rewiring of the building this year at a cost of \$25 million; we have begun the repairs of all the washrooms in the building at a cost of \$7 million; we are doing routine maintenance at a cost of \$3.5 million; we have repainted the internal walls of the building; we have replaced the gate with an automatic grilled gate; we have restructured and refurbished the fence in keeping with the architecture of the State House, which adjoins the AG's Office; and we are

doing repairs in the library of the building. There are massive necessary repairs being undertaken on the building.

Mr. Forde: In relation to line item 6302 on page 277, could you explain the purpose and extent of the scholarships that may be provided and contemplated under this line item?

Mr. Nandlall: We conducted, during the course of the year, a number of training exercises for the State Counsel within the Attorney General's Chambers, and state counsels without encompassing lawyers from the Director of Public Prosecution's (DPP) office and lawyers across the state sector. Last year, for example, we had a number of training in arbitration where we brought in arbitration experts from North America and the Caribbean. We have joint training arrangements with universities in North America, in relation to legal drafting and legislative drafting. This year we will have another series of training sessions which will include training in illegal mining, Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) and arbitration. The arbitration training will continue because we have not completed the required syllabus in relation to that training.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, PM. Hon. Member, Mr. Forde. Sorry, AG.

Mr. Nandlall: You are demoting me Sir, but it is all right.

Mr. Chairman: I have no authority to demote or promote. Hon. Member Mr. Forde, you have the floor.

Mr. Forde: Line item 6272 – Electricity Charges: It seems strange that for the previous years no allocation was made in relation to electricity but is this the first year, Mr. AG?

Mr. Nandlall: Yes. I concede Sir that there is an anomaly on the record, and I made inquiries. I know that prior to 2020, the States Asset Recovery Agency (SARA) established under the previous Administration, fell under the administrative portfolio of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. When that agency was closed down, there was a lot of money that was left in the accounts. We referred the matter to the Ministry of Finance and we were advised that it should be paid to the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) as prepaid payments for the Ministry of Legal Affairs. We have been benefiting from the deductions out of that prepayment, in respect of our electricity charges, since 2020. This would be the first year I am informed that we should be budgeting for electricity charges and the sum that you see there is the budgeted sum.

7.26 p.m.

Programme: 521 – Policy Development and Administration – \$206,215,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 523 – Attorney Generals Chambers – \$1,195,940,000

Mr. Forde: In relation to line item 6116, Contracted Employees, could the Attorney General explain this year's allocation?

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir. There is a variance firstly. That variance is due to the addition to the staff compliment of two Parliamentary Counsels, six State Counsels, two Legal Clerks, one Confidential Secretary and the promotion of one staff from Principal Legal Advisor to Assistant Solicitor General. It is 11 staff. We also had seven resignations and one death.

Mr. Forde: In relation to line item 6241, rental of buildings, could the Attorney General explain this item?

Mr. Nandlall: Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings: the Constitutional Reform Commission, though it is a tribunal to be appointed by His Excellency the President, the Attorney General has been assigned the responsibility to assist the President in the establishment of this tribunal. In this regard, we have rented a building on Middle Street. We rented it some time last year or the year before. We have used the building so far to house a Commission of Inquiry into the 2020 Elections. We used the building to house the Commission of Inquiry into the Mahdia Dormitory fire. The Leader of the Opposition can confirm that he has received a letter from me, on behalf of the President, inviting him to submit his nominees to be appointed to the Constitutional Reform Commission. He has until 10th February to do so. Earnestly Sir, I can safely say that just after these budget proceedings are concluded, His Excellency shall move to appoint the Constitution Reform Commission and this is the building in which that Commission will be housed. It is already furnished and ready for occupation by the Secretariat and the Commission.

Mr. Forde: In relation to line item 6284, Other, you would observe that there is a considerable variance or difference between what was budgeted in 2023 and the Revised in terms of what was actually spent. Could you explain this?

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, of course. A lot of it included the fact that the Constitution Reform Commission did not come on stream in 2023. Also, we budgeted princely sum for the Law School but that is an on-going process. We have not been able to spend the type of money that we have anticipated.

That process is at a stage where a feasibility study is now being concluded for submission to the Council of Legal Education. We will then have to await permission from the Council of Legal Education to proceed to the next step because that is what will inform the Council in terms of the type of decision it will make. We have already identified the land. The land has been surveyed. We have a provisional lease from the University of Guyana. The Law School is likely to be located within the precincts of the University or on the University grounds.

We made substantial payments but not conclusive payments towards the completion of the review, the revision of the Laws of Guyana. Today, I got an email that the binders for the laws have arrived. The revision of the laws will be completed and they will then go to the Guyana National Printers Limited. We have paid off for the review but we have not yet fully paid for the printing, so moneys are left back which have to be paid to the printers. The Law Reports of Guyana from 2008 to 2020 will be completed before the first quarter of this year as well. They are currently being compiled. We have already selected the covers. As soon as we receive them, they will also go to the Guyana National Printers for printing. We have paid deposits at the Guyana National Printers Limited and we have paid the contractor for the compilation and the preparation of those law reports. We have final payments to be made on those things. By and large, those are the main items that may have resulted or have resulted in the differential to which my friend is referring.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Attorney General, you mentioned sometime before that the Constitutional Reform Commission would have been set up during the course of this year and you indicated, from what you said today, you have budgeted for the rental. Could you indicate to us what is the rental per month?

Mr. Nandlall: The rental per month is, when we initially took the building, it was \$700,000 and the landlord has raised the price to \$1,000,000 per month for the building. It is located at 92 Middle Street, Georgetown. It is the entire bottom flat of a fairly big building.

Mr. Forde: In relation to line item 6231, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, what does this cover?

Mr. Nandlall: Do you mean line item 6321?

Mr. Forde: Yes, line item 6321.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes. This money relates to the establishment of the restorative Justice Centres across the country. Now,

you would recall that I have been speaking a lot about restorative justice. It is a project funded under the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) support for Criminal Justice Projects. This year, it will now move under the Ministry. It is because we do not have the financial investment to outlay the Restorative Justice Centres across the country in the manner we would have liked, we are twinning with the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and we will work with them in establishing a Restorative Justice office wherever there is a probation office.

We believe that there is great similarity in the types of services that these two agencies will provide. We know that the Probation Services office already has an established institutional relationship with the Criminal Justice System in particular across the country, in relation to the various Magistrate's Court. If we are able to locate a Restorative Justice Officer in those offices and take advantage of the already established institutional framework that exists, it will allow us to deliver this very unique product of probation as well as restorative justice in one unitary hole across the country with minimum investments in capital. The \$50 million that you see here is for us to bring the RJ Unit under the Ministry of Legal Affairs for the first time, staff it, *et cetera*, and then fan it out into the various regions across the country, utilising the kind support that our sister Ministry – the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security is offering us.

Mr. Forde: Mr. AG, in relation to line item 6131, Other Direct Labour Costs, what does this line item covers for this year?

Mr. Nandlall: I am told it is duty allowance that is paid for eight staff, three Parliamentary Counsels and five State Counsels at \$35,000 each.

Mr. Mahipaul: I just want one question and perhaps a clarification. The Hon. AG said \$700,000 was the rental but last year ...

Mr. Nandlall: It was \$750,000. I think you are trying to correct me.

Mr. Mahipaul: The question I want to ask is, the AG was very firm last year in saying that this Constitutional Reform Commission would have been up and running. In fact, he did indicate that on 30th January, 2023, it will be very soon. Of course, a year has passed. Could the Hon. AG tell this Committee what caused the delay for the establishment of the Constitutional Reform Commission?

Mr. Nandlall: One explanation that I have already provided to the Press is, the Government got taken up with the Border issue with Venezuela and some other pressing issues, so it did not happen within the time frame that we had expected. The letters have gone out already. I have already received a number of responses nominating various persons from the various stakeholders organisations to whom we wrote to invite those nominees. I do not think I received any nominations from the Opposition. Let us hope you do not delay the process any further. We are getting there. It will be swiftly appointed this year.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, I thought you were on Programme 521. Could I ask a question?

Mr. Chairman: We have passed Programme 521.

Mr. Holder: I thought you were at Programme 521. I would like to ask a question on Programme 523.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Holder: Line item 6284, Other, Goods and Services, Hon. AG, through you Cde. Chairman, is there a sum under this line item that caters for legal services with respect to the Oil Spill matter before the Courts? If it is not under this line item, point me to the line item?

7.41 p.m.

Mr. Nandlall: The quick answer is no.

Mr. Holder: Could you point me to a line item, Sir?

Mr. Nandlall: There is no oil spill matter that is before the court.

Mr. Holder: Parent company guarantee matter, Sir.

Mr. Nandlall: That is being financed, Sir. The Attorney General is part of the proceedings out of the normal budgetary sums that are budgeted to offer legal services for the Government. There is no singular provision anywhere for that particular case.

Mr. Holder: In that case, could I ask the Attorney General (AG) the sum catered for 2024 for the matter and that which was spent in 2023? Since there is no line item and it comes from, wherever it comes from.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, I will have to total all the lawyers' salaries in the Ministry. We are not hiring, we are appearing... [An Hon. Member: The Chambers.] ...the Chambers is appearing. I have to total all the lawyers' salaries and send it to you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General I was about to tell the Hon. Member that may be a question for questions, not for the estimates. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: Very well, Sir. I thought it was outsourced.

Mr. Chairman: That is okay.

Programme: 523 – Attorney General’s Chambers – \$1,195,940,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 524 – State Solicitor – \$40,171,000

Programme: 524 – State Solicitor – \$40,171,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 521 – Policy Development and Administration – \$300,040,000

Programme: 521 – Policy Development and Administration – \$300,040,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 523 – Attorney Generals Chambers – \$18,500,000

Programme: 523 – Attorney Generals Chambers – \$18,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 524 – State Solicitor – \$3,500,000

Programme: 524 – State Solicitor – \$3,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs and your staff for taking us through your agency.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this is a good time to take a shorter break and then we will return in half an hour for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Assembly resumed.

Assembly suspended 7.46 p.m.

Assembly resumed 8.24 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

I invite the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and his staff led by Ambassador Harper to take us through his agency. Hon. Members, let me

turn your attention to pages 102/103. I have to caution Members with the use of certain words. Certain words promote great controversy in the House.

Agency: 12 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation

Current Expenditure

Programme: 121 – Development of Foreign Policy – \$3,564,156,000

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6111 or 6111 to 6117, the Staffing Details, I note there is a reduction in staff by 12. Minister Todd, why are so many people leaving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation? What accounts for the reduction?

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]: Actually, it is part of the yearly activities, so we have postings. You will see that persons will move from programme one to programme two – those who were posted to foreign missions. That would account for not a reduction, but as a movement from one programme to the next.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Hon. Minister agree to lay over the missions to which these personnel were posted?

Mr. Todd: Certainly, Mr. Chairman, we can do that.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, line item 6111, we are at still. Whilst there is a decrease in staff, there is an increase of about \$45 million. What accounts for that increase in the expenditure? Is it as a result of the overseas postings? I am trying to ascertain.

Mr. Todd: That would be the promotions, Mr. Chairman. Taking officers to the next pay grade, as well as the 6.5% increase that Government would have provided to public servants.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6261, Local Travel and Subsistence, I notice there is a sum there of \$65 million. We had this query last year because there was another substantial sum there. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what this sum is for exactly? Local Travel – where are you going? Is there a work plan to support this amount?

Mr. Todd: Mr. Chairman, this caters to several categories, postings, re-postings and cross-postings of staff, administrative visits to missions, transportation, as well as the public relations (PR) programme that we have at the borderline regions.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, a follow up, could the Hon. Minister indicate what this PR programme is that they have in the outlying regions and in which specific areas?

Mr. Todd: This is an initiative that we had taken when we assumed Office to sensitise the villages in the borderline regions, particularly Regions 1, 9, 8 and 7. This is to bring them up to speed with the controversy that Venezuela has over the validity of the 1899 Award, giving them a historical perspective, helping them to understand, clearly, how we are positioned and what we are doing in terms of preserving and protecting our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman a further...

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Follow-up question. Who exactly goes because the people in these regions complained bitterly that they do not see anybody from the Government. Do you send officers? Who exactly goes to do this PR and the sensitisation?

Mr. Todd: We have a mixed team. We have a team of members from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and we also collaborate with other individuals. What we have had is a slight pause due to flooding in some of the regions as well as the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). This year, we are going to ensure that we get back on track. We have a very active programme planned for 2024.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, I am having a difficulty understanding COVID-19, *et cetera*, but I will give the Minister the benefit of the doubt and ask that he lay over with this honourable House that work plan for these visits.

Mr. Todd: Very well, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, if you wish, you may sit and pull the microphone to you, we will be able to hear you quite loudly and clearly.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Appreciate it, Sir. Thank you. Line item 6284 – Other, could the Hon. Minister provide a disaggregation of that sum? Thank you.

Mr. Todd: Payment of legal fees \$500 million; advocacy \$131,200,000 million; public diplomacy and public relations activities \$20 million; diaspora engagements and outreaches \$50,030,000 million; digitisation of the Ministry's records \$10 million; bank charges and remittances to overseas missions \$50,500,000 million; information technology infrastructure that would require software applications,

antivirus, *et cetera*, \$22 million; other operational expenditure \$26 million; giving the total of \$810 million.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman a follow up, you said \$110 million on advocacy. Could you clarify for us what exactly you mean by that?

Mr. Todd: Strategic advice and counsel with regards to the relationship between Guyana and dealing with PR for Guyana.

Ms. Walton-Desir: When you say PR for Guyana, are you referring specifically to the local PR drive or is this PR on the international level?

Mr. Todd: On the international level.

8.34 p.m.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6294 – Other: I would be grateful for a disaggregation of that amount. Thanks.

Mr. Todd: The disaggregation is: transportation and visiting delegations – \$180 million; multilateral and global affairs – \$50 million; official visits – \$85 million; and miscellaneous expenditure – \$63,844,000, which gives a total of \$376,844,000.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I keep having this concern because I heard the Hon. Member refer to official visits, but I keep making the observation that line item 6262 provides a discrete heading for overseas conferences and official visits. Why is there a reluctance to include that sum there, specifically?

Mr. Todd: This is to pay for the expenses of meals and accommodations when we have visiting delegations here in Guyana.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Just for my clarification, is it one for when 'we have visiting', and the other is for when 'we are visiting'?

Mr. Todd: I am advised that we do not have that line item.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I will move on but just to observe that there is line item 6262, which states Overseas Conferences and Official Visits. We will move on.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you want the floor?

Mr. Todd: Yes, Mr. Chairman. This is just the format of the schedule, but we do not have that line item under the Ministry. As you see, it is at zero.

Mr. Chairman: There is a zero there.

Mr. Todd: That is correct.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships), could the Minister indicate how much of this is for training through the Foreign Service Institute (FSI)?

Mr. Todd: This is the FSI's budget, so all of the training would go through the Foreign Service Institute.

Ms. Walton-Desir: From the same line item, could the Hon. Member indicate what are the particular courses or areas of focus of the FSI? I am not averse to him laying over that information in the interest of time.

Mr. Todd: Mr. Chairman, I could spare the time. The courses or areas of focus are: language training; orientation for officers; posting preparation; protocol and console; Microsoft Excel; training in the understanding of the Local Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS); language use and diplomacy; multilateral Caribbean Community (CARICOM); defence and environment; foreign policy matters; research and analysis; accounting; training in administration staff; guest lecturers presentations; substantiable development diplomacy; the art of speech writing; energy diplomacy; foreign and security policy context in the Caribbean; diplomatic etiquette; protocol and ceremonial; international law; communities and diplomacy; and diplomatic communications in practice.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am at the same line item. Is the Hon. Minister saying to us that all of these courses are offered at the FSI?

Mr. Todd: This would also include training through the Public Service Ministry (PSM).

Ms. Walton-Desir: Okay. It is not all through the FSI. I am trying to understand, specifically, what are the courses offered by the FSI. I am not speaking about PSM or any other place because I suspect that may come under the PSM budget.

Mr. Todd: If the Hon. Member would wish for me to lay it over, I could do that in the interest of time.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I offered before, and the Hon. Member declined, so I think we will continue. This is because what I want to understand, and it is follow up, you could probably lay that over if you wish, is specifically to these foreign

affairs courses – protocol, language, defence and environmental foreign policy. How are they offered, do we bring in personnel to offer these courses or are they offered by maybe senior staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation?

Mr. Todd: Some of the courses are offered in-house and some we outsource.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I want to stay right there for a second because I am not convinced that the allocation is for line item 6302. I am concerned that the allocation seems insufficient for that type of training. Is it *ab initio* as in they come and train one time or is there a programme for continuous training?

Mr. Todd: Some of these trainings that we do are done in-house, as I mentioned. Some of the courses are outsourced. We partnered with several reputable institutions that offer these training for our foreign services officers for their development.

Ms. Walton-Desir: That is it for me here, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much.

Programme: 121 – Development of Foreign Policy – \$3,564,156,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 122 – Foreign Policy Promotion – \$4,458,760,000

Ms. Walton-Desir: I was going to refer to line item 6113, Other Technical and Craft Skilled, but I recall that the Hon. Minister indicated that staff were moved from one programme to another. I am confirming that this is the programme he was referring to that they were moved to.

Mr. Todd: Just for clarity, these are employees who are locally recruited at the various jurisdictions.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Did you say locally recruited at various jurisdictions?

Mr. Todd: Yes.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Okay. Line item 6284 – Other, could the Hon. Minister provide a disaggregation of that sum?

Mr. Todd: The disaggregation is: bank charges – \$45 million; advocacy – \$10 million; public relations services – \$10 million; legal and consultancy – \$70 million; upgrade and maintenance to the website – \$29 million; miscellaneous expenditure – \$50 million; and insurance of diplomatic staff,

residents and transferee – \$6 million, which give us a total of \$220 million.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: There is a notable increase from \$297,941,000 to \$403,878,000. My question to the Hon. Minister is, does this increase cater for an ambassador being appointed to Brazil?

Mr. Todd: These are for our postings.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Are these for current postings or postings that you anticipate?

Mr. Todd: These are current postings.

Ms. Walton-Desir: If I am to understand what you are saying is that there is no provision in here for the anticipated appointment of an ambassador to Brazil, is there?

Mr. Todd: We do not budget for anticipated employment costs. It is covered by the Ministry of Finance.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am not sure what to make of that statement, but I will move on.

Mr. Chairman: There is a principle that is applied in budgeting. You cater for the staff on hand, now. Any new hirings, the Ministry of Finance...

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, I am very well aware, but I am alluding to the fact that there are statements in the public that the appointment of an ambassador to Brazil is imminent. It was in that context that I asked that question. Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships), could the Hon. Minister indicate the training that is anticipated here?

Mr. Todd: These are trainings to be conducted at the various missions.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6117 – Temporary Employees, it stands at eight. I am interested in understanding what the designations of these temporary employees are.

Mr. Todd: The categories would be cleaners, gardeners, drivers, and a legal accountant.

Programme: 122 – Foreign Policy Promotion – \$4,458,760,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 123 – Development of Foreign Trade Policy – \$58,909,000

Ms. Walton-Desir: I just have two questions on this programme. The first one is on line item 6116, Contracted Employees. It moves from three to four. Who is or what is the designation of the person the Ministry contracted?

Mr. Todd: One second, Mr. Chairman. It has been reduced by one staff and increased by one. So, we hired one person, and one person was posted.

8.49 p.m.

Ms. Walton-Desir: This is what I said. I wanted to know the designation of the person that was hired.

Mr. Todd: Both are Foreign Service Officers II.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, if I may ask, we are under the Development of Foreign Trade Policy, maybe let us go to the same contracted employees. Is anybody here responsible for the development of a trade policy for Guyana?

Mr. Todd: The department is responsible for the development of the foreign policy agenda, of course, led by the Government itself, but the Ministry as a whole, we are all a part and parcel of driving that agenda.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Save and except I was very specific in my question. I asked about the development of a trade policy, not the agenda, just a trade policy. Do we have one?

Mr. Todd: Mr. Chairman, we do have a trade policy.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I would be grateful if the Hon. Member could lay over a copy of that policy for us. Thank you, Mr. McCoy.

Mr. Todd: Very well, Mr. Chairman.

Programme: 123 – Development of Foreign Trade Policy – \$58,909,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Estimates

Program: 121 Development of Foreign Policy – \$145,000,000

Ms. Walton-Desir: I want to go for the project code 2512500 – Furniture and Equipment. I notice there is a provision there. Is this for the Embassy in Brazil?

Mr. Todd: Mr. Chairman, this is for the upgrading of the IT infrastructure within the Ministry.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have a follow up for the Hon. Minister. I notice the construction of the building. In the project

profile it says for the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). Has the land been identified, *et cetera*? How advanced is this?

Mr. Todd: The land has been identified. It is within the compound of the Ministry. We have the space allotted already.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Program: 121 Development of Foreign Policy – \$145,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 122 Foreign Policy Promotion - \$ 96,991,000

Ms. Walton-Desir: Project code 2512500, again, is this equipment for the Embassy in Brazil?

Mr. Todd: These are for the missions across jurisdictions, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have a follow up, could the Hon. Member advise as to the status of the Embassy in the Brazil?

Mr. Todd: Mr. Chairman, we are soon to go out to tender.

Ms. Walton-Desir: What for, please?

Mr. Todd: I am advised that there is no allocation for that, and we can deal with that within the regular sitting of the National Assembly.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member just said to us that he has \$30 million for furniture and equipment across missions. If I understand our diplomatic arrangements correctly, we have a mission in Brazil. My follow up question then falls squarely there. What is the status of the Embassy in Brazil?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we are at programme 122 – Foreign Policy Promotion, capital. There is a heading at 1201400 – Buildings which has zero on it.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am perfectly aware of that. I did not ask the question under there. It is a follow up on what the Hon. Minister asked. If he wishes, I could ask it, but he said that it is for furniture across all the missions and Brazil has a mission and, therefore, it is certainly within the remit of the question to ask what is going on in Brazil. But, Mr. Chairman, I will pose the question. It is fine.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the question is, what is going on in Brazil with all this furniture?

Ms. Walton-Desir: Where are you putting it?

Mr. Todd: We have an Embassy in Brasilia – we have several embassies and depending on the need, we will make allocations to ensure that we keep the missions well-functioning with the furniture and equipment.

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

Ms. Walton-Desir: That is it for me Mr. Chairman. I will ask the question on Brasilia in a question to the Hon. Minister. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: It is the row. You could move out of your seat and ask.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, under Land Transport, I see \$66,991,000 to purchase vehicles, could the Hon. Minister say what types of vehicles?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much. Hon. Minister, you may have the floor. Ask the technician to check the connection in that row.

Mr. Todd: Toyota Fortuner, Toyota Land Cruiser, Mercedes Benz, Toyota Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV).

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, and for the use where?

Mr. Todd: Havana.

Mr. Mahipaul: Is it for the Ministry's use right here in Guyana?

Mr. Todd: No. We are overseas.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Programme: 122 Foreign Policy Promotion – \$96,991,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 123 Development of Foreign Trade Policy - \$500,000

Programme: 123 Development of Foreign Trade Policy – \$500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister, Her Excellency Ambassador Harper and the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation. Hon. Members, I now invite the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs, Ms. Pauline Sukhai, and her staff. You can use the western seating arrangement. Thank you.

Agency: 16 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs

Current Estimates

Programme: 161 – Policy Development and Administration – \$797,635,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, you may have the floor.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings, could the Hon. Minister say if any rehabilitative works will be done on the Amerindian Hostel on Princess Street? If so, what scope of works will be undertaken and how much of this sum of \$25 million will be used to do the rehabilitation?

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Mr. Chairman, the estimate caters for major works including electrical and the plumbing maintenance; repainting of the internal building, both concrete and wooden surfaces; routine servicing of the roof; replacing of doors, male and female dorms, the dining hall door, the male washroom; repairs to the female dorms, front step; repairs to the floor on the new wing; and general repairs to the male washroom at the Amerindian Residence.

Mr. Cox: Line item 6284 – Other, could the Hon. Minister provide further details or a breakdown of what constitutes Other?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you may have the floor.

9.04 p.m.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Line item 6284 – Other: This allocation caters for repairs to office furniture; photocopying; binding of documents, advertisements of bids and vacancies; purchase of fuel drum hose, drums, and vehicle logbooks; payments for services, drivers and porters; fees for the transportation of tractors; and labour for transporting capital purchases.

Programme: 161 – Policy Development and Administration – \$797,635,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 162 – Community Development and Empowerment – \$603,381,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, you have the floor.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6284 – Other: In 2022, it was \$36,200,000; in 2023, it was \$36,200,000; and the budget this year is \$36,200,000. According to the Hon. Minister, this is a very important head because it deals with the welfare and support of the hinterland peoples of Guyana. It caters for support to

families and patients who have difficult financial circumstances and who are affected by natural disasters such as fires. There is also assistance for burial, medical treatment, ultrasounds, cancer treatment, Amerindian prisoners, the processing of birth certificates, the purchasing of medication and essential items for patients and transporting deceased bodies back to the villages. Hon. Minister, this amount is woefully inadequate, and I would like to ask if the Ministry is planning to have it improved to an acceptable level. Thank you.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, from the trend of our allocation, the spendings and the exhaustion of our budget in this line, we have not incurred that it is woefully inadequate.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: I direct the Committee to page 469. I note that there is a sum of \$100 million allocated. Out of that, \$45 million is allocated to the National Toshias Council's (NTC's) Secretariat. Could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to disaggregate the amount as capital and current expenditure?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, for Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, the NTC is allocated \$45 million this year. There is no capital in this. This is purely for administration of the affairs of the NTC and for its operational cost. Capital expenditure is handled differently.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Is the Minister saying that there is no money allocated for the NTC Chairman or his staff to visit hinterland communities?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, \$45 million is for the administration and operational cost of the NTC. Under the operational cost, we will cater for travelling, visitation and small projects we may want to undertake with the membership.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Under the same line item, could the Hon. Minister say if she has ever received request for subventions or subsidies from any other local organisation from the hinterland communities, specifically Amerindian villages?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Under this head, Mr. Chairman, no, but under this head, we also provide subvention to the Bina Hill Research Institute. This is \$50,498,000 which covers all of its expenses. We have received a request from the Kanuku Mountains Protected Area grouping and we have allocated \$4.5 million. There has been no other local Amerindian organisation or committee that has asked us for any subvention.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, I am looking at Volume 2 and there are indicators on page 106. Indicator three states:

“Proportion of villages reporting having improved standard of living among residents.”

It states that, in 2023, 100% of 233 of the villagers reported having improved standard of living. The target for 2024 is 254. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what are the indicators being utilised when measuring standard of living improvement within the regions?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: With respect to Amerindian villages and local communities in the hinterland, the standard of living is measured by their improvement in terms of food security and their improvements in terms of opportunities to be engaged in economic activities and opportunities to ensure that their businesses are thriving. So, we have used those to indicate.

Ms. Fernandes: I have a follow-up, Sir. So, indicators that you did not list are things such as access to clean water, access to electricity and so forth. I am asking specifically about these because they are internationally recognised indicators for measuring standard of living. At any point in time is the Ministry measuring access to clean, potable water and access to electricity as measures of improved standard of living, based on all the projects that were identified by the Hon. Prime Minister earlier?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I am sure the Hon. Member is quite aware that these are all factors and indicators. If one looks, reads and checks the reports, yes.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister kindly lay over the indicators that are being utilised by the villages to measure the improvement in standard of living?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you.

Programme: 162 – Community Development and Empowerment – \$603,381,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 161 – Policy Development and Administration – \$82,700,000

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, for project code 1214500, Buildings, there is \$48 million for the provision for facilities,

bridge, and payment of retention. In Volume 3, the Description of Project states:

“Provision for kitchens and bridge.”

Could the Hon. Minister state which kitchens will be constructed and where and which bridge?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The extension of the kitchen will be at the Amerindian Residence. With respect to the bridge, it will be the construction of a concrete bridge at the Amerindian Residence.

Mr. Cox: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister, for the upgrade to the Amerindian Residence. As you may be aware, of recent, there were pictures on social media showing it was deplorable and so we welcome this position. Besides the kitchen, there are other aspects that require renovation and other stuff. Are we saying that those are not catered for here? Is it strictly for kitchen?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I would like to repeat, but under the current programme, I had earlier listed all the repairs and maintenance that would be conducted on the Amerindian Residence.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I now put the question that the sum stated for Programme 161...Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, you have the floor.

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess I *jumped the gun*; I was going to Programme 162.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Let me put the question on Programme 161.

Programme: 161 – Policy Development and Administration – \$82,700,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

9.19 p.m.

Programme: 162 – Community Development and Empowerment – \$ 4,788,400,000

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Minister kindly disaggregate project code 1400100, Amerindian Development Fund, under the various headings that exist there, please?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, I am willing to disaggregate it by sectors. For the Community Support Officers (CSOs) programme or Youth Economic Empowerment Project (YEPP), we will be addressing \$1,080,000,000 for stipends; training – \$150 million,

Presidential Grants – \$392, 500,000; for economic projects, we will have approximately \$3,43 million; for projects targeting women – \$354 million; agricultural development projects, which will cater for advancing food security and commercial farming – \$742,760,000; for tourism projects – \$132,850,000; infrastructure projects will total around \$397 million; land transportation support to villages will have an estimated \$310,500,000; water transportation – \$57,500,000; communication equipment – \$10,500,000; language and cultural projects – \$50,840,000; and advancing the education awareness and the revision of the Amerindian Act – \$80 million.

Mr. Henry: Could the Minister kindly state what percentage of the \$1.2 billion, or whatever is allocated towards the CSO's programme, is dedicated towards management, including a project officer and staff who are dedicated to this programme?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, our project, the YEEP Project is established. The concept is far different than the youth project advanced by the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) time. Our Management Development Officers, MDOs, are responsible for ensuring, in coordination with the village councils, the supervision and management of the CSO. This is done so that the majority of the funds will go into the pockets of the participants in the programme and not to monitors and managers, as was the case prior to our return to office.

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. From what we heard, there is a sort of management, but what percentage is dedicated towards that was not answered.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Maybe, I was not clear. The Management Development Officers are staff of the Ministry, and they operate out of the project department. This is a programme that falls under their direct responsibility. They collaborate with the village council. It is a partnership at no cost, except the salaries.

Mr. Henry: Could the Hon. Minister kindly state the monthly remuneration given to a Community Support Officer, who does the payment and how regularly are the payments made?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, the CSOs, as they are popularly referred to, receive a monthly stipend of \$30,000. They are paid every two months, and the payments are done by the MDOs or Community Development Officers (CDOs). It is teamwork and includes staff of the accounts

department because it is very tedious, and the logistics are really wide. They all have to team to ensure that they cover the activity of payments in the fields and villages.

Mr. Henry: Hon. Minister, there are reports that some CDOs have been deducting sums of moneys from the payments of CSOs. If this is not an authorised action, I do request that an investigation be launched to correct this.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, you have to be very careful because you ought to ask a question pertaining to an allocation being sought. Any other intervention of a question will have to come in the proper format.

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could I continue? Could the Hon. Minister state what measures are in place for the monitoring and evaluation of the CSO programme? Are there any report(s) on this and where could we go to get a copy or copies of the report(s)?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, obviously, there is monitoring and basically it is the responsibility of the village council. They are young people who are providing support to community development in their respective villages. They are also supporting the village council with respect to governance. There is monthly reporting by the CSOs, and those reports are stamped by the Toshaos after verifying that they have been in the programme for the months for which they will be paid. With all due respect, unless the Hon. Member does not have confidence in the village council in working along with their young people.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, just to close this off, we would like to ask the Hon. Minister to lay over the final report as soon as possible so we can get to know what is happening. It is an important programme nationally. Thank you.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, this programme is an annual programme. At the end of every year, at the Ministry's level, we have what we call an end of year review. There is a document that speaks to the CSOs. The programme is not expected to come to an end as the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) project came to an end in 2019, under the APNU/AFC Government. From 2019 to 2020, when we came in, there was no programme for young people under his government.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Mr. Chairman, I have a follow-up on that same project code. Is there any consideration being given to increasing the stipend of \$30,000 for the CSOs, considering the high cost of living and 2% inflation, *et cetera*? We left it at \$30,000 and it has remained there.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, the programme is designed to incentivise the young people to be interested in developing skills and building capacity. As a Government, we are investing, annually, an additional \$150 million in terms of training. It is not only about the stipend, but it is about the investment in building capacity and capability of the youths in the villages so that they can develop skills that will allow them to achieve some form of experience, whether at the village level or at the sector level in the village, so they can easily step out of the CSO programme and into a job, if that opportunity arises. We have seen that it did arise in some cases and increasingly so. Some of them are moving on. I can give you some examples; we have trained young CSOs in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). They had very good certificates – As and honours. Some of them, closer to the coast, have moved on to fulltime jobs in the private sector and in other areas. It is also the experience that the CSOs, from investment we are making in them and giving them that apprenticeship experience, have moved into the health sector and not as much as we would like in the educational sector as yet.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Minister. I am happy to see the continuation of the progress that was started under the APNU/AFC. **[Hon Member: (Inaudible)]** We had a training aspect in that programme. No matter how you want to say that it was not good, we did have some training aspect on tourism, ICT and other parts. I am happy to see that is being continued. Cde. Minister, that is why I was asking if you are not considering increasing their stipend. Young indigenous people of today who are living in remote areas find it more difficult. They have to eat and they have to live like anyone else.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Hon. former Minister and Hon. Member of the other side for her compliments.

Mr. Charlie: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I have Mr. Henry first.

Mr. Charlie: I have been trying to ask a question for a long time.

Mr. Chairman: I have Mr. Henry first and then I will come to you.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I did not hear – perhaps it is not there, or it was read too quickly – the various projects that are being done under project code 1400100, I was wondering if the completion of the

Amerindian Act is under that heading also or if it is elsewhere. Thank you.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. He was not paying attention. We mentioned it.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. Minister, could you say if the stipends for the CSOs are more or less than what the APNU/AFC offered young persons from 2015-2020?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, under the APNU/AFC Government, there was no CSO Programme and so I cannot compare the stipend.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, under that same programme, in relation to the Amerindian Act, the question is: what is the timeline for the completion of the revision of the Amerindian Act?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, The Hon. Member is quite aware that the Amerindian Act is a very special Act, and our Government is committed to ensuring that we consult at every village level.

9.34 p.m.

So, it going to be quite a time-consuming activity and there is no major rush to finish it in six months or in three months. As a Government, we have to adhere to and we have always been adhering to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). Therefore, least we be accused of not adhering to that international principle...Yes, we are reviewing, and we will review, and we will consult at every village level.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, you had said, sometime earlier, that you cannot force or tell any Minister or anybody to answer a question, but the question was not answered. What is the timeline for the completion of the revision of the Amerindian Act? The indigenous people of Guyana are listening that there is no timeline.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, if you want to ask a question, ask a question. If you want to refute an answer by the Minister, that is a different story, but you cannot go and stand and say that the Minister said there is no timeline. She never said that. If you want, I can pull up the transcripts. So, I will strike out what you just attributed to the Minister as having said. You can continue.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cox: The revision of the Amerindian Act is of much importance, and it is quite overdue. Is there a work plan by the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs as it relates to the revision of the Amerindian Act? I want to commend you for

your stewardship in anticipating that you will consult with every village across Guyana. I just want to remind you as well that, in your consultation, it would be wise and obviously the inclusive approach to involve the duly elected representatives on the Opposition side as well.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, our Government stands committed to free, prior and informed consent.

Mr. Cox: The first part of my question was in relation to a work plan and if you have one as it relates to the revision of this Act. If so, could you share that with us so that we can have a copy of that work plan?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs is awaiting the approval of the budget, and we will confirm our work plan. I do not want to jest here but there is a habit of the Opposition of trying to cut the budget.

Mr. Cox: Hon. Minister, is there a timeframe where you anticipate this work plan...I know you said that you anticipate upon the passage of the budget, but there must be a timeframe in your mind for the work plan.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I will allow this last question, which has been asked in four different forms.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, the work plan will detail 2024 activities. If the Hon. Member does a bit of research, when the Government of Guyana, the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Government, took that bold step to provide and to consult on the existing Amerindian Act, it took close to three to four years before we were able to adequately bring into force a modern Act. This is a revision and I do not expect that it will last that long.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, any good plan cannot be one that would be rushed and be completed in a short period of time and so the length of time is irrelevant. Moving on. In the Budget Speech, it was stated that the \$1.2 billion catered for over 2,600 CSOs in skills training programmes. Could the Hon. Minister state five such skills training programmes and how exactly these will benefit the different communities? Besides that, is there involvement of training in the oil and gas sector? This is because, as we speak, some of these CSOs are quite qualified persons who left school and they have their subjects, but they chose to become CSOs because there are limited job opportunities in those communities.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, this year, we will continue to focus on training in tourism and hospitality; business plan development; we will be training drivers to

operate tractors, lorries, minibuses and pickups; and we will be continuing training in small engine repairs. There is a plethora of engines for brush cutters, chainsaws, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) that are widely used by Amerindian villages these days and so the opportunity for our young people to provide service in repairs is very necessary. Those are about four. We will also be training in craft in production, and we will continue to train in garment construction.

Ms. Hasting-Williams: I would like to draw the attention of the Committee to Volume 2, page 102 – Recurrent Programmes – Community Development and Empowerment, specifically under land titling. Under land titling, it has extension, demarcation, titling and land conflict resolution. My question to the Hon. Minister is, could you tell this Committee in how many communities would extensions be done, how many will be demarcated, how many will be titled, how many are earmarked for these projects and how many land conflict resolution will be completed for this year?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, I would not like to *steal the thunder or jump the gun*, but this question will be relevant for the Ministry of Finance. The Amerindian Land Titling comes under that Ministry.

Ms. Fernandes: First of all, the Hon. Minister said a little earlier, as it pertains to the Amerindian Development Fund, that the sum of \$343 million is being allocated to projects. Could the Hon. Minister say how many projects this will cater for?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, the sum allocated for village economic projects is open for villages to submit their proposals. It is in similar fashion as how we operate with respect to the Presidential Grant. There is a standard grant for each village, and by the end of 30th March, all villages are expected to submit their proposal. In similar fashion, under this allocation, villages are also expected to submit their proposals. So, at this point in time, I will be unable to say how many villages will take up this particular category that you are asking about. We do that due to the fact that we allow the village councils and their villagers to discuss their priorities, identify the projects that they would like to do and then submit their proposals. This is because, often times, people do not understand that this is what happens, and they accuse the PPP/C Government of handing out to the Amerindians. We believe that the Amerindians can, by themselves, determine what their priority projects shall be and submit their applications.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister give a disaggregation of the amounts that will be going to each village? Based on my understanding, there is a specific amount going to each village, but they have to submit a plan before the moneys are actually given to carry out a project. So, could the Hon. Minister please give a disaggregation as to how much will be going to each village?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, under this allocation, it is not to every village. These are additional resources that are provided as opportunities to villages to conduct their economic activities and to increase their economic activities. Under the Presidential Grant fund, every village receives a grant. However, I want to add that the project sums will run between \$5 to \$7 million. So, it is larger than the Presidential Grant.

Ms. Fernandes: Understood. Could the Hon. Minister say, as it pertains to food security, what is the Ministry's goal as it pertains to elevating production of food items, cash crops and so forth at the level of the Amerindian communities?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: It is not the Government's goal or the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs' goal. What the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs does is support village goals and objectives. We provide resources that will provide the opportunity to advance, expand and even, in some instances, develop new economic activities that they normally would not be able to do without the financial support.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say specifically – and I am aware that other economic activities are conducted within the Amerindian communities...But more specifically, there is an allocation there that speaks to food security. Food security has been a national conversation. So, is the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs actually working towards a goal? Are there any plans to scale up production within Amerindian communities for those communities to be provided with the necessary funding when it comes to actually having Amerindian communities and Amerindian people play a more important role that they will financially benefit from on a national and, further, an international level, as Guyana is going into food security?

9.49 p.m.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Indeed, the statement is pretty broad. But I will say that the Government continues to support village vision in respect of agriculture and food security, and from the trend of the previous years, we have taken on board their request for increased cultivation. Our Government over the last two years has distributed, to

support that trend, two hundred and three tractors that will provide some level of support to opening up and cultivating larger areas of land for those villages that want to go in that direction, because not all Amerindian villages, at this stage in their development, are focusing on large scale production. There are still many villages that seem to have some limitation in that perspective, with respect to even cultivating large areas in the Savannahs. We have those experiences but, as a Government, we will continue to support them.

Another trend that we are supporting in our expansion is the production aspect and the value-added. We did support villages that wanted to improve farine production, cassareep production and newer crops. Many villages last year indicated, through their request, to get involved in the shade-house culture of agriculture. It is probably not a new technology but it is new to Guyana. So, this year we expect, from the discussions already undertaken, that a number of communities will want to also expand with respect to the shade house cultivation, which may be a very good thing because, if you understand the way and the distance Amerindians go to cultivate, this is a technology in agriculture that is attractive to young people. The experience we have seen on the coast already is that young people are taking tremendous pride in using or taking on agriculture as a business by doing the shade houses. I believe that the indigenous youth can also benefit in that way and the opportunity should be open to them.

Ms. Fernandes: A final question from me, Sir. I am happy the Minister actually said that not all of the Amerindian villages want to go in that direction of large-scale production, because what that says is there are communities that want to go in that direction. Could the Minister please indicate to the House what are the preparations, or the support mechanisms being explored by the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, to aid those communities that do want to move forward to large scale production in the process as we look to attain food security?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs would be a supporting partner with the Ministry of Agriculture that has already begun to provide such support to those subdistricts where villages are indicating they want to go into commercial farming. Nurseries are being set up, five-acre nurseries in some instances, and larger plots of land ranging from 10 to 25 acres are being supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. I will leave that question, but we are a supporting partner in it.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Hon. Minister, I just want to take your attention back to the Village Sustainable Plans (VSPs). Could you say to this House how many VSPs have you received to date? Out of the 240 plus communities, how many have you received to date, if any? Secondly, is it a five-year plan that will be reviewed annually or do they just have proposals or plans for one year?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: This is not a matter for the line item. I will take this opportunity to inform the House and the Hon. Member that, to date, my information is 242 villages and communities across the length and breadth of our country, that comprise Amerindian villages and local communities, have submitted 242 such Village Sustainable Plans. There is a second part of that question even though, again, it is not a line item. Many villages have submitted five to ten-year plans on average.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. We just need to check one box because the Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams, said when her party left Government, the Community Support Officers (CSO) got \$30,000 and that was followed up with a question from the Hon. Member, Mr. Alister Charlie. So, Mr. Isaacs we need to double check the facts from the transcripts. Hon. Members, we actually went past our 8.00 p.m. without suspending the Standing Orders. We have to remedy that. Could we go back into Assembly? Sorry, Ms. Walton-Desir, do you have two questions? Hon. Members before we go back, let me put the final programme.

Programme: 162 – Community Development and Empowerment – \$4,788,400,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: We saved only four minutes on this head.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip, we need to, as an Assembly, resolve to work beyond the 8.00 p.m. hour.

Suspension of Standing Orders No. 10(1)

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No.10(1) be suspended to allow the sitting of the National Assembly to proceed during the consideration of the Estimates beyond 8.00 p.m. until the business of the day is completed.”

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip]

Ms. Teixeira: Based on the Standing Orders, I hereby ask that we go past the hour of 8.00 p.m., so we can conclude our business for today.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, we thank you and your staff for taking us through that last item and now we call on the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip, as we conclude the first day of consideration of the Estimates, to move the adjournment. Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED

“That the Assembly be adjourned until 31st January at 10.00 a.m.”

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip]

Ms. Teixeira: We shall adjourn to tomorrow morning at 10.00 a.m. to continue the Estimates as decided by the House on Friday 26th January.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: We now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. tomorrow to continue our work. Have a good night and safe travel back home.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.58 p.m.