



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 (2020-2025) OF THE
TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC
OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL,
GREATER GEORGETOWN*

7TH Sitting

Friday, 18TH September, 2020

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (70)

Speaker (1)

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

[Virtual Participation]

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (37)

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

Vice-President (1)

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

[Virtual Participation]

+ Cabinet Member

* Non-Elected Speaker

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

Senior Ministers (16)

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

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

[Absent - on Leave]

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

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

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**
* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
Lot 96 Duke Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Lot 229 South Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Nigel D. Dharamlall, M.P.,
(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
Minister of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
DeWinkle Building,
Fort Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),
Minister of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Human Services and Social Security,
Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,
Lot 357 East and Lamaha Streets
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,
Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Main Street,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
Minister of the Public Service,
Ministry of the Public Service,
164 Waterloo Street,
North Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

Junior Ministers (4)

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

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

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

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
Lot 41 Brickdam & United Place,
Stabroek,
Georgetown.

Other Members (14)

Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,
Lot 71 BB Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,
(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
148 Lethem,
Central Rupununi,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.

Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Lot 4 Public Road,
No. 66 Village,
Corentyne,
Berbice.

Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,
Lot 60 Section ‘K’,
John Street,
Campbellville,
Georgetown.

Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,
Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,
Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.
Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,
Lot 340 East Street,
South Cummingsburg,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.
Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,
55 AA Victoria Avenue,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
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.
Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Lot 290 Area ‘J’,
Tuschen, North,
East Bank Essequibo.
Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.
*Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.
*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.
Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,
Lot 32 Crown Dam,
Industry,
East Coast Demerara.

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

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Joseph F. Harmon, M.S.M., M.P.,
Leader of the Opposition,
Lot 99 Mazaruni Street,
Guyhoc Park,
Georgetown.

Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,
Lot 10 Delph Street,
Campbelville,
Georgetown.

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

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

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

Dr. Nicolette O. Henry, M.P.,
Lot 2227 Ozama Street, North Ruimveldt,
Georgetown.

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

Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.,
Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue,
South Ruimveldt Park,
Georgetown.

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

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

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

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

[Virtual Participation]

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

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

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

Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,
Plantation Belfield,
East Coast Demerara.*

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

Mr. Vincero H. Jordan, M.P.,
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),
Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,
West Coast Berbice.
C/o Christopher Jones*

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

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

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

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

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

Officers (2)

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

Hansard Division Officers (20)

Ms. Allison Connelly,
Chief Editor
Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor
Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor (ag)
Ms. Latoiah Joseph,
Senior Editor (ag)
Ms. Carol Bess,
Editor
Ms. Shevona Telford,
Editor (ag)
Ms. Christina Ramroop,
Editor (ag)
Ms. Tesia Ellis,
Reporter
Ms. Indranie Persaud,
Reporter
Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter
Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter
Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Reporter
Ms. Bianca Cummings,
Reporter
Mr. Rohan Ramjas,
Reporter
Ms. Nadeila Allen,
Reporter
Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter
Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
<i>Contents</i>	<i>Page</i>
<hr/>	
7 TH Sitting	Friday, 18 TH September, 2020
<hr/>	

Public Business – Government Business	687-816
Estimates of Expenditure 2020 - Budget Speech	689-817
Adjournment -	818

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Reason for the Late Commencement of Sitting

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let me apologise for the delay in start today. I want to thank the Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Public Works for the notice. Apparently, there is going to be maintenance work in my area and the Hon. Minister kindly called to inform me. So, I had to relocate the Speaker’s position to another area which would ensure that we can continue today’s proceedings in an uninterrupted manner.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Motion

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2020

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2020 of a total sum of three hundred and six billion, two hundred and seventy-one million, two hundred and eighty five thousand dollars **(\$306, 271,285,000), excluding twenty-three billion, two hundred and seventy-three million, eight hundred and forty-six thousand dollars (\$23, 273,846,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the under-mentioned schedule, and

agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.

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

Assembly resumed Budget debate.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: I rise to make my maiden presentation, in this honourable House, in support of the Budget presented by the Minister of Public Works, Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill, under the theme our ‘plan for prosperity.’

This emergency Budget, prepared in record time, in extremely unusual circumstances, is a product of a lot of hard work, not only on the part of the Hon. Member but, also, a large number of technocrats across the public service.

Before commencing the business of this debate proper, I would like to add my voice to those expressing sympathies to the families of Joel and Isaiah Henry, and Haresh Singh. As a citizen, as a mother, my heart bleeds, and the entire nation has been thrown into pain. This pain is not a partisan pain. An attempt to make this grief and pain a divisive and partisan issue is shameful and, may I say, downright disgraceful. We grieve deeply as a nation, with and for the families of these young men. My prayer is that the families in our collective communities can find the will, courage and strength to heal.

Despite my profound sadness at what has taken place inside this honourable House, it would be remiss of me to omit expressing that I am truly honoured to join all Members of this honourable House for the Twelfth Parliament of our Republic. I express my thanks to His Excellency, Dr. Irfaan Ali, for extending to me the privilege and opportunity to serve the people of Guyana in his Administration. I also extend thanks to those Hon. Members on the other side of the House, who have afforded me the opportunity to serve in the public service, exposing me to the administrative machinery of Government, which experience I intend to draw upon in the service to the people of our country.

Last, but not least, Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your election to preside over this honourable House, and you have my sincerest wishes for a successful, productive and fulfilling tenure.

Over \$2 billion in Current and Capital Expenditure has been programmed for the portfolio of the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and its predecessor, the Ministry of Business. Before I get into the substance of my presentation, I

wish to take this opportunity to speak to some assertions made by some, not honourable, Members on the other side of the House.

Quite frankly, I am disappointed and somewhat dismayed by the quality of the debate coming from the other side of this honourable House. We have presented costly programmes and detailed the results that we expect to see from the allocations. In return, we basically have rabble-rousing and superficial slogans, some of which warrant no repeating and suggest an inability, or perhaps a refusal, to intelligently consider the issues and make constructive contributions to this debate.

The assertion, however, that this is a private sector budget and not a people’s budget is particularly troubling, because it indicates a lack of understanding of extremely basic economic principles. What is the private sector without people? When the private sector thrives, the people thrive. The private sector employs people and the private sector pays taxes with which we fund the essential services for people. The private sector brings in foreign currency and the private sector is one of the most important components in alleviating poverty. Economic development is unthinkable without the growth of the private sector, thus the view that the private sector only comprises big companies is seriously flawed. The private sector is comprised of hundreds, if not thousands, of small and micro enterprises, some owned and operated by small families, even single parents, who provide the livelihoods for thousands of citizens of this country.

One other point I wish to bring to the attention of this honourable House is the mischievous rhetoric, raised by the Hon. Members on the other side, that this Budget is discriminatory. I say mischievous because, in the context of the realities of Guyana, those words take on a particular meaning. Who is being discriminated against, or what group of people is being discriminated against? Which budgetary allocation is hiding under the guise of equality and fairness? Could the allocation of \$4.5 billion, to provide \$25,000 for every household, be called discriminatory? Is the allocation of \$150 million to support frontline workers, regardless of their political persuasion, sex or race, to be considered discriminatory? Certainly, it is not the bonus of two weeks tax-free salary to the Joint Services, which I may need to point out, include the army, the police force, the firemen and the prison service – all of them. Is discrimination the removal of value-added tax (VAT) from electricity and water, to bring immediate relief to every household and to businesses? Or is it the measures included to assist school children and our

senior citizens? These are only just a few examples of how this Budget has reached out to improve the lives of every Guyanese. The hue and cry of discrimination is completely without basis and, frankly speaking, malicious.

The Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, facilitating and fostering the development of the private sector, the very engine of growth, is now my remit. In furtherance of this goal, in order for us to understand the course that we are taking and the enormity of the task before us, we cannot avoid taking stock and making an assessment of the position from which we start.

It matters not on which side of this honourable House we sit, it cannot be denied that our country was in a period of great turmoil and uncertainty for a period approaching two years. It is the nature of politics that there will be competing narratives for generations as to why this was so. But again, it is undeniable that this was a period of great uncertainty.

We must understand that uncertainty is one of the worst things that can confront business and commerce. In times of uncertainty, investment is curtailed, production is reduced, employment is affected, consumption is reduced less revenue is accrued to Government to provide essential services, all leading to a vicious cycle of economic disfunction that hurts, predominantly, the most vulnerable among us.

As is well known, the political uncertainty of 2019 and early 2020 transitioned into a full-blown crisis, in the aftermath of the general elections, which was intensified by the globally unprecedented occurrence of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the likes of which has not been seen by the entire world in a century and, for which, currently, there is no reliable estimate as to when it is likely to recede. Added to this, the tragic events in West Berbice threatened to further upset our social order. These events have had a devastating effect on business and commerce. This is the situation in which we find ourselves today. These are the circumstances in which the private sector finds itself, and it should be no surprise to any of us that engine has stalled.

While we are told that Guyana’s economy, overall, is expected to grow by up to 33% this year, we are further told that a non-petroleum economy Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to contract by up to 5%. It is this non-petroleum economy which accounts for the employment, the livelihoods and the prospects of the majority, thousands of Guyanese citizens including, once again, the most vulnerable amongst us.

As the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, it gives me no pleasure to report that over 62% of hotels, guest houses, resorts, and places of entertainment and leisure are either closed or are now providing drastically scaled-down services. Many small businesses, as a result of measures adopted to contain COVID-19, have downsized in response to the pandemic.

10.31 a.m.

They have now been forced to reduce overheads in order to stay afloat. Even optimistic economic forecasters warned that some businesses will not survive. I am heartened to announce that there is hope and there is a plan, *Budget 2020*. This Budget, as presented by Hon. Minister Juan Edghill, provides for the immediate and the future, for relief and recovery. It is a Budget with vision; it is progressive and dynamic.

Budget 2020 is also designed to provide the foundation for inclusive growth and benefits so that every Guyanese will feel that they have a fair shot, an equal chance, at accessing resources and programmes offered by this Government. Such inclusiveness is one of the ways in which we will contribute to mending the fabric of our society. It is in this context that I turn to the initiatives that we plan to execute for the remainder of budget year 2020. Even in the midst of profound challenges, there are opportunities, if we choose to look for them. The COVID-19 pandemic, even with all of its ravages, offers some opportunities for us to exploit as a nation.

First, in Government, in the public sector, we are forced by the pandemic to do what we have always known was possible. We made greater use of technology to facilitate working from home; we reduced cash handling by encouraging suppliers and customers to conduct business *via* electronic banking; and, most critically, we started moving some services online, actually increasing the efficiency with which we serve businesses in some cases. We are resolved to build on these success stories and to ensure that, as we emerge from the pandemic, such efficiency becomes part of the new normal.

In pursuit of this increased efficiency with which the Government facilitates the private sector, we have, therefore, resolved to continue the work of implementing the Single Window Automated Processing System (SWAPS) for which almost \$35 million was spent between January and July, 2020, and for which an additional \$10 million has been allocated to see us through to December. We see the Single Window Automated Processing System as critical to facilitating the international competitiveness of our local

companies, allowing them to be more agile and responsive to their local and international customers, by reducing the time and cost of complying with regulatory procedures. The nature of these proceedings are such that it is incumbent upon me to remind this honourable House, that this project was birthed out of the National Competitiveness Strategy that was initiated by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration, as far back as 2009.

Another area in which the COVID-19 pandemic may provide opportunities, in the midst of the challenges, is in the area of tourism. We plan on safely and responsibly managing the re-opening of the sector, for the foreseeable future. There will be a larger market for local tourism, as persons who would have previously opted for international travel for leisure look inwards to our local tourism products. We want to ensure as we exit the pandemic, whenever that is, that we would have built our local tourism infrastructure, especially our niche eco-tourism infrastructure, to such a level that we will preserve this local market and that Guyana will be the first choice for Guyanese.

Even with respect to our international clientele in the tourism sector, opportunities still exist because the small, intimate nature of our tourism offering is more amenable to viability in the face of COVID-19 compliant requirements, while the mass-based tourist product will be difficult to sustain in the face of the need for reduced sizes of gathering and social distancing. The tourist experiences of our typical eco-lodges with small gatherings are more likely to be viable.

We have, therefore, started a dialogue with Regional Tourism Associations (RTAs) and started to fashion a package of assistance for investors to upgrade their facilities to be able to comply with the COVID-19 protocols. This initiative, which applies especially to community-based tourism facilities, will see the implementation of the National Health and Sanitation Protocol (NHSP) and the raising of awareness in communities to support the efforts of the National COVID-19 Task Force. This will enable communities to be better prepared to accept visitors when travel reopens.

Implementation of this programme will continue through to December, 2020. In this regard, a sum of \$21.8 million has been allocated to assist with training, the acquisition of sanitation supplies, and the acquisition of safety supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE). Apart from our unique, small eco-tourism product, Government has realised that, like many other areas, the oil and gas industry has already started to drive increased demand for certain

services. The hospitality industry is one of the primary sectors to see such growth and, as such, we are preparing for the increased demand by setting out to attract investments, transparently made, in large-scale branded hotel facilities, for which we will insist on meaningful local participation. As part of a holistic approach, we are actively pursuing the establishment of the hospitality institute, which will serve to prepare our people for sustainable employment in the industry.

On the theme of relief and recovery, the Small Business Development Fund (SBDF) is going to be a key instrument in our pandemic response. It will be a mechanism by which much-needed resources are going to be channelled to small, medium and micro enterprises, especially those which demonstrate a commitment to preserving employment.

We have programmed \$100 million for the Fund, through which we will disburse small business relief grants for qualifying businesses. These businesses will be required, thereafter, to qualify for continuing relief to demonstrate that they are meeting the key objectives, among which are preservation of employment and minimising of price impact to customers.

Still on the subject of the Fund, under the previous Administration, the ceiling in small business grants was reduced from \$500,000 to \$200,000. We will raise this ceiling, once again, to a level where it is likely to make an impact on the hundreds of small and micro enterprises and the persons whom they employ and serve.

Of course, in order to access these benefits for their employees and owners, our local firms will need to register with the Small Business Bureau (SBB). The Small Business Bureau plans to register 1,500 new small businesses in 2020 but, unfortunately, in this period of instability and uncertainty, we were unable to reach a fraction of this target in 2020. We are determined to maximise registration of small businesses by publicising the benefits of registration with the Bureau. These benefits include access to the resources of the Small Business Development Fund, and access to procurement opportunities.

To see the potential impact of this initiative, the more than 500 small businesses registered with the Bureau employ, on average, two persons each. According to the *2012 Population and Housing Census*, the average household size was 3.6 persons. Were we to reach the target of registering on the order of 1,500 small businesses, we can see that the Small Business Bureau has the potential to positively impact the

lives of almost 11,000 Guyanese. We are, therefore, resolved to redouble efforts to have small businesses take advantage of the considerable resources that we have prepared to make available directly to them, through the Small Business Development Fund, which would deliver much needed relief almost directly to households.

Other key initiatives that offer direct support to industries will include the completion of business support and incubation facilities, including industrial estate facilities at Lethem, Leguan, Enmore and Belvedere, for which \$17 million was spent between January and July and \$92.7 million is programmed for the rest of 2020. These facilities have been languishing unused, and we are advised that this is in a large measure due to severe deficiencies in project management. We plan to make these facilities fit for purpose and to aggressively pursue plans to ensure take-up and utilisation by the intended beneficiaries. The funds allocated to these important facilities are part of the \$2.2 million which has been allocated to the Small Business Bureau – a tangible expression of Government’s commitment to the small business sector. Small businesses are part of the private sector too.

Finally, before moving off of the small business sector, I remind this honourable House that the estimates also contain an allocation of \$105 million to the Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development Programme (SLED). In total, the allocations for medium, small and micro enterprises exceed \$400 million, with more than half of that allocated being programmed for direct assistance to the beneficiaries. That is a people’s budget.

I turn from some of the direct support initiatives to those that are aimed at strengthening the institutional environment within which our companies operate. These are the strategic investments that will deliver benefits over a longer period of time than a budget year, or an electoral cycle, and they demand foresight and patience to see them through.

As a small country, with a small economy, it is fundamental for our economic growth that our local companies are able to tap into international markets. In order to do this, they must be able to conform to minimum standards of quality, in order to even have a chance of competing in those markets. We are, therefore, committed to continuing the work of developing the national quality infrastructure, which we consider to be critical to the development of the international competitiveness of our local companies. To this end, therefore, an allocation of \$85.7 million has been made for

this essential component of our competitiveness strategy, adding to the \$92.5 million that was spent between January and July. Again, another tangible example of our commitment to sustainable national development.

I now turn to our legislative agenda. A key part of strengthening the institutional environment is the enactment of legislation which will enable modern 21st Century business practice. We are, therefore, committed to re-starting several initiatives which were totally stalled. These include electronic commerce legislation, the Movable Property Security Bill, and continuation of the Secured Transaction Framework project, inclusive of a modern secured transaction law, and collateral registries which will allow for businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises, to leverage their assets into capital for investments and growth. As part of our programme for consumer protection, we also intend to bring to this honourable House legislation to govern the practice of hire purchase arrangements.

The private sector represents one side of the equation – the supply side if you will. The other side, the demand side, is the consumer. Being sensitive to the needs of the consumer, Government continues to commit funding to consumer protection bodies such as the Competition and Consumer Affairs Commission (CCAC) and the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS), as both entities have important regulatory mandates as it relates to consumer welfare and protection. For consumer protection, some \$83 million was spent between January and July and some \$45 million is allocated for the remaining period of August to December, 2020.

In conclusion, I commend this *Budget 2020* to this honourable House, and I maintain that the measures contained therein cogently demonstrate that we are committed to inclusive and sustainable growth and development, that is, the creation of security and prosperity for all Guyanese. Criticisms notwithstanding, that future of prosperity is impossible without a thriving private sector in all of its forms, from the biggest corporate group to the smallest one-person and two-person family enterprise. I urge all the Members of this honourable House to support this Budget. The people of Guyana will remember you with favour. Thank you. [*Applause*]

10.46 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce for that presentation. You have certainly set the tone and the pace for today.

I would like to now call on our next speaker, the Hon. Minister... Sorry, the Deputy Speaker of the House, the Hon. Member, Mr. Lenox Shuman.

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, let me first say thank you for the pre-emptive promotion to Hon. Minister. I hope that someday, in the future, that minister will be the highest office, and will not be the Prime Minister, but the President. I also hope that, while I stand here, should I run overtime, one of my Colleagues in this House will stand and extend to me the five-minute courtesy, or maybe even 10 minutes, if I am not concluded.

I rise today on request of you and my Colleagues, in this honourable House, a little latitude, not out of disrespect for this House or its Hon. Members, but out of respect for the taxpayers who placed all of us here.

I wish to first thank my wife and soulmate, Ms. Amanda Shuman, our loving children, my parents, my siblings and extended family, the hard-working team of the Liberty and Justice Party (LJP), my Colleagues in the joinder and my ancestors. Because of your collective love and support, we will do our part to support and critique all agendas connected to our country’s development. Mr. Speaker, I also congratulate you and all Hon. Members of this House on our election. I wish everyone a happy Indigenous Heritage Month.

As a father and an empathetic Guyanese, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences to the Henry family, the Singh family and others who lost their lives during the recent string of violence in Berbice. I also echo the collective call for justice for these murdered youths, because justice delayed is most definitely justice denied.

His Holiness Dalai Lama said that politics and religion are pure institutions; it is people that corrupt them. While this is not an indictment of my Hon. Colleagues in this House, it is a sombre warning of the effect that we, in this House, have on our society, both locally and in the diaspora. We tend to ignore, whether conveniently or unintentionally, how the misuse of our speech can have a corrosive and corruptive effect on the very people who elected every Hon. Member to this honourable House. The concept of corruption should not only be viewed through a monetary lens, but also through the words we choose to use in the service to the people.

I recall that in 2016, when sitting in the gallery of this esteemed House, the former Hon. Minister, Mr. Keith Scott, during his debate, stated that Indigenous people are

avaricious, greedy. This incident, amongst many others, mesmerises me and continues to provide sober reminders of the gruesome legacy of settler colonialism and how it has impacted the consciousness of our esteemed House and, by extension, all Guyanese society.

For the first time in the history of parliamentary democracies, an Indigenous person has been duly nominated as the Deputy of Speaker of a national Parliament; a ground-breaking moment in the history of Indigenous peoples in this country. It is a position that bears no political clout, but holds incredible symbolic political capital to the Indigenous peoples in Guyana, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the world.

It was unfortunate, yet not surprising, that this momentous shift in Indigenous representation, within this honourable House, could not enjoy collaborative bipartisan support. Instead, commentary involving my election to the position specifically referred to me as an ‘it’ and also an ‘abomination’. One would assume the Hon. Member was describing the harrowing events of 3rd March, and its subsequent effect of bringing Guyana to its precipice of democratic collapse.

I marvelled at the flurry of linguistic markers issued in that statement by the Hon. Member, markers that were steeped in classism and reeked of coloniality. I suppose, the very symbol of an Indigenous person in authority creates substantial psychological discomfort to those who are socialised to view Indigenous peoples as being subservient and in need of paternalistic supervision. It is the same repressive and exclusionary approach that my Colleagues, on this side of the House, are invoking to deny my presence on any parliamentary committee; not a single committee. Maybe that an Indigenous leader can fight to protect democracy pre-emptively created psychological discomfort. Some may believe that colonialism is a thing of the past, but its ideology appears to be manifesting, through the actions of several of our Hon. Members in this House.

On the first day of this budgetary debate, an Hon. Member spoke on institutions where *come-backees* and re-migrants occupied office. Yet, it was a *come-backee* that brought down the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government and triggered the events of 2nd March. It is a *come-backee* who is speaking to you right now, who also fought for the preservation of democracy and helped to fend off a dictatorship in Guyana for five long months. And it is those very *come-backees* whom every political party

courts, for their support, during the election season. We need to move pass these harsh dichotomies, which border closer to the realm of xenophobia, and recognise that we are all Guyanese.

I sat quietly, as the lone Member of the Opposition in Parliament, at the presentation of the *Budget 2020*, while my Colleagues absented themselves. We were elected to do the people’s business, and while sometimes we disagree, we have an obligation and must act with the utmost responsibility and civility. I would like to remind my Colleagues that, while a drop in a pool causes a fading ripple, actions and words uttered in this House stand to create tsunamis which could cause tremendous destruction to our people and our nation.

I wish to bring to this House and the nation’s attention the severe policy deficiencies, in relation to Indigenous peoples, that continue to exist within previous and current budgetary debates. My Colleagues spoke of Indigenous lands. Let me offer a short history lesson. In 1814, when Guyana was given to the British by the Dutch, one conditionality upon that giving was to respect Indigenous peoples’ territories. Fast forward to 1966, when Guyana gained independence, the only conditionality for independence was to ensure that Indigenous peoples received their rightful titles to their lands. Yet, here we stand, 206 years later, government after successive government continue to use Indigenous lands for votes.

During the first 28 years of independence, Indigenous lands were given at roughly 2.28 land titles per year. The following 23 years it was 1.67 and in the last five years, it was minus or negative one. It is such a shame to the legacy of the late Hon. Stephen Campbell.

Whether it is the People’s National Congress (PNC) or People’s Progressive Party/Civic in Office, regardless of who sits in the big House, the government at the end of the day is still the government. It is a superstructure that needs urgent recalibration in order to offer meaningful support to the Indigenous peoples and all Guyanese.

The Constitution of Guyana in its preamble states:

“Value the special place in our nation of the Indigenous peoples and recognise their right as citizens to land and security and to their promulgation of policies for their communities.”

The State has shown that it values the Indigenous peoples so much that some of our brothers and sisters have been lodged

in a court battle, for over 23 years long years, for their lands, without even getting past the very first court. Governments after successive governments are unwilling to address the issues. I should remind my Colleagues again that justice delayed is justice denied. It is time to get this court case moving and let us get it to that weapon against injustice, as quoted by my Colleague across the hall, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ).

Further, Mr Speaker, article 149(G) of the same Constitution states:

“Indigenous Peoples shall have the right to the protection, preservation and promulgation of their languages, cultural heritage and way of life.”

Article 27 further states that all Guyanese shall have the right to free education, and that education must cater to the future needs of the nation and be culturally appropriate. I remind this honourable House that, where there is enshrined in the Constitution a right, there is a parallel responsibility on the Government and among us, the representatives of the people, to ensure that those constitutional responsibilities are met.

Today, again, administration after consecutive administration can find finance and time allocation in the curriculum for Portuguese and Spanish, while the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has identified that many Indigenous peoples are at risk of losing their languages.

Ms. Minnie Degawan, an Indigenous leader and activist from the Philippines said:

“For indigenous peoples, languages not only identify their origin or membership in a community, they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors – the indigenous knowledge systems that make them one with the land and are crucial to their survival and to the hopes and aspirations of their youth.”

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also stated:

“The state of indigenous languages today mirrors the situation of indigenous peoples. In many parts of the world, they are on the verge of disappearance. The biggest factor contributing to their loss is state policy. Some governments... indigenous languages are referred to as dialects, and accorded less importance than national languages, contributing to their eventual loss.”

Our communities are struggling through the COVID-19 epidemic. The schools on the coast are enjoying internet access, television (TV) and radio broadcast learning tools, while many of our Indigenous communities are expected to self-teach, in a language that is somewhat alien to them, in preparation for examinations that are mostly void of their collective histories.

11.01 a.m.

COVID-19 has revealed the systemic failures and deficiencies within our education and governmental structures. The State apparatus sees Indigenous peoples as developmental projects instead of partners. This is a sad, myopic and obtuse view that needs to be changed towards one that allows Indigenous peoples the right of sustainable self-determination as outlined by Mr. Jeff Corntassel, who is an Indigenous scholar.

We have seen infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, hospitals, internet and electricity going to communities on the coast to support education and economy, while Indigenous communities are forced to deal with inadequate solar panels, sluggish and unreliable internet connection, and poorly maintained trails. This is an indictment of all previous Administrations. Added to this, not only are communities dealing with this in a COVID-19 environment, but they are trying to deal with this while, at the same time, trying to deal with land conflicts and climate change which threatens both their personal and food security.

Indigenous peoples also want access to a global marketplace in accordance with article 14(1)(e) and (f) of the Amerindian Act 2006. In relation to the development and regulation of agriculture, as such, I am calling for a subvention to be created by the Ministry of Agriculture that covers the cost of not only attaining organic certification as stipulated by the United States Department of Agriculture, but also commercial farming in Indigenous communities. We welcome culturally appropriate agricultural development strategies and micro economies within our Indigenous communities in line with Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). I ask that the Government examine my request, because it is of benefit to the health of all Guyanese people.

By its design, the colonial system has kept Indigenous peoples in a state of perpetual poverty. I heard my Colleague, the Hon. Member from Purima, complain about preferential treatment being given to coastlanders while the communities are fully capable of doing the work. This is an indictment of the Procurement Act that only permits the coast to profit and

grow, while communities continue to be marginalised within basic policy formulations. If companies are sympathetic, they would hire low-end labourers out of pity. We should not have to rely on sympathy. Guyana is not only in need of an Indigenous peoples’ policy coupled with a revised Amerindian Act, but we are in need of a revised Procurement Act that guarantees Indigenous communities a system of equity and not sympathy. Sympathy, without empathy, is apathy disguised. Indigenous peoples should not have to hope and cope. Indigenous peoples need development partners, not a customer/client relationship of dependency through projects.

In 2016, the United Nations Children’s Fund released its study on the status of Indigenous women and children. It was an indictment of all previous Administrations from independence to now. To date, I still await the integration of the findings of this study into any budgetary discourse or considerations.

As a representative of an independent oppositional seat, my duty is to find an elusive middle ground. The people’s work should always take precedence over egos or, as the great Poet, Martin Carter said:

“All are involved, all are consumed”.

Roughly, \$3 billion was spent for Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) in three years with roughly 20 success stories, which is almost \$150 million per person. Then, we switch to paying Community Support Officers (CSOs) while village councils continue to fail. Toshaos continue to bear significant responsibilities but get paid a meagre and paltry \$30,000 per month, regardless of which Administration goes into Office.

I support the Hon. Mdm. Teixeira’s remarks that this is not, I say this is not, a time for campaigning.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker, Ms. Teixeira may have to support you with an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Shuman: I would like to thank the Opposition Chief Whip. I support the Hon. Mdm. Teixeira comment that this is not a campaign. This is the time to get the peoples’ work done. I heard the Minister of Labour, the Hon. Mr. Hamilton, mention that we cannot be judged by our words but by our actions. I beg to differ with the Hon. Minister. We are judged by our words and our actions.

The five-long-month fight for the preservation of democracy has strengthened my resolve that we could do better. We must all do better. The previous Minister of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs often quoted an African proverb that says:

“When the elephants fight, the grass suffers.”

While not articulated in this Budget, I look forward to working with all of my Colleagues in this honourable House and to driving for the people all the tools to enhance our democracy and peoples lives through electoral reform, legislative reform, a United Nations (UN) regulated platform for truth and reconciliation, inclusive microeconomies, a comprehensive local content policy and, last but not least, constitutional reform which has been the failing of every governing Administration.

In September, 2020, we are presenting a Budget for a year that has almost ended and that demonstrates how far we have deteriorated as a nation. We cannot and we must not permit politics to deny our people of their rights to live in a society where they could prosper. Hon. Colleagues, we all say *ad nauseam* that we abide by the Constitution, but the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana* also states in article40 (1) that:

“Every person in Guyana is entitled to the basic right to a happy, creative and productive life, free from hunger, ignorance and want. That right includes the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual.”

These such meaningful and powerful words yet, we have differently abled people whose constitutional rights are trampled upon every single day. Even though the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*, under article 149 (2), states that they have the right to not be discriminated against, these constitutional rights should not be confined only to the coast. It is in the Constitution of Guyana. Last I checked, Indigenous peoples are the first peoples of Guyana and are also protected by and provided for in this very Constitution.

I ask my Colleagues, while we go about our respective ways of doing the people’s work, let us do so in a circumspect and considerate manner that brings economic, social, legal, ethical, environmental and moral justice, and equity to all our peoples.

Let me close by thanking our international partners, the global community and the Guyanese diaspora who showed their commitment to Guyana through the fight for democracy. I look forward to a prosperous and sustainable future in store for Guyana. I urge all my Colleagues to work for Guyana and all the people who placed us here. The days of party paramountcy should be firmly behind us. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]: Allow me to first congratulate you on your appointment to the National Assembly as well as the Deputy Speaker, Mr. Lenox Shuman, who was the previous speaker. I also would like to acknowledge that we are meeting in the month of September, which is considered both Heritage Month as well as Education Month. I think sometimes this gets over our heads.

I rise to give support and sustenance to the 2020 Budget presented by the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill, Minister of Public Works. Before I begin, I want to express my thanks publicly and I remain humble to be chosen to serve as a Minister of President Mohammed Irfaan Ali’s Government.

Let me mention that this Budget is being presented against the backdrop of our country coming out of an electoral gridlock that lasted more than five months. It was an impasse that has significantly hindered and encumbered the progress of our country’s development. Never again must we allow the clandestine intentions of a few to hold our development back and never again must we permit our economy to be eroded by the selfish and malicious actions of a group of elected officials, who have led our country into a dungeon of hopelessness and despair.

Thanks to the heroic and resilience of our President, His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Vice-President; Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo; and a team of courageous persons, many of whom are sitting in this hall on this side. I also recognise the Deputy Speaker, the private sector, the civil society and others too numerous to mention, including our international communities and, more importantly, the citizens of this country who stood for democracy. We are now able to put that chapter in the past.

This Budget is a budget which caters for the poor and the ordinary man who has weathered the storm and who deserves a bright future. The 2020 Budget has been crafted to do just that, which is to ensure that every stratum and every sector in our country benefits.

This Budget provides an economic stimulus for the individual and his community. By these measures, we will see increased spending that will lead to an increase in the employment rate, that will, in turn, increase income and, hence, boost spending. Thanks to the 2020 Budget we will see a prosperous country under the leadership of a competent Government.

11.16 a.m.

I am happy that the Hon. Member arrived at the right time. The Hon. Ms. Ferguson, in her presentation to the National Assembly, presented distorted facts on issues that were already decided on by the electorate. The previous Administration, for example, had no plan of action for this country, hence what we see in the Ministry of Housing and Water. The Hon. Member believes that she can continue to spin webs of deception in this honourable House, forgetting that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change is no longer in Government and there is now a new and truthful dispensation to manage the affairs of the people who we have been elected to serve.

The APNU/AFC operated visionless in the housing and water sectors. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government’s housing programme is based on a profound understanding of the needs of its people for housing and on years of service and satisfying their needs. The leadership and governance of the APNU/AFC in 2015 to 2020 represented not just a pause but a poverty of ideas. The housing sector performed below par; it was riddled with incompetence and void of empathy to the needs of the people of this nation. Even after three Government Ministers, within the span of less than five years – the Hon. Bishop Edghill in his speech described this as, *musical chairs of Ministers* – this sector could not muster the steam required to meet the needs of Guyanese who desire to have their own homes. The Coalition grappled to define its ambition in the housing sector, completely lost sight of the needs and urgencies with which it should have decisively acted.

Let us take the so-called massive public outreach at the Square of the Revolution, just before the General and Regional Elections, which showed data that states the housing sector was overwhelmed by the priority needs of the people. The Coalition has not been able deliver. This should not be a

surprise. The policy position of the Coalition to defund the housing sector, mediocre leadership of every changing Minister, a lack of private sector incentives, taxes on building materials, among others, strangled the housing sector and slowed its ability to contribute to the needs of the nation. By that, the APNU/AFC purported to be interested in improving the lives of the ordinary Guyanese it affected. Let us look at what happened.

Effects on the housing sector 2015 to 2019 – immediately after taking Office, the Coalition, in 2015, met \$8 billion in the Central Planning & Housing Authority (CH&PA). The APNU/AFC Government moved in post-haste to defund the entity and demonstrated a lack of care for housing, the priority focus and the needs of the nation. When it left, there was only \$3.6 billion in the coffers of the CH&PA. This sector could never have delivered given such policies, conditions and leadership of the former Government. Land sales declined from \$3.6 billion in 2014 to as low as \$580 million in 2017. In fact, it never met half of the performance of the PPP/C Government. In 2018 and 2019, land sales were \$1.94 billion and \$1.84 billion, respectively. House lots allocated went from 2,440 in 2014 to as low as 776 in 2018, even after the evidence from the public outreach showed that housing needs were the most desired. In 2019, the Coalition still did not do it and allocated 1,220 house lots for that year.

The Hon. Ms. Annette Ferguson should be ashamed to come here to speak about APNU/AFC’s record for house lots allocations. The Hon. Member proudly announced that the Administration distributed more than 7,000 in its entire five-year period. What the Administration did in five years, the PPP/C Government will do more than that in one year, by distributing in the first year 10,000 house lots. The Coalition would argue that providing a complete home was its policy, but let the evidence show that, at best, 158 units in 2018 and 81 in 2019 were allocated when the nation cried out for housing as a basic and priority need.

The Central Planning & Housing Authority suffered from weak egotistical leadership. This is not in my assessment, but that is what the *musical chairs of Ministers* revealed. The CH&PA has efficient evidence to say the least under the Coalition Government.

In 2014, under the PPP/C, 4,079 transports were processed. At its best, the Coalition did 2,556 transports and, at its worst, it did 1,207 over the period of 2015 to 2019. This meant that the rate at which security of tenure was achieved through land title distribution declined. There are clear indications that the

Coalition never got a grip on managing, governing and providing the leadership required to address this important need of the nation.

I am pleased to announce that by the time we complete four months in Office – not one year – the Ministry of Housing and Water will be distributing over 2,000 transports and titles. The new PPP/C Administration under President Ali, who happens to be the immediate past Minister of Housing and Water, will restore the housing programme to satisfy and surpass the expectations of the Guyanese people. The PPP/C Administration will, as asserted in the Budget speech, restore the vibrancy and vitality of the housing sector from the state of comatose that the Coalition had it in. [**Mr. Duncan:** Vibrancy and vitality do not go into the same sentence.] You should just *shh* and listen. Listen and learn. The Government will throw its weight into this sector as a priority by restoring investment, where immediately \$4 billion is allocated only for the last quarter. My Colleague, Ms. Rodrigues, the Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Water, outlined details of the projects to be undertaken in *Budget 2020*. The suite of measures indicated, from improving transportation networks, water affordability, access to finance and mortgage relief, among others, shall re-invigorate the housing sector.

These measures will increase the contributions of the housing sector to the Gross Domestic Product and jobs. It will ease the burden of electricity and water that complements dwelling in new and existing homes. There will be more money in people’s hands. There will be a command of more disposable income, through adjustment measures, for all Guyanese are sure to be directed to their own priorities. That is one we have seen over the years and, most recently, in housing. The reversal of value-added tax on water and electricity should make living more sustainable by allowing homeowners and all, especially the vulnerable, not to be excessively stressed by utility bills. There will be more incomes of which to dispose.

This Administration, as indicated, will achieve a minimum of over 50,000 house lots to be distributed over this current term in Office. In an effort to bridge the gap in the demand, which is at a backlog of 68,000 active applicants, the PPP/C Government will adopt a practical approach to the housing drive. These approaches are: one, through Government’s capital subvention; two, the public private partnerships (PPPs); three, private developers; and four, through capital market financing. We have advertised expressions of interest to further develop the public private partnership and it was closed since Monday. This is so that we can, in an aggressive

way, start to tackle the backlog of cases. As I speak, there are a number of persons and we have already started to talk with the banks, because it is our intention, as the Government, to raise capital market to help in the infrastructure development at a fast-track rate. This, along with the following measure, would serve to stimulate the sector.

Mortgage interest relief (MIR) for low and middle home income earners; increasing the limit for the low-income loans; a reversal of VAT on building materials, where it was imposed; and measures to give increased access and availability to finance home ownership within the reach of every citizen, will be goals of the Ministry of Housing and Water. It is part of the PPP/C Government’s continued drive to increase the disposable income for every household.

Mortgage interest relief – in 2013, the PPP/C Government introduced this mortgage interest relief initiative for persons with mortgages at the bank to a ceiling of \$30 million. In 2017, the Coalition Government reduced the ceiling to \$15 million.

11.31 a.m.

This reduction negatively impacted upon approximately 55% of those borrowers and they will now recover, yearly, approximately between \$500,000 to \$1 million. This is direct cash being returned to those individuals and it is another example of the Government putting cash directly in the pockets of our citizens.

Cooperate tax relief: With respect to increasing the low-income threshold from \$8 million to \$10 million, the Government is saving those persons who qualify approximately \$100,000, annually. It will also allow for a larger number of persons to qualify for loans up to \$10 million, giving them the opportunity to improve on the quality of houses being built. In addition, by raising the low-income tax concessions, commercial banks can now grant low-income mortgages at a higher ceiling and lower interest rate. This will allow more persons in the low-income earning bracket to borrow. The removal of VAT on building and construction materials will reduce the construction cost significantly, thereby producing higher quality homes and improving living standards tremendously. These measures will invigorate the sector and realise the aspirations of Guyanese in the housing drive.

As similarly mentioned by the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, we will be embarking on a Single Window Automated Processing System for permits. The

intention is to reduce the processing time to under one month. Internal works have already started at the Ministry. Therefore, the ease of doing business is one of the elements for attracting both domestic and external investors to the local economy. It has been recognised that the multiplicity of regulatory agencies leads to indefinite delays in approval of permits and licences and, over the years, this has been above par. Dealing with construction permits and licences, for the most part, involved planning permission system, whereby the CH&PA is the principal element with direct functional linkages with the Local Democratic Organs (LDO)s, the Guyana Fire Service, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Central Board of Health, and the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. You will understand why there has been a delay. It is our intention to implement a single window electronic permitting system that will focus on three facets: as I said, to reduce the permission time to under a month; to ensure that we have the legislative changes that are required – the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs is leading a committee for this activity – and to ensure that we put the necessary software to place. We will build the necessary infrastructure to implement the single window electronic permitting system.

Hinterland housing programme: Two former Ministers spoke about the Hinterland housing programme. They should be ashamed to raise that programme. The Hinterland housing programme was an initiative of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. Worst yet, as I stand here, the previous Minister had no initiative to continue that programme. There is not even a documentation to show any initiative to commence another round of the Hinterland housing programme. I can say this, we have already started the work and it is our intention, in 2021, to resume the Hinterland housing programme.

Review of allocations/processing: I want to make mention and to provide a clarification that we are currently reviewing the allocations for house lots that were done and processed. It is to bring fairness and transparency to the processing and the allotment process. This is in light of certain transactions coming to light. We have also noted, in the run-up to March Elections, that the processing of a number of allocations and transactions for new applicants were done even within one month, while there are thousands who are waiting for years.

The Ministry of Housing and Water is also working to ensure that we continue the plan, which was left in 2014, for a new location for the Ministry. We are currently reviewing that. There was a prior Cabinet approval for a location of a new

head office for the Ministry of Housing and Water. We will bring this back up, so persons could expect some work to start in that regard. This is so that we can provide sufficient office space and quality service for our citizens.

Water: Much like the rest of the economy, the leadership and management of Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change, were the worst in the company’s history. If we were to show the performance of the company in the form of a Broadway musical, it would be appropriately named ‘how to run the well dry’.

Over the last five years, the financial situation at GWI had reached an all-time low. At the end of 2015, GWI ended the year with \$1.3 billion in surplus.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I am listening.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order No. 40 (a).

Mr. Speaker: What is the point you are making?

Ms. Ferguson: It is the Point of Elucidation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the only way I can allow a Point of Elucidation is if the person on the floor would concede to you. Hon. Member Mr. Croal, would you allow the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, to make a Point of Elucidation?

Mr. Croal: I sat and listened attentively. The Hon. Member will have an opportunity at the end of my speech to give all the rebuttals that the Member requires.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, I would not be able to allow that Point of Elucidation.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, Mr. Croal, you may proceed.

Mr. Croal: Over the last five years, the financial situation at GWI has reached an all-time low. At the end of 2015, GWI ended the year at \$1.3 billion in surplus. At the end of August, 2020, the company recorded almost \$70 million in losses.

The measure of true leadership is when those whom you lead succeed and prosper. Under the APNU/AFC’s leadership and management, GWI lost its own identity and, even worse, its performance. The GWI’s motto is *Water Is Life... Save It!* but under the APNU/AFC 70% of all the water that the company produced was wasted. The APNU/AFC was not finished with GWI, it was just getting started. At the end of 2015, GWI had in its employment about 600 persons. Currently, there are 1,319 persons employed at GWI, which is an increase of over 116%. Ironically, it is with no notable improvement in the level and quality of service to customers but has resulted in a decline in productivity of the employees.

We have kept our commitment in our manifesto that is, for free water for pensioners. As a result, 25,620 pensioners will be able to benefit from this measure. The total value is \$227 million as a result of this subsidy on water for pensioners. I will break it down further. I see the former Minister is writing, so let me have her writing a little more.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, before you can break it down further, you have to build up your time. Could I have someone move an extension for you, Sir?

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given another five minutes to conclude his very good presentation. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, you have five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Croal: Let me break down another category, removal of VAT on water – As a result of this effect, 88,000 metered customers and 83,000 unmetered customers, a total of 172,324 customers, will benefit to the value of \$416 million. The average employment cost was \$94 million in 2015 when compared to \$239 million in 2020, which is an increase by 2.5 times. Indebtedness to Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) was \$828 million in August against \$6.78 billion in 2020. The GWI has long overdue amounts for goods and services procured from firms and individuals totalling \$783 million of which \$680 million was from previous debt for the past five years. Between 2015 to 2020, GWI’s total bank balances have deteriorated significantly by \$1.76 billion or 69% of the total bank balance as of 2015. Collections deficiency was at 61% as at 31st August, 2015.

11.46 a.m.

At 31st August, 2020, a decrease of 9% had ensued, and yet we saw more than 100% increase in staff. As a result of water loss and leakages and the low level of service, customer complaints increased in all the regions.

Last Friday, following a meeting, the new board of this department, along with the public relations (PR) department, will be given immediate priority. No longer should we have customers reporting leakages and their complaints being left in the system for months. And yet, when someone called directly, the problem was fixed in an hour.

The Guyana Water Incorporated has procurement problems. When the other side talks about the glorification of the last Government, it is the former President, Brigadier (Ret’d) David Granger, who gets the praise. But when it comes to GWI, all one hears about is the *baby Jesus*. Let me tell you some of his stories; I have already told you about his records. Procurement has been a problem. Right now, the Hon. Member from Region 5 knows that there is an office that is expected to be completed in Region 5 for GWI. The original contracted sum for that building was \$19.7 million. That is what was approved by the previous board. To date, \$40.5 million has been spent on that building. As I speak, they are requesting another \$25 million to complete the building.

Then there is another arrangement – SeaQuest – which has cost the taxpayers of this country \$1.8 billion in four years, which is \$450 million per year. A contractor was sole sourced to supply the treatment for well water for 28 wells. What were the findings? The GWI did not even comply with its own procurement policy – there was no competitive bidding process. A decision has already been taken to terminate this contract because the taxpayers of this country must get value for water.

The GWI’s strategic plan will include: achieving nationwide access to safe and affordable water for all in a sustainable manner; provision of treated water to improve the water quality to the world health standards; reduction of non-revenue water to improve the level and quality of service and financial viability; as well as and, equally important, to attain financial and commercial viability and sustainability of the water sector.

Therefore, our key focus will also include extending water coverage throughout Guyana, including the hinterland communities – Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams – with an expanded treatment for water coverage and increasing our metered coverage.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, could you wind down? You are into seven minutes.

Mr. Croal: Over the many years, the sanitation investments have been limited to solid waste *via* landfill facilities. However, there is now a need to turn our attention to waste water treatment through resource recovery application.

As I conclude, Guyana is expected to develop rapidly due to its advancement in the oil and gas sector whereby presenting several residential, commercial and industrial developments as proposed by the Central Housing & Planning Authority. Therefore, sanitation and water delivery will play an equally important role in the housing sector.

With those few remarks, I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Collin Croal, Minister of Housing and Water, for that presentation.

The Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Priya Devi Manickchand, you have the floor.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Thank you, kindly, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to add my own words of congratulations to you for ascending the Chair. I cannot imagine a more appropriate person, at this time, for this position. We expect that you are going to preside there, as you have done in other areas of your life, with excellence. I also want to congratulate the Deputy Speaker for his election to this House. We expect that he, too, will become experienced.

Please allow me to also register our thanks and our deep gratitude to the Vice-President, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, for leading a team and getting this Budget ready for us – a budget that crafts a vision that was outlined by the people of Guyana, who told us what they wanted for themselves. I thank, particularly, Minister Bishop Juan Edghill, for presenting that Budget. Unlike the very ungracious comments that persons made that he only read the Budget, I am aware of the long hours he spent with the budget staff, putting this Budget together and making sure the numbers were balanced. We thank you, Sir.

Please allow me to also register our deep gratitude to the Office of the Budget – Ministry of Finance, led by the Director of the Office of the Budget, the very brilliant Ms. Sonya Roopnauth, who put together this Budget for Guyana. They must have missed the work since we have not had a budget for a couple of years, as you know. When the

Members of the Opposition of this House say, very derogatively, that this Budget could not have happened, then they are really speaking about the public servants of this nation because those are the people who toiled hard, without prancing around in the newspapers, to get our work done. We register our deep gratitude.

Before I begin, I also want to welcome back to the Ministry of Education Guyana’s son, Dr. Marcel Hutson. Unfortunately, he was one of those persons who suffered at the hands of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change when we heard about the hundreds of persons being fired which, incidentally, is not true, but I could give a list, from the Ministry of Education. The people who were unceremoniously fired were people who had no party loyalty. People who started in education when they were 15 years old, you sent them home simply because they were doing their jobs and being faithful and loyal to the Government of the day. Shame on you! Shame on you! Whoever wants to come back, they will have a space with us because they are patriots of this country, unlike what I saw when I left.

My secretary, at the time, was a lady chosen from the pool. She did not come from Freedom House, but she was tucked away in a dusty office, when I left that Ministry. That is shameful behaviour and that is why you are feeling the effects of the people you hurt and that is why you are sitting over there – that is why. **[Ms. Singh-Lewis: (Inaudible)]** I know the Hon. Member, Ms. Singh-Lewis, very well. She also worked at the Ministry of Education. She may want to be careful with her comments – very careful.

This Budget brings to the people of Guyana what they said they wanted. Let me just be clear. When we drafted a manifesto in the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), we did not sit in a backroom and decided what we wanted in that manifesto. We went to the people of this country, village to village, and we had open consultations. I remember, at the Ramada Georgetown Princess Hotel, there were more than 200 persons from all sectors – labour, the private sector, women, Amerindians, men and religious groups – all of whom told us what they wanted. We have been in Office for under six weeks, and, in those weeks, we have begun to deliver promises. In this nation, five years later, we are still waiting for the APNU/AFC to deliver its 100-day plan.

What are some of the promises that we have begun to deliver? From this Budget, by these measures in this document, value-added tax will be reversed on electricity and water. Value-added tax and duties will be reversed on

machine and equipment. Tax concessions on mining and agriculture and forestry...There will be a reversal of land lease fees. There will be a removal of VAT on pesticides and agrochemicals. There will be the reversal of VAT on all exports. There will be the removal of VAT on hinterland travel. There will be the removal of VAT on all medical supplies. There will be the removal of VAT on building and construction materials. There will be the removal of VAT on cellular phones. There will be the removal VAT on corporate tax for education and private healthcare. The mortgage interest relief will be moved to \$30 million. We will reverse the policy on used tyres and vehicles. The sum of \$800 million is in this Budget for the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF). There is the sum of \$5 billion for the support of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). There is free water for pensioners and two-week tax free bonus for the Joint Services. The sum of \$150 million for health frontline workers. The sum of \$200 million to expand the Guyana Learning Channel Trust. The hinterland will receive 25,000 solar units; removing the required licence for mining equipment and reverting the poultry industry to zero-rated status. Special incentives for corn and soya production, tax concessions in agro and cold storage capacities and investing in farm-to-market access roads. Fifty new 4x4 vehicles for the Police Force for the hinterland patrol and \$1.5 billion for hinterland roads. Upgrades to the Lenora Cottage Hospital, the West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH), the Suddie Regional Hospital and the Diamond Diagnostic Centre. The \$25,000 per household for COVID-19 relief and special incentives for new hotels. We are committed to liberalising the telecommunications sector. We are putting three multipurpose sports complexes in Regions 2, 6 and 10. This is just a short list of what we are going to do.

I will further emphasise, in my presentation, on what will be done, particularly, for the education sector. When you say that there is nothing in the Budget for anyone, how do you deny this?

This Government will make sure that what the last Government did for teachers ...I am hearing the cries of teachers. There is nobody in a political system that loves teachers more than we do and we will show you that; we will show the teachers that. We will not have the Hon. Ms. McDonald beating a pot and a drum on the road to get our attention. She will have my ear all the time and she needs to know that.

12.01 p.m.

This, for me, is a sobering time. We are in the midst of a pandemic and that is sobering. A pandemic has meaning. Plenty people get sick, and many could die. At this time, it requires each and all of us as a collective, to reach down into our bellies and pull-up from ourselves the very best that we can be. We are facing an existential threat and we must, as one, fight back and ride out of this period together.

In this time, when we are faced with this existential threat, the petty shouts and shallow quarrels seem extremely minimised when we are talking about life and death. This is not an abstract concept. I am sure that everybody in this House knows some family that has been severely affected by this disease. This thing that we are fighting requires of us a oneness to be able to succeed in that fight. I am saying to you that, on behalf of the PPP/C Government, our arms are outstretched and we are prepared to work with you, once you are prepared to work with us, to make sure we take this country forward. We will say this, if you are not prepared to reach our outstretched hands, we will then do it alone. The people of this country have placed their trust in all of us here and have required of us that we do this together. If you do not want to partner, we will do it alone; and the people will judge you harshly.

What was the state in which I found the Ministry of Education? I could see that the grand union leader is accustomed to screaming and shouting, but I commit to you that it is unnecessary when we are in leadership. We can hear you. *Stop screaming like a banshee.*

The state in which we found the buildings at the Ministry of Education needs examination. We were told, in this very House by the APNU/AFC Government, that nothing could have happened in the education sector, until a very favoured Commission of Inquiry (COI) – if you can remember, for a certain President, everything was a COI – happened into the Ministry of Education and the education system. One can recall that, up to today’s date, after millions of dollars were spent on that COI, it was never laid in this House and has never been made public. The reason for that – and I have found it – is when one looks at the composition of the COI, it was just jobs for the boys. Millions of dollars were spent for a desk review of things that the Ministry of Education already knew and had written in its plans.

For the first time, after 1993, this country went without a published education sector plan. If you look at the *World Development Report* of 1993, it stated the importance of a sector plan. For all the years the PPP/C has been in Office,

there has been a functioning sector plan. The first five years the People’s National Congress (PNC) was in Office, the whole period went without a sector plan. That is a shame because a sector plan gives direction for the entire country – all the regions and departments – about where it is going and what to expect; none of that happened.

On 17th January, 2015, we were not yet out of Office. The PPP/C announced that it had acquired a \$10 billion loan from the World Bank, and it was going to be used to acquire and achieve universal secondary education. Schools were to be built – one at Golden Grove, one at La Parfaite Harmonie and another at Yarrowkabra. Five years later, we are back in Office and the schools are not ready; they are not even up. An entire generation of children have passed through the system and continue to go to schools that are not appropriate. If you love your teachers, you would be upset on their behalf. Who is the contractor?

There is nothing wrong with having friends, but our friendships must not interfere with our duty to serve the people of this country. That contract was signed on 1st October, 2018, four years after we left you the money. It was supposed to be finished on 15th January, 2020. We are on 18th September, 2020 and it is only 74% finished. I would take my seat now if any one of the Members wants to get up and defend that. It is indefensible and unacceptable and, together, we must say to the contractors that they cannot give us services like this; our children deserve better. It is very telling that the Opposition is defending this. The people at Golden Grove and Plaisance and the people between Golden Grove and Plaisance are hearing you and they will judge you.

The contract for the construction of the Yarrowkabra Secondary School was awarded on 31st December, 2019, when the APNU/AFC was deemed to be, by the Caribbean Court of Justice, a mere caretaker – a babysitter. The question is, did we expected them to relax? No. But if they were going to do something, then they should have done it.

Let me tell you about the status of this school. [**Mr. Duncan:** What is your problem? What is your challenge?] I am not intellectually challenged like you, Hon. Member Mr. Duncan. Perhaps, that is your problem. We have already advanced to the contractor the sum of \$161 million, plus \$53 million; added, it is more than \$200 million and he has finished 3.5 % of the work. At this time, he should be at least 8% of the work. This is turning out to be a Golden Grove. I am now sounding a warning to contractors who will be working with us; we are not going to tolerate this kind of sloth and neglect

on the projects that this Government has. I see that Mr. Ramjattan is defending this contractor and that is interesting to see.

Look at the St. Rose’s High School, for which a contract was awarded in August, 2018, and was supposed to be finished in March, 2020. Up to today’s date, 8% is finished. The entire school was supposed to be built by March of this year and only 8% is finished. You are talking to me about loving teachers when this is the condition you have them in and are defending it. Shame on you! Shame on you! Back your words with actions or you will be deemed to be politically exploiting people.

We are saying, very clearly, that these schools which the APNU/AFC inherited, they got the moneys from us to build it, along with the drawing and the project manager and still could not finish it.

We are saying to the people of these communities that we will finish these schools. We will finish them because we understand how important it is for their children to receive a world-class education; how important it is for them to have comfort; and how important it is to have a building that they could attend.

The other thing that we met in this period of this pandemic, in a totally unready state for any kind of organised or centralised engagement... That means we came into Office on 5th August and the Ministry had no direction and policy from the Government or anything to say how our children would be engaged in this period – nothing. I will say that this is one of the hardest times for our country, both educationally and medically. To the young gentleman at the back, I do not yet know his name, who said that it was a lethargic attempt. Let me tell you from now, nothing that we attempt to do in this period will be perfect nor will it meet everybody because we are not in perfect times.

We are trying very hard to engage our students and I agree with the Hon. Members, Mr. Cox and Mr. Shuman, when they said that more attention has to be paid in the hinterland. We could tell you that the programmes we have, right now, are not reaching those communities, but we cannot, Hon. Member Mr. Sears, do as your Government did, which was nothing. You just threw your hands up and said that you could not give a perfect solution, so you gave nothing. You left your teachers undirected and your students unengaged – you did nothing.

What are we asking you to do now? When we have a programme, which we are telling you would not be perfect, walk with us, join hands and make sure we educate Guyana’s children. That is what we are asking you to do. If you truly love them, and if you stand a chance of ever crossing that floor to come over here, you have to work with us because you do not have a plan by yourself. You cannot come up with a plan by yourself. You were incapable of doing that for five years.

This particular Budget allows us [**Ms. McDonald:** Report on the meeting you had with the Guyana Teacher’s Union (GTU).] The Hon. Member is saying to report on the meeting I had with the Union. I invited the Union to the meeting because I believe it is an important stakeholder. I am saying to the Hon. Member that the Union will not have to, under us, beat a drum and stand on the road in the hot sun and rain, to get an appointment with the Minister. [**Ms. McDonald:** Should I be grateful?] I do not think that they should be grateful, but I think that is the relationship we must have going forward. Stop being *an empty vessel making noise* and let us partner for the education sector.

I am very pleased to say that since then we have launched, on 4th September, a collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Coursera, to do online training for the people of Guyana. From then to now – just under two weeks – we have had 31,438 Guyanese persons registering. Thirteen thousand five hundred and nine of them are actively pursuing courses and 368 will be graduating on Tuesday with the rest of the Caribbean.

12.16 p.m.

Let me share with this House what we know. We had 307 registrants from Region 1; 1,060 from Region 2; 4,699 from Region 3; 18,592 from Region 4; 1,531 from Region 5; 2,918 from Region 6; 303 from Region 7; 65 from Region 8; and 278 from Region 9. I am happy to tell you that we already have five persons with certificates from Region 1; 27 from Region 2; 51 from Region 3; 246 from Region 4; 24 from Region 5; 58 from Region 6; two from Region 7; one from Region 9 and 19 from Region 10. We are not stopping here.

There has been a claim that they love the young people. Let me give you the breakdown: zero to 25 years old, the number of registrants is 12,992; 25 to 35 years old, the number of registrants is 11,087 and then we had some more numbers. We had between 75 and 102 persons. What does this tell us? It tells us that our young people were starved of training. When we opened, it 31,000 joined. Do you know when this

country got the invitation to get on this programme? It was at the end of April. The Ministers were too busy trying to steal power and too busy trying to force themselves on this country to serve the people. Again, they were reminded in July and they did nothing to get this to the people of Guyana. We will not be a Government like that.

In addition to just putting this here, we are now going into the hinterland to make sure that persons who would like to be trained, but do not have access to either the internet or devices, be given the opportunities they require.

Again, I bring to the attention of the nation the response of the Opposition. Instead of saying, yay, Guyanese are getting trained, certified and skilled and making themselves more employable, look at them, they are jealous of these people, while they themselves grabbed scholarships for their Ministers – grabbing scholarships for your Ministers. You fully know the value of an education, but you do not want to share it with the people of this country. Shame! Shame! Shame!

I do recommend to the Members of the Opposition that there are courses – actual courses – on how to treat human beings and how to respect human rights. There is a nice course there on honesty and trust in decision making. Go and sign up; it is free. Sign up and teach yourselves about governance. I could not find a course on why you should not thief an election – steal, rig or whatever might be the appropriate parliamentary word – because the world has far moved on from that. After they learnt of you here – this lot here – from March to now, you might see courses like that being introduced from next year. Courses on why you should not rig an election; why it is dangerous for an economy; why it is dangerous to people’s mental health; and why you should not steal people’s right to choose a Government. Those might be introduced because of all of you and the whole world becoming aware of all of you trying to rig an election.

Two days ago, we started a teachers’ training programme. Why did we start that? It is because our teachers have said to us that they are being asked to teach online and it is difficult. The teachers do not know how to teach online. The teachers do not know how to deal with these children online. Right now, it is a huge problem. Do not laugh at it. It is a huge problem with children being at home on the *Zoom* video classes and being extremely disrespectful towards their teachers. We need to partner with parents to make sure our teachers are not going through that extra hardship. It is not something to laugh about; so, do not laugh.

It is important for us to train our teachers so that they are given more confidence, given more tools, and given a sense of pride in what they are doing. I know that the majority of teachers want to be effective, and we are going to make sure that we do what we have to do to make them effective. I think there is a teacher at the back there, who is bellowing about shame. Clearly, she will not make herself available to this programme and that is sad. It is sad because if she gets the programme, she will be a better teacher in the classroom, which means that the Guyanese children will better themselves.

This programme is a collaboration with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the ProFuturo Foundation. We have also partnered with Guyana Telephone & Telegraph Co. Ltd. (GT&T) and Digicel Guyana, so that the teachers who go online to do this training will not have their data expended. That is what governance is about – partnering with people to get the work done.

These programmes existed when you were there and you never went to the teachers, and you are telling me that you love teachers.

Two days ago, since this programme was launched, a total of 5,034 teachers have registered. That is how interested they are in developing themselves; 1,700 of those teachers are already on the platform. What is this programme going to do? It is going to teach innovation and information and communications technology (ICT). The innovation part shows them how to use whatever is available, whether it is under a tree, in the yard or home. Teachers are not as interested in incentives, as you are. So, stop asking about what the incentive is. The incentive is developing themselves and being able to deliver in a classroom; and that is why 5,034 teachers did this. Stop belittling teachers and making everything about money. That is not how I see them.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have to stop there and get an extension. Could someone move the extension for the Hon. Minister of Education?

Ms. Teixeira: There is a certain trade union leader, who seems to not recognise that we are in Parliament, and who thinks that we are on a picket line.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to request five minutes for my Colleague to conclude her presentation. Thank you, Sir.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Hon. Members, it has been very noisy. Please remember that I am following through a 3.5-millimetre (mm) jack with a headphone. It becomes very difficult to follow. Please, let us keep it a little quieter.

Hon. Minister of Education, please continue.

Ms. Manickchand: Where teachers have no access to devices or data, we are making arrangements to make sure that they do not stay behind.

The Hon. Member is talking about giving people points for promotion; that is in the works; so, stop. Why did you not advise your Minister of Education from your party to do this same programme, since the start of COVID-19? It has been five months. I am not talking about what we will do, I am talking about what we have already done in six weeks. It has been five years and yet you cannot do it. So, *shh, shh*.

The other very important thing that we have to do which faced us when we took Office, less than six weeks ago, is how do we deliver to the children of this country some kind of education; something, so that we keep them engaged. We know that we could never replace the value of a teacher in front of the classroom but, in the absence of that and given the health concerns for our teachers, students and their families, what do we do? I do not hold the view that the Hon. Devin Sears seems to hold that, in the absence of being able to deliver something perfectly, do nothing at all. As leaders, we do not have that option; we do not give ourselves, on this side of the House, that as an option. We must find solutions to problems.

What have we done? We have established a timetabled/scheduled teaching on the Guyana Learning Channel Trust. It begins at 8.00 a.m. for the nursery levels. [**Ms. McDonald:** (*Inaudible*)] The Hon. Member knows that is not true; it begins at 8.00 a.m. I sent her the timetable, so if she knows that it is not true and she is still saying the opposite, it means she is prepared to dissemble to the people of this country and they must not trust her. The timetabling starts from 8:00 a.m., which is perfectly normal, and continues to 6.00 p.m.

The Learning Channel Trust was launched by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, in 2011, by the then President, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo. The vision, then, was to make sure that we can take education to all parts of this country. At the time that he launched it, he said, ‘imagine children in a deep hinterland village being able to see the best Science teacher from the coast or the best Mathematics teacher doing equations.’

Guess what happened from then to now? First of all, earlier in the week, I was asked for a piece of equipment because they needed it, and I asked them: Why did you not ask the previous Minister for this because this is so easy? The answer was that they never saw her. She never visited that the Guyana Learning Channel Trust.

But guess what they did? Here it is, according to the *Guyana Times*, 16th June, 2016.

“Govt programmes sneaked onto Guyana Learning Channel”,

Your priority was to put your picture, your face and your President and not the children of this country. When President Jagdeo launched it, he had said this would be the only channel that has no political content. What did they do? It was not about how we can get education to the children in Aishalton, Karasabai or the children of Paruima. It was how can we get our very poisoned messages to all these communities. Let us go and take up time and space on the Guyana Learning Channel Trust and that is what they did.

I see we are hurting a couple of people here today; we are hurting you; are we not?

This Budget that you say provides nothing for anyone is giving \$200 million for the expansion of the Channel. Do you know what that expansion will entail? That expansion will entail us having six learning channels at the same time. The problem the Member complains about, which is we have to start from 8.00 a.m., we can now start from 10.00 a.m. and take the nursery levels, all the way until 3.00 p.m. We can start Grade 1, on the other channel, and they can teach all day. It will not be two hours and then two hours; that is vision. That is *putting your money where your mouth is*. We wanted to serve the people, six weeks after we came into Office. After six weeks in Office, there is money here. So, when you stand and say you cannot support this Budget, you are taking away from the children of this country the ability to get the teaching that they desire and deserve. Shame on you! Shame! Shame! Shame!

I hope that you will give me back my time. [**An. Hon. Member:** Dr. Henry schooled...] It will be quite a day when Dr. Nicolette Henry schools anybody.

12.31 p.m.

This Budget also provides \$15 million to establish our own radio station; it will be the education radio station – this Budget, the same one that you said has nothing for anyone.

Ms. Catharine Hughes said, and the Hon. Member turned out to be such a colossal disappointment to this country, that radio existed since she was a child and that she read on it. So did I. It existed since March of this year also, when we went into lockdown. That incompetent and incapable Government could not use the station, which they knew existed since she was a child, to deliver education to this nation. Shame! Shame! Shame!

This Budget allows us not to have to borrow a couple of hours from the National Communications Network (NCN) and from the National Television Network (NTN). It will allow us to run our radio station all day with educational content. Thank you, President Irfaan Ali.

This Budget also provides money for us to provide masks to all our teachers and students because going back into schools is inevitable. When we go back into those schools, we have to make sure that our teachers are safe, their families are safe, and our students are safe. We will be providing masks from a Government level. It would be interesting, while the Hon. Member is speaking, for her to tell us how many masks the APNU/AFC gave to the people of this country. You came out with a big rule – people must wear masks – but you did not give them any. It was up to the PPP/C, while in Opposition and as a political party, to distribute more than 100,000 masks. What would we do without the PPP/C?

This Budget also provides money for us to ensure that our infrastructure in schools can accommodate the protocol set up by the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO). We will have to have enough sinks with running water and toilets that flush. This Budget, which you said does nothing for anyone, gives to our 180,000 students and our 10,000 teachers, and their families, the comfort of knowing that they can wash their hands when they want. If you cannot support this Budget, then you are taking that away from them.

This Budget also provides money for us to deliver education using the ‘blended approach’ that we spoke about – television, print material, radio, paying our teachers to go on the channel and teach for us, and getting the material out to the people. Three hundred million dollars was set aside in this Budget to make sure that we keep our children engaged. So, when you say you cannot support this Budget, it means that you do not want those children to have the materials we are sending out to them. Parents are begging us for the print material. When you say you cannot support the Budget, you are taking away the print material from them. Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame on all of you. [An Hon. Member:

(Inaudible)] Yes, that was Mr. Bulkan. This is what you did with the Guyana Learning Channel Trust. You put a Minister and his face there, which had nothing to do with the children; plus, all that he told them were untruths. That is what you did. What are we doing with it? We are teaching on that channel.

While I am on the issue, and I know that my time is running out, this is a list of what we promised for education in the manifesto. The highlighted parts of this list are what we have already begun to deliver, six weeks later. This list will go on my wall, on a vinyl-printed material, and it will stay there to remind us of what we have to do every day because this is what the people of this country called for.

What does this Budget help us to do? It helps us to enhance the Guyana Learning Channel Trust to support learning across all levels and extend coverage across Guyana. It provides generous tax incentives to private education providers from primary to tertiary levels. We have offered incentives to teachers and opportunities for training; we are offering all of our teachers 100 hours of free training. We are restoring and increasing the ‘Because We Care’ cash grant. These are things that we have already begun to do.

The other side has zero moral or any authority to come here and tell us anything about governance. These are the people who I believed to be my equals, up to 5th March. Then, we saw what unfolded. They tried to take from the people of this country their very basic human and fundamental constitutionally enshrined right to pick a government of their choice. That is where we are not equals. You are not like me. You are not like us. We are not equal. You are thieves of rights. We are not. For the people who said we are ‘weaponising’ the courts, let me say this: we will use every means, every measure, all the time, every time and every day, to make sure that we protect the rights of the people of this country, particularly, to make sure that we protect them against the APNU/AFC and the PNC. We assure the people of this country that will be our mission. The forefront of our thoughts would always be that, once you give them a chance, people do not have rights in this country anymore.

Mr. Speaker: Please wind down, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: As I close, I say with certainty that 10 heads will always be better than one, all things being equal. My position has been, always, and will continue to be that I am prepared to partner with whoever is prepared to partner with us to take the education sector forward. That does not mean we have to have the same opinions and we have to have the same... In my house, there is a difference of opinion on a

large number of things and we love each other. We could get by if we truly love our children. Do not be disruptive or be an obstructionist and come here and holler like *your head ain't good*. Let us partner for the children of Guyana because the PPP/C is on a mission and it is to deliver education to all corners of this country, to every single child of this country and, along the way, we will be looking after our parents and our teachers. I thank you, Sir. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Education. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 12.39 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.55 p.m.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Hon. Members, this is our final day. I have listened to the different presenters on the Opposition's side and they have said that the Budget is clueless, visionless and other such comments. I am really not surprised because you were clueless and visionless when you were in Government. Nothing has changed since you became the Opposition. You have a document that is simple, uncomplicated, with no quotations from the *Bible*, unlike previous budgets, because we are a secular State. This Budget explains, very simply, a couple of principles upon which the PPP/C Government is based.

First of all, we have to take emergency efforts and provide programmes and funding to address the COVID-19 pandemic that is in our country. We are doing exactly what countries all across the world are doing; it is no different. The unfortunate thing is that, when the first case was discovered on 11th March, many countries, our Caribbean brothers and sisters and the governments there, brought in by April/May what was called 'comprehensive approaches' to deal with COVID-19. That included health interventions, interventions to prevent the spread of the disease, using measures such as curfews, *et cetera* and, also, relief – relief to the people. Every country in the region had except us. Barbados and Jamaica had it and some gave assistance to the frontline workers. We are now doing it, almost seven months after the first case was discovered in Guyana.

The other aspect of the Budget has to do with turning our country back onto a positive path. Between 2015 and 2020, our country was derailed. We came off the tracks. I know my Friends on the other side do not want to hear that. It is true and, yet, you have come to this House with a holier-than-thou

approach. My mother would say that it seems as if *butter could melt in your mouth*'. You tried talking to us about discrimination, governance and constitutional rule. Really? When you were in Government, you had the highest offenses to the Constitution of Guyana than any other regime in this country. You even beat Mr. Burnham; you even put Mr. Burnham to shame, and you have come to talk to us about constitutional rule.

I will give you some examples because I know you want proof and we have the proof – there are many. For example, we had to restore the Constitution, the rule of law and democracy in this country. Those statements that you have made in this House do not help you as a political Opposition. Your credibility has been destroyed over the last five years and, more so, in the last five months. All of this, as they would say, *pomposetting*, does not convince anybody. This is because people have gone through the last five years of increased poverty, a slow-down of the economy and, worse yet, in the last five months, an outright effort, for five straight months – not a one-off – to derail the elections and the will of the people of this country. Yet, you have come here holier-than-thou. Really? Who believes you outside there? Maybe only you believe yourselves. Maybe, that is why you are where you are. The rule and legacy that you have left this country is one of a government that was inaccessible and invisible. You did not go and talk to the people. I could name village after village where people said no Minister went for three years or five years. It is unacceptable and that is why you are where you are. That is why this is an opportunity for you, as the Opposition, as we had to when we were in the Opposition, to review the way in which you operate, and do better. I call on you to give some thought to that.

2.01 p.m.

From the last budget that was brought in December, 2018, to now, it has been almost two years. November, 2018 was when we started discussing the 2019 Budget and, yet, you refused to obey the CCJ. I went to other places, which are quite credible, I must assure you. The CCJ [**Mr. Duncan: (Inaudible)**] I do not have to justify my qualifications to anybody. I have been in this country for 40-odd years as a politician. I do not need to justify that to anyone and certainly not to you, Mr. Duncan.

The constitutional breaches – let me just give you an example: on 12th July, 2019, these were the orders of the Caribbean Court of Justice: the court ordered you to hold elections in accordance with the Constitution and to, also,

remember that you were an interim Government. It said that there was a restraint on your legal authority and power. You obeyed nothing. Elections were not listed. When it was to be held in September, it was held until March, 2020.

Let me just remind my Friends on the other side... There are a lot of new Members, and I hope that they will use the opportunity to not be *led through the nose with a ring*, but to be able to read and understand what has happened in this country. This former Government, APNU/AFC, appointed two persons as Technocrat Ministers, who were on the candidate list. This matter was taken to the court and the court ruled that, the two Ministers, Mr. Keith Scott and Mr. Winston Felix, unlawfully occupied seats in the Parliament in contravention of articles 60, 103 (3), 105, and 162, as defined by article 232. They continued as Ministers until 2nd August, receiving their pay, benefits, security, drivers and cars. Not only did they flout the Constitution, they flouted the courts.

Then there was the revocation of the leases of the farmers of the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agricultural/Development/Authority area (MMA-ADA). The court ruled that this was unconstitutional null and void.

The Caribbean Court of Justice ruled that you had to restrain yourself and hold elections in consonance with the Constitution. The Caribbean Court of Justice ordered the Government of Guyana, in 2016, to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to Dipcon Engineering Services Limited. It did not. This is in contrast to what it did with Rudisa Beverages, where it paid US\$16 million on a claim without any negotiations for that repayment, when the company owed Guyana millions of dollars in taxes. We can continue with the fact that they paid the BK Group of Companies \$5.3 billion for a project they never finished, and they paid them the full price.

There is D’Urban Park and the Homestretch Development Incorporated, where over \$1.4 billion was spent and was still being spent up until 2020. The head of that special-purpose company became the Director of Public Parks, under the Department of Environment, and was receiving a very handsome salary. One can see the National Park and its condition. I do not know what he was doing all of those years. We have them taking 6,000 solar panels for the interior and putting them on the Ministry of the Presidency.

Let us go to the constitutional bodies – the Public Service Commission (PSC): you talk to us and you preach to us here about discrimination and independence of the constitutional bodies but, in 2016, Minister Simona Broomes directed the

Public Service Commission to cease all interviews and meetings until further notice. The court was approached and ruled that it was unconstitutional and unlawful. The President moved the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, a constitutional post holder. The court ruled that it was unconstitutional. He then appointed Mr. Yarde in his place. Again, in breach of the constitutional requirements of appointments to the Public Service Commission.

The Police Service Commission: in 2017, the President, through the Ministry of the Presidency, *via* Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon – I do not see him here yet, I guess he is writing his speech – directed the Police Service Commission to halt all police promotions until further directed. While the Police Service Commission was expired, the President announced a revamping of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and appointments to the leadership of the police without the *imprimatur* of the Police Service Commission. This matter too, was taken to the court, the court found that the letter sent by the Minister of State, Lt. Col (Ret’d) Joseph Harmon, to the Police Service Commission, directing it to withhold work on the annual police promotions, was in flagrant disregard of the Constitution and was unlawful, null and void and of no effect. The court went on to state that, this was a blatant disregard of article 226 of the Constitution, which insulates the Police Service Commission from influence and direction from any person or authority, especially political directions.

The Judicial Service Commission: my friend, here we will deal with that, in terms of the neglect you have gone through for two years and not appointed.

Then we have, of course, the *biggy* one, the Elections Commission (GECOM) and the appointment of the former Chairman of GECOM in violation of the Constitution; the unilateral appointment of the Chairman. Therefore, the Caribbean Court of Justice, again, stated on 18th June, 2019:

“We have no choice but to conclude that the process that was followed in the appointment of Justice Patterson was flawed and in breach of article 161(2).”

So do not come and ‘play preach’ to us about holier-than-thou.

Let us go on. We are dealing with restoring democracy and also turning Guyana around, to be able to move forward since you have reversed so many things. We spoke in 2016; when the taxes came out in February, 2016, we warned you then that the taxes you were bringing would have a deleterious effect on the Guyanese people. You laughed and went ahead.

We promised then, in that Budget speech of 2016 that, when we get into Office, we would remove those taxes. In this Budget speech, we have kept our promises to the people, in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

We have to be able to stimulate the economy. I know you are saying that, the purchasing power... Let us go back to what those taxes did to the Guyanese people. Do you see the philosophical difference between us? Some people like to say that it is an ethnic issue; it is not ethnic. There is a philosophical difference between us, on both sides of the House – a major philosophical difference. Let me explain. Your approach to development, as shown by the five years in Government, has been one of taxation and monoculture. Our philosophical approach is pro-poor, pro-growth, balancing the two and being able to have and create a diversification of the economy, a diversification of the skills and things that are needed in our country and an inclusive approach to how we run our country. I will say that we are in line. Your thing was taxes - taxes, taxes, taxes.

Why do I say that you are a monoculture? Why did I say that you were not doing things of diversification? The issue of monoculture – you took over with an economy that was in good condition. You took over with an economy that had over US\$780 million in our foreign currency reserves. You took over a country where sugar, rice, bauxite, gold, diamond, timber and fisheries were doing well. What did you do? You closed estates and you cut off that revenue stream of over US\$16-US\$20 million that was coming in as revenue. You brought taxes that hurt the miners, the businessmen, the manufacturers, the taximen, the minibus drivers, the vendors, then you are surprised that the economy started to have problems. You removed the revenue base of this country and what did you give it? You gave it oil and gas. We became, in four years, a country where we can say that we are more dependent on oil and gas than on any of the other sectors in this country. That is your pride and joy because you gave it away in the agreement of 2016, which you kept hidden for a year, including the signing bonus. You were so occupied with secrecy and *clandesity* you hid from the Guyanese people that you actually gave away a lot of our patrimony, of course, small amounts of money.

Let us go back to the taxes and why this Budget has to, and had to, change the taxes that were brought on our people. Do you know what the VAT in 2017 cost the Guyanese people – all the taxes that you brought in? It cost \$5.2 billion in disposable income. You took \$5.2 billion out of the pockets of Guyanese people. By our removing the imposition of VAT

on zero-rated items and new fees and licences imposed in the 2016 and 2017 Budgets, we are, in fact, returning in excess of \$5.2 billion in disposable income to the Guyanese people, which is approximately \$31,200 for every household. By removing VAT on data, we are returning \$1.3 billion to the pockets of average Guyanese, annually. We have also removed another \$469 million, in terms of reducing the cost of licensing and permits, annually. This \$469 million will return to the pockets of Guyanese people. By removing the VAT on water and electricity, \$2.6 billion would be returned to Guyanese, annually. Between October and December alone, \$660 million would be returned to the Guyanese people. That will increase their purchasing power and put money in their hands. By restoring zero-rated VAT for capital equipment in mining, which is a critical area, \$1.3 billion will be returned to the miners, annually.

That is the difference between us philosophically. You believe in taking away from the people and we believe in giving back to the people. It is a fundamental philosophical difference between us. [**Mr. Nandlall:** It is as simple as that.] It is as simple as that. Let me cut out all the fancy things in economics. What is the difference? You like to take and we like to give.

We have to stimulate the economy and these measures that are brought in, in these last few months, the... [**Ms. Philadelphia:** Go back to the Guyana Power and Light.] If you *bruk* up the place, do you think that it will be fixed in six weeks?

The Prime Minister and I were listening to a United Nations virtual forum, this morning, on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It made me remember, when you were in Government, we had asked, in the National Assembly, what you were doing with the Sustainable Development Goals.

2.16 p.m.

Apparently, you did do something, but the public never knew it nor did the Opposition. So, the issue of what Mr. Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, said this morning is so pertinent to the debate going on here today. Mr. Guterres spoke about the challenges of implementing the 17 sustainable goals, particularly with COVID-19 and the fact that there have been greater reversals in many countries because of COVID-19. The gentleman spoke about three important issues: Firstly, that the political will is needed for inclusive governance, and you knew of this when the goals were brought out years ago. Secondly, that you needed to have transformative changes, and these were possible to

change the way in which the world deals with those inequalities, gaps and disparities between the rich and the poor. Thirdly, the issue of climate resilience, preserving our planet and renewing efforts of using alternative means of being able to have development.

This Budget, actually, is about that. This Budget talks about.... Let me find the page for you because I suspect that none of you really read the Budget. I know the PNC well; I have been around them since 1977. The attitude is that, if it is not written by someone they like, they do not read it. That is your attitude and that has been your failure all the time; a refusal to look at something, even when you do not agree with it. On page 60, this document makes it very clear that the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) will be our national development agenda. So, when you say it is visionless, you did not read the document; you do not know and so you are just talking *fluff*. You are just blowing wind in the air all the time. You refuse to come out of this cocoon – this shell – that you keep keeping in.

Page 60 states:

“... we will reinstitute the LCDS to help achieve prosperity for our people by deploying earnings from forest climate services to diversify the economy and create more jobs and opportunities, utilising a non-carbon intensive pathway. The LCDS will be broadened to include wider environmental services, including integrated water resources management and climate resilience. It will see the strengthening of the Environmental Protection Agency and the National System of Protected Areas.”

The LCDS brought in revenue for us. It was using carbon-trading, a new area of diversification in our economy. This was not a loan. We were not getting into debt. We were merely using the wonderful forest we have and our beautiful environment to be able to trade on the World Market and be able to gain money through carbon services. We were able to get US\$245 million as a result of that, with just maintaining our forest management.

The Opposition did not like it and they brought in the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS). Nobody really knows what the Green State Development Strategy is. We do know that they painted buildings green and I will say in aside, the State House will be restored to its traditional and historical colours of white walls and the forest green edges. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Not duck egg green.] Not duck egg green.

We have a serious philosophical difference of how we address things. When you got into Office, there was an issue to do with hiring. We had a situation where you came in and we had about 42,000 employees in the public service, under the Ministry of Health’s payroll. By the time you left Office it was \$69 billion. You created a bloated bureaucracy. So that, in 2014-2015, as I said, \$44.8 billion was spent on employment costs. In 2019, it went up to \$69.3 billion. The numbers in the public service increased from 41,441 to 51,020. You are bloating; you are the bloated bureaucracy.

Unfortunately, instead of bringing people back from the diaspora, who are highly qualified or using highly qualified people, what did you do? By the way, these figures came after what you did when you fired 1,972 CSOs in the interior. Do you know what you did when you did that? You withdrew \$700 million from the Amerindian communities by firing those 1,972 workers. Why? It was because the bill was about \$60 million per month. Multiply that by 12. I know the APNU/AFC has never been good at Mathematics but, anyway, I am sure you can figure that out.

The sum of \$700 million per annum was removed from those villages. You impoverished communities, knowingly/wittingly. You then fired 7,000 sugar workers, knowingly/wittingly and offered nothing in response. I heard some people speaking about discrimination and I just cannot believe that you would even dare want to use that word because you fired over 2,000 to 3,000 persons in the public sector, just because, maybe, you did not like their ethnic complexion or you thought that because of their ethnic complexion, they were politically aligned. The issue though is that the numbers went up, even though you fired about 7,000 persons from the public service. So, when you speak about discrimination and that some people lost their jobs – social cohesion, lovely thought and things... But what were they doing? The Department of Social Cohesion was made up of 11 persons, many of whom were Regional Social Cohesion Officers, who, for the last few months, until August, were a part of the recount process at this same building, representing the APNU/AFC. Who was doing the public service work?

I left governance in 2015, with a database and files that anybody coming in could continue the work that we were doing with human rights, on the Constitution, and on treaty reporting and other Parliament files. They are gone. Yet, you brought in high-powered persons at \$650,000 a month, plus benefits. Not one file can be found on what was going on in the last four years in governance – nothing. There was the Department of Social Cohesion and there is not one record to

show. What was the Department of Social Cohesion really doing? I do not even think you know what social cohesion is. From the way you talk, you could not know about social cohesion. You could not understand social cohesion based on how you spoke in this Parliament.

The politicising of the public service and making it into...Let me tell the House something – and maybe the young people on that side do not know – the Office of the President, formally known as the Ministry of the Presidency, had a political department. The political department received applications or pass through those who were APNU/AFC activists and that was the screening. So, to know that these were good boys and girls, they would be approved by the political department, signed by Mr. McWilfred, on the advice of Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon and others – Mr. Backer and Mr. Archer. That went to the Permanent Secretary (PS) who then wrote a letter to the Department Public Service to employ those persons. This was the *control freakism* that went on to make sure that there were no slippages and that no unidentified flying object (UFO), who had not been screen before, came in. This is the level of *freakism* that we are finding. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] They were looking for the Russians: I guess so.

This morning, when we listened to the UN meeting, what became clear and even clearer for me was that what we are talking about in this Budget is in consonance with the Sustainable Development Goals and the challenges of the country to deal with it. The Budget speaks of social protection areas, social safety nets, relief for single mothers, taxation relief and ability for people to get loans easier. These are all in the Budget. An alternative arrangement to do with climate, which is the Low Carbon Development Strategy, and assistance for the health workers – this is in the Budget; it talks of using technology to deal with teaching children in the COVID-19 experience. You have heard Minister Manickchand talk about information technology. It is just that some parts of the country are not connected, so we have to use a combination that she spoke about. In the Sustainable Development Goals, it talks about having a multi-layered/multifaceted approach to making sure that children have an equitable access to education so that children who are very poor or children in far-away areas would not be disadvantaged. This is in the Budget too. The Budget speaks about housing, having better water and people living in a cleaner environment. Everything to do with the sustainable goals and where we have to go forward is reflected in the Budget.

So, we as a country, we as the Government, have not departed from the goals that we have to reach in order to improve the quality of life of our people. The fact is that the quality of life had deteriorated badly. Maybe the former Ministers who are left over there, because some of them did not come back, did not go out enough to see what people were experiencing. This is because, when all these taxes were put on the miners, work started to slow down. When taxes were put on the manufacturers, including the very weird taxes of taxing the exports for the manufacturers, it made no sense. That is in the Budget and is being removed as well, giving the commercial banks and working with the commercial banks to make it easier for our people to get loans. These are all in what is our pro-people and pro-growth combination and it is applicable to all...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, what is applicable now is an extension.

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, you may continue.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Sir. As a developing country, the two challenges we left in 2015 were power generation and telecommunications - connectivity. If we would like to move forward as a country, we have to deal with those issues. We were working and it took us eight years to get to the point that we did with the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project.

In your first budgets you said this was criminal, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. You got into Government and you threw it away. The Norwegians came, on your invitation, for an independent analysis of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and hydro opportunities in Guyana. The Norwegian company, independent, not the Government of Norway, advised that the most viable and ready project that could get off its feet in a matter of years, was the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. We earned US\$80 million from the Low Carbon Development Strategy. That was not money from a loan, that is *we* money, all of. It was *all ah we* money. Eight million United States dollars was put aside for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Where has it gone? What did you do with it? It is not there; we have to start all over again and you have come high and mighty to us and pretend that you are holier-than-thou. Seriously?

What is really sad is that we have to start all over again. We have to get cheaper and reliable electricity for the country. We want investments. The Budget talks, too, about transformative projects and it is stated in this Budget. Basically, we have had no budget for 2020 to comply with the Constitution. To be able to have funds, we had to be able to put in what we are calling an emergency Budget. However, you had already spent half of the Budget.

2.31 p.m.

You spent approximately \$160 billion between January to July. I heard my Friend, Mr. Trotman, talking about us breaching the Constitution. Really? And that is coming from a lawyer. That is why I do not trust lawyers, except my lawyer, Mr. Anil Nandlall.

The Constitution is very clear on this issue. What you were doing was unauthorisedly spending money above what you were allowed in the period when there was no budget nor appropriation from Parliament. You have been having a fun time, have you not? You have had a good time. You have given away 20-odd pieces of land, all sorts of land all over the place, worth billions of dollars and you got pittance for them.

So, you have, again, taken money out of the budget. I heard some people talking...whatever is the stupid word that you are using ‘fraudulent’ or whatever the damn thing was. The issue is that *you spent de money. Where de money gone?* When the Auditor General gets involved, then we will get answers as to where the money has gone. I think that will lead to some serious issues.

The Ministry of Public Health, between August, 2015 and 2019, had \$151 billion and, yet, drugs were not bought for two years. **[Mr. Nandlall:** It was billions.] Billions. The highest amount of money ever put into health. You beat us on that, and we accept. You gave more money to health than we had given when we were in Office. What did you do with the money? That is why we could not understand why wherever we went across the country we were told there were no drugs, no vaccines, no this and no that. We would say that \$30 to \$40 odd billions was passed for the Ministry of Public Health in the National Assembly. Well, we have to find out where the money has gone, and we will find out. I promise you that.

I heard a number of persons talking about a number of issues. One of our focus, as a country, is to defend and preserve democracy all the time. That is a duty of every citizen, every political party and everybody in this room. It is the duty of us

to be responsible as Parliamentarians. I have heard some statements in here and I think people need to think carefully about what they say when they are inciting people. We are a multi-ethnic society, a very beautiful tapestry upon which to build our country, where everybody has a place, whether they vote for the APNU/AFC or the PPP/C.

Unfortunately, when you were in Government, if one were a PPP/C supporter, one was like a second-class citizen in one’s own country. Yet, you won the elections in 2015 by only 4,526 votes. That is why you are nervous now. It is because you believe that we will behave like you. You believe that because you did it, that is our style in the PPP/C. It is not our style.

Those who went out campaigning in the five months and shouted from the Square of the Revolution...the evil doers and called on God to smite us down and throw us into the fire, they are a *different kettle of fish* than public servants. Those who used race on social media and *Facebook*, have a different role to play and we will treat them differently, unapologetically, because we have the responsibility to protect our people from violence of all kinds.

We have said in the Budget document that we are working on the diversification of our economy, and, therefore, in every region, we will be looking at what are the investment opportunities and what is needed to open up for investment. Now, opening up for investment is an issue that the APNU/AFC, traditionally, had problems with because as soon as one says investment, they have the view that it means foreigners. Yes, it could mean foreigners. Why should we not have foreigners here to invest their money in our country to provide jobs? After all, when you left Government, you left 30,000 people unemployed.

When we say we are going to build jobs, how do we do that? Everyone cannot be employed in the public service. Mr. Granger himself admitted that. After promising teachers, soldiers and other public servants a 20% salary increase in 2015, which the Government never implemented, he then said that the Government does not employ people, they have to go elsewhere. That was when he talked about plantain chip. Do you remember that story?

We have a responsibility to get this economy stimulated and back up and running. The taxation is one issue. Removing the impediments and bureaucratic hurdles that are in our people’s way of getting business done is another issue. Why is it that the miners have to get a police clearance to fetch fuel in their own cars and drive their fuel into the interior? That is

bureaucratic madness. It is like the former Government had an obsession with red tape. I mean, I know you do not like the colour red, I should call it ‘green tape’.

Anyway, these are issues to *free up the place* and our economy. Our responsibility in Government is to make sure that people are treated fairly and that workers are treated fairly. Minister Walrond spoke about the funding available to create micro businesses. Dr. Vindhya Persaud talked about programmes for women in business. This is all in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. This is all in line with developing our country.

We will have a presidential youth council that will be all inclusive to be able to drive youth issues. It is right here in the Budget; just read it. It is not going to bite you if you read it. It is not going to contaminate you if you read it; just read it. You are not going to get the COVID-19 from it.

President Mohamed Irfaan Ali said very clearly that when we get into Office, we are going to *hit the ground running*. In the last six weeks, with very limited resources, we have attained more than you guys have attained in five years. Really.

The last comment I heard, and I am sure Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon is going to repeat it *ad nauseam*, is that we are an illegitimate Government. In 2015, you got 4,526 votes more than us. [**Hon. Members of the Opposition:** *(Inaudible)*] You are not running this show. The man up there, Mr. Speaker, is. When he tells me I am done, then I am done. In 2015, we filed an election petition, which has not been heard up to today. You have filed an elections petition. You will have your case heard, I assume, in whatever time it is done. But you cannot come here and talk about us being illegitimate. Your former President agreed to the recount and now you are challenging it. You all are bad losers. You are poor losers. You are like kids in a playground playing and because *yuh don’t get it right, yuh throw down yuh bat and ball and yuh walk away; yuh done*. That is your problem. We have won the elections, and, with the Opposition parties, you have lost by 23,000 to 24,000 votes. So, *tek yuh loss, pull your socks up* and let us get along with building this country for the benefit of all our people. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, in keeping with the time allotted to all Hon. Members of the House, I do crave your indulgence for the Hon. Nicolette Henry to be afforded an additional 10 minutes, as the Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira was just given.

Dr. Henry: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to address this honourable House as part of the 2020 Budget debate, I give thanks to Almighty God for this beautiful gift of life, for health and strength and for the opportunity to serve the people of Guyana.

I must say that, given everything that has happened since 2nd August, 2020, including the death of my two cousins, things have really gotten out of control, including the spiralling death rate due to COVID-19. I have never been more thankful for life.

As I make this presentation, Guyana’s COVID-19 death rate has taken a quantum leap during the past month and a Hon. Member in this House is responsible for that. Frankly speaking, no pun intended here, this development is unacceptable to say the least. The Hon. Minister of Health, even prior to taking the oath, wanted us, the good people of this country, to believe that he had the magic prescription to control and prevent the spread of COVID-19 here in Guyana. It has now been over one month since the Hon. Member has taken up his portfolio and we, the good people of this country, are still waiting on that minted cutting edge strategy to address the serious public health pandemic.

All we are getting is a lot of pontification, *fluff* and *bluff*. To hear that Hon. Minister come to this honourable House, during this budget debate, and trivialise the issues related to the health and wellbeing of the people of this country is nothing short of a travesty and is most disappointing, to say the least. The people of this country deserve better. We have to get answers as to why the death in COVID-19 is decreasing, globally, and we are seeing the reverse here in Guyana. We need answers.

Given these frightening trends, I was expecting to see, under the education sector in this Budget, a more robust and sustainable plan to mitigate the effects and the aftershock of COVID-19, which will lead to the risk of regression of many of our students, especially those whose basic foundational learning was not strong to begin with, as my Friend there. The future of education lies in the application of an appropriate blended approach not limited to information and communications technology.

As this debate is ongoing, the biggest question on the minds of the people of this country in relation to education is: would the shift in education policy, administration and governance in Guyana leave our children behind? This oral question is both urgent and important. Given the PPP/C’s track records in education, coupled with the implications of the COVID-19

pandemic, and as with most crises, the effects will be most damaging to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations, including learners from low income and remote areas.

2.46 p.m.

The decision was made to close our schools on 13th March, 2020. As a result of this closure, a number of emergency measures were implemented by the David Granger Administration to mitigate the adverse effects associated with school closures, including the potential for students to fall behind in their education. It should be noted that the emergency efforts were part of a wider plan for the delivery of public education, remote learning and teaching scheme, fondly referred to as PERLTS. This initial rollout, while laudable, had to be evaluated for sustainability purposes, as well as to identify gaps. Having completed that evaluation, the Ministry of Education needs to communicate to the public what areas of that initiative will be sustained, strengthened or discontinued. The clock is ticking. Classes have recommenced. There is no critical information on areas such as what percentage of our teachers have been trained in online and blended learning skills to ensure the delivery of quality education during COVID-19 in Guyana. The quality of teachers is the most important and significant determinant of student output. The quality of the school system cannot and will not exceed the quality of teachers.

Similarly, the public should know where the Ministry of Education is with supporting engagements with parents, especially those who have children with special education needs and those parents who are not efficient in ICT and other areas of remote learning. These are minimum imperatives, given our new reality in education, and parents are still asking and clamouring for this training. Up to this morning, several persons, including parents, continued to contact me and many of my Colleagues in relation to guidance, as there is growing concerns that lack of parental involvement and technology will further exacerbate the inequality in education.

We know too well that the most privileged could afford tutors and fibre optic internet, while the poorest and most marginalised are likely to be experiencing different forms of challenges and even neglect. Given that disparity, some of our children will return to school without missing much, while others will not return at all.

It is, therefore, both unfortunate and regrettable that this budget is void of any measure to specifically address our

most disadvantaged and marginalised students. Every other country in the world has educational programmes that are specifically geared to address these marginalised groups, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. By now, it is common knowledge that remote learning is posing a challenge for many students, especially those with underlying conditions and comorbidities and, also, those living in far-flung communities. These challenges include little or no connectivity, lack of access to online educational assessment equipment, unfamiliarity with remote and distant learning techniques and, I have to add, the frequent blackouts that we are experiencing.

If these basic areas are not addressed, the old disparities linked to socioeconomic status, ethnicity and special education needs will continue to emerge as fault lines in Guyana’s education response. There must be a concerted effort to provide the necessary support and tools to all of our students in this regard. It is in that context that I will say that the \$15,000 cash grant is not targeted nor evidence-based to respond nor provide resilience to the education system in these COVID-19 times.

I have to say that ‘because we care’ cannot be handed out on a voucher. It has to be demonstrated in the policies and programmes. From all that we have seen and heard, there are no programmes contained in this Budget that are demonstrative of that care. In fact, you heard from one of my Colleagues how an Hon. Member, sitting in this House, told teachers that if they do not like the pay, they could leave the job. I am asking all the teachers in this honourable House, who were subjected to that crass, puerile and insensitive behaviour to say ‘aye’. The ‘ayes’ it.

Similarly, the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) programme would have outlived its usefulness and we have learnt from several commentators that many homes have more than one learner and, therefore, will require the use of more than one electronic device to facilitate online and blended learning, which has become the new reality due to COVID-19. The Government of Guyana, therefore, at this critical time, when school has recommenced for the new academic year, 2020/2021, must commit, with some urgency, dedicated evidence-based programmes that will cater for the individual needs of all our learners.

As we look to the future, we have to ensure that a temporary disruption of schooling does not become a permanent loss of education. Guyana has made significant strides in education delivery during the past five years. We have said our goodbye

to the ‘no child left behind’ policy. We will not embrace any policy that will leave all our children behind. The people of this country demand better. It is expected that the Ministry of Education will leverage the gains already made to the benefit of the Guyanese people. The people of this country have every right to believe in a better life, as we proceed to develop our nation from year to year and from administration to administration. Along the way on this journey, there have been and will always be highs and lows, twists and turns, but that is life and that is politics. How we respond as a country is entirely dependent on the efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness of the leadership, which is brought to bear on our circumstances, whatever they might be.

In responding to some of the comments made by presenters from the other side of this House, I have to set the record straight. I refuse to use this honourable House to discuss matters related to my subordinates. I would not go as far as to bring anybody’s personal file here. In terms of the rehiring of the Chief Education Officer, this is someone who had reached the statutory age of retirement and, therefore, the issue of dismissal does not arise. Hon. Member, I have to say that you know I could do a lot of things, but, believe me, I cannot fix people’s birthdays. I have to agree with Mdm. Teixeira, in this particular instance, that one certainly cannot trust some of the Attorneys.

In terms of the various initiatives implemented for COVID-19, nothing new is being proposed by the current Administration. As early as May of this year, Guyana was cited as one of four Caribbean countries implementing a blended approach, which included all of what is being claimed by the current Government. I have here before me a report titled, *Report to Commonwealth Education Ministers: From Response to Resilience*, dated May, 2020. Guyana, Jamaica, Belize and Bahamas already made progress in television and radio channels in interactive radio, e-learning portfolios and many of the other recommendations. The data do not lie.

If it is one thing we know, as policy makers in education, it is that you always begin with the end in mind. You have to ask yourself: What it is that you want for our children that causes you to embark on a particular programme? If your response to that question is nebulous, then you know it cannot be the intention and the best interest that our students will reach their full potential.

The history of this country is rife with the gains made in the education sector during the past five years. We have left an

education sector better than we found it and the data speaks for itself. When the David Granger-led Administration came into Government in 2015, we took over an education sector that was in crisis. The performance of the nation’s children at the national and regional examination, in the past five years, serves as a clear indication. In 2015, for instance, the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) results were appalling, as the previous years for which I have seen the data. In fact, 23% of our students were passing their National Grade Six Assessment examination. In five short years, we have seen incremental improvement in all subject areas. In some instance, it is more than 60%. We have also improved the working conditions and remuneration packages for teachers. It is the best they have gotten in decades. We have initiated curriculum reform after four decades. We, on this side of the House, knew that a more than 40-year old curriculum could not have delivered the breadth of skills required for the 21st Century. In 2018, after an absence of more than a decade, the David Granger Administration commenced teachers’ training programme in Region 8.

With regard to attendance at schools, we have seen improvement, particularly at the secondary level, and we were able to significantly reduce the dropout rate. The people of this country could accept nothing less than to keep the momentum and gains we have made in education. I am proud of the track record of the Coalition Government in the education sector. I am proud.

3.01 p.m.

It is often said that people get governments that they deserve. I can tell you that the people of this country deserve much better than a PPP/C Government. In fact, I cannot stand here, in good conscience, and support this 2020 Budget, given the glaring inadequacies, inequities and rank disparities that will result from the implementation of these measures contained therein. There is an obvious lack of foresight to effectively deliver quality education to all of the students of Guyana.

It concerns me that we can return to what we had as education delivery during the 23 years of PPP/C governance. There is a false belief and this grossly unfounded notion, pedalled by the PPP/C, that all the programmes of the Coalition were flawed. I do not know if they are listening to themselves, especially since it is difficult to imagine how any political party, for that matter, can be in Government for 23 consecutive years and had litany of woes and failed projects that I will not rehash in this honourable House. Yet, these same people can turn around in five short years, after

demitting Office, and paint a picture of doom and gloom and realistically think that they are extricated.

I wish to place on record that *Budget 2020* is woefully inadequate, both in the sums allocated and the policies adumbrated for education. It has left many persons, including me, worried about the outlook for basic education in Guyana, now and in the long-term. There is obviously a lack of coordination across key divisions, creating duplication, overlaps and gaps in key activities. Again, I say the people of this country deserve better. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: On 14th November, this year, we will be celebrating Diwali. It is a pleasure for me to stand here this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, did you say 14th December?

Mr. Nandlall: On 14th of November, we will be celebrating Diwali.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Nandlall: It is a pleasure for me to stand here this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: Sir, let me interrupt you one more time. You said 14th November.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, that is a very auspicious day. It is going to be my 60th birthday. Thank you very much.

Mr. Nandlall: Happy birthday, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry; I was just kidding. I will be 65 and a pensioner.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, once you stay away from certain Members of this House, you will remain strong and healthy.

Sir, permit me to add to the echo of congratulations extended to you for your most deserving election as Speaker of the National Assembly. Permit me, also, to welcome all the new Parliamentarians, who have been conferred with the honour and dignity of serving the people of Guyana in this august Assembly. It is no secret that our journey here was not an easy one. It is necessary, for posterity, that we must record certain important events that led us here.

I have listened to the other side and I have heard the many references from the *Holy Bible*. So, I know that they know

about Moses and his 40 days on the mountain top. Perhaps, it is serendipity that we are meeting here because we spent our 40 days, here, fighting for democracy. This is our Mount Sinai. We had the fortune of having on our side and the side of the people of Guyana over 100 countries, as we tried desperately and successfully, in the end, to navigate our country away from the destructive path on which they wanted to take it.

It is important that we record in the *Hansard* the contributions that certain persons and governments made to the democracy of this country. We have, today, in our country, the privilege of hosting the Secretary of State of the United States of America (USA), Mr. Michael Pompeo, a champion of Guyana’s democracy. We want to thank the Government of Great Britain. We want to thank the Government of Canada. We want to thank the Caribbean leaders – the Hon. Mia Mottley, the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, the Hon. Owen Arthur, the Hon. Bruce Golding – the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States, the United Nations, the Carter Center and, of course, all the democratic-minded persons of this country who saved this country from total disaster.

I have heard, unfortunately, in this House, this Government being described as fraudulent. Mr. Speaker, permit me to remind you and also place on the record of this House that the General and Regional Elections were held on 2nd March, and every single vote was recounted by an agreement. That recount was verified and certified as free and fair. That process was ruled upon by the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) as being legitimate and constitutional.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 41 (2).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall and Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul...

Mr. Mahipaul: Standing Order 41 (2), Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hold on a second. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, there is no need to repeat, in a very loud voice, over and over. Remember, we are operating electronically; I have to unmute my microphone before I can speak; so it does take a little while and a delay.

Go ahead, Mr. Mahipaul. State your Point of Order.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am guided, Sir. It is Standing Order 41 (2). I remember when I was about to speak on the recount, you guided me that it is *sub judice*, so I am seeking that the Hon. Member also be guided the same way. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think I did speak in terms of the case in court when we were talking about the case in court to determine legitimacy. The recount is a different issue. Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall, please proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir. The recount process was examined, ruled upon and pronounced to be constitutional and legal by the highest court of this land. As a result, the General and Regional Elections results were declared by the Elections Commission. The Chancellor of the Judiciary administered the Oath of Office to His Excellency Mohamed Irfaan Ali, declaring him the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. I take great umbrage to this current Government being described in this House as fraudulent. Mr. Speaker, I ask you, being the one in charge of this National Assembly, not to desecrate the record of this Assembly any further. I ask you to take objection anytime that adjective is used in this House to describe the PPP/C Administration.

From the beginning of this debate, we, in this House, and the Guyanese public have been fed with that well-known diet from the APNU/AFC of platitudinal rhetoric and sanctimonious outpourings of their great performance in Office. We heard of the hypocritical illusions of a ‘good life’ similar to their hollow and fallacious campaign themes, such as honesty and decency, and their fabled and fanciful ‘Decade of Development’ – all being warp fabrications of their fertile imaginations.

Fortunately, *actions speak louder than words*. The Guyanese and Caribbean people and, indeed, the entire world, have this motley crew on display, not only since 2015 but, moreover, from 3rd March, 2020. As a result, it is difficult for anyone to take any of them over there seriously.

I, therefore, will not consume valuable time in traversing their submissions made in this House. Only for the record, I will remind the Guyanese people that when the APNU/AFC took Office, they did so upon a platform that was as unprecedented as it was historic, even dreamlike. They took Office on the heels of the largest discovery of the highest quality of crude ever found in this part of the world; a staggering eight billion barrels of oil which immediately converted every Guyanese and their unborn grandchildren into multi-millionaires. That is what they inherited. That is the platform upon which they took Government. It is recorded in *Forbes Magazine* in an article.

By July, 2020, due to their conspiratorial and relentless efforts to massacre democracy, they pushed the nation state of Guyana agonisingly close to the precipice of total collapse

and utter destruction. It took the combined efforts of 100 countries worldwide to navigate the ship of Guyana from those tumultuous waters and back to the safe harbour of democracy and the rule of law. I am pleased that the ship of Guyana is now firmly under the stewardship of the PPP/C Administration, as she begins to chart her new voyage to become the new Dubai of the world. This is what the international press is now publishing about Guyana. On 4th September: *Guyana hails as the new Dubai of the hemisphere*. This brings it back from the total destruction on which you were taking it.

The *Budget 2020* is barely the first intake of fuel for that ship of Guyana as it begins to chart this new course. That is why the Budget is presented under the theme ‘Our Plan for Prosperity’. It is part of that map that will guide the ship of Guyana to that majestic destination. Someone from that Opposition’s side said that we must situate this Budget in its proper context.

3.16 p.m.

I agree that this budget is unique in many respects and we must put it into context, for almost half of the moneys budgeted here have already been spent by A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) and, I dare say, illegally so, in violation of the Constitution and the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) and without any parliamentary scrutiny. Most importantly, there is no evidence to show how it was spent. What did you do with \$160 billion? What did you do with it! *Yuh builaway, yuh builaway*. ask *yuh* grandparents what that means.

Part of the theme, under which this Budget is presented, is ‘Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law’. This is not usual thematic language of any budget, but it was used here because context is important. No one can doubt that this Budget came after five years of a style of Government by the other side that constantly places democracy and the rule of law upon trial. No Government in the English-speaking Caribbean, since independence, has been found guilty, more times by the judiciary, of violating its constitution and trampling upon the rule of law than the APNU/AFC from 2015 to 2020.

The unconstitutional journey begun just after the first week in Government. Just the first week in Government on 28th May, 2015, Minister Simona Broomes wrote a letter, upon the instruction of President Granger, directed to the Public Service Commission to halt promotion. That letter was squashed by Chief Justice Chang on 24th June, 2015 as

unlawful, unconstitutional and in violation of article 226 of the Constitution. That is how the abuse of the Constitution begun and it never stopped until they left Office in August, 2020. This runaway train smashed into the Constitution and attempted to wreck the rule of law on repeated occasions over the next four years.

The Ministry of Housing and Water seized people’s transported and titled core homes. The court ruled that they violated the constitutional right to property. President Granger revoked over 50 rice farmers’ leases in Region 5 and the court ruled that the President violated the Constitution. The Hon. Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon wrote a letter, on behalf of President Granger, directing the Police Service Commission to halt promotions and the court ruled that it violated the Constitution. President Granger attempted to seize Red House from the Cheddi Jagan Research Institute and revoked a 99-year-old lease and the court ruled that he violated the Constitution. The President refused to constitute the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) after it expired in 2017, again, violating the Constitution. The President summoned the Chairman of the Public Service Commission and requested that he resign, again, violating the Constitution. The Attorney General threatened a sitting judge during the hearing of a High Court case, again, threatening the Constitution. President Granger unilaterally appointed a Chairman to the Elections Commission, again, violating the Constitution. When the Government was defeated by a no confidence motion in December, 2018, it violated the Constitution by Cabinet refusing to resign and by refusing to hold an election within three months. In fact, it refused to recognise the validity of the no confidence motion. The case went all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice, where they embarrassed every Guyanese on a global stage by arguing that 33 is not a majority of 65. Then the Government tried to remove tens of thousands of registered electors from the voters list in order to deny them their right to vote, again, the judiciary was forced to rule that the Government violated the Constitution. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] This is the book. For five years, and with the power of the State, you could not take it back.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a law book.*]

Grow a pair, grow a pair and come for it. Come for it, *grow a pair*, come. What was most egregious about their abuse of the rule of law is the way they used it as a weapon in their attempt to destroy the reputation, the character and the lives of young professionals who have served the people of Guyana faithfully and discharged the mandate of their office.

Young Mr. Dharamlall, Mr. Seeraj, Dr. Ashni Singh, Mr. Brassington, all are outstanding public servants, educated people, university graduates and you tried to make them criminals by using your power of the State. I say to you, today, that the law is the greatest creation of mankind. When you abuse the law, the law will deal with you and that is why you are on that side. It is the law that put you on that side. Let me assure you, we will not persecute. We will not destroy people’s character. Yes, we will charge those who have committed offences but not innocent people. You tried to destroy the lives of young professionals and the law put you on that side.

We come to 2nd March elections, an election that they were forced to hold, in the first place, and which was held one year late. The elections that they first claimed that they won but which they subsequently tried to rig. After that failed, they spent the next five months trying to denigrate and render those elections incredible and fraudulent. During this period, the world witnessed five months of an admixture of manifest vulgarity, rank fraud and trickery, a series of nonsensical litigation, vitriolic abuse of the diplomatic regional and international communities, non-stop comical propaganda, a mountain of the most asinine political argumentation and veiled and not so veiled threats of violence and thuggery. It was an unparallel malaise of madness never witnessed in the Western Hemisphere. That is what you subjected this country to. Expectedly, it ended the careers of many, but it should have ended the careers of all involved.

Unfortunately, vestiges remain with us here today and want to lecture us and the Guyanese people about democracy and the rule of law; the audacity of you people; the audacity of it all.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs has been dormant for the past five years. The Hon. Bishop Edghill said it in his Budget. He said that, from all indication, the Attorney General’s Chambers and the Ministry of Legal Affairs were demonstrably dormant for five years. Mr. Basil Williams is not here; clear evidence that it was dormant. He is still dormant; Mr. Basil Williams is still dormant.

Apart from a few Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Bills, which were hastily enacted in the late 2015 and early 2016, there were no major legislation passed. Even those AML/CFT Bills were drafted during the PPP/C Administration, which the APNU/AFC used its one seat majority to vote down during the Tenth Parliament of Guyana.

The Ministry began to administer US\$8 million Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded support programme for the criminal justice system in 2017. This programme was treated like a kept secret as neither the Opposition in Parliament, important stakeholders in society nor the ordinary Guyanese knew what it was until I made components of it public a few weeks ago. A staggering US\$42 million was already spent from this programme for the payment of expenditure, including salaries and wages, rental and costs associated with accommodation.

A Bill came to this House in 2017 to establish a Law Reform Commission under this project. Three years since and not a single commissioner was appointed, but the rental and payment of staff and other costs for this phantom Commission totalled approximately \$98.3 million without a single output. This is squandermania at its best. Aspects of the project are now under review, adjustments are likely to be made and the project is now being fully implemented. The Law Reform Commission Act will be amended to make the Commission broad-based. Currently under the Act, the Minister and the President appoint the entire Commission without any consultation. The amendments will ensure that the appointments are made from nominees from the Private Sector Commission, the labour movement, the religious organisation, the legal profession and organisations representing rights and consumer protection. A Government building has already been secured to house the Commission free of cost, saving taxpayers, immediately, \$850,000 monthly, which was squandered as rent for the past three years. One area in which there was great activity in the Attorney General’s Chambers was the hiring of special prosecutors and retaining lawyers, both locally and across the Caribbean, to represent the Government as well as private individuals in a series of political litigation, all of which were completely without merit and all of which they eventually lost.

Dozens of invoices cannot be found for lawyers retained during this malaise of madness; that is, the five-month period when a series of disgraceful and useless cases were filed in an effort to get the judiciary to conspire with the rigging cabal at Congress Place to pervert democracy. A special audit is currently being undertaken by the Office of the Auditor General in relation to these expenditures. From the invoices that were found, the Attorney General’s office paid the staggering sum of \$146,99,180 to private lawyers from 2017 to 2020. This carnage of taxpayers’ dollars will be halted under this Administration.

Another agency that has a parasitic effect on the treasury is the State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA). It has not recovered a single piece of State asset since its formation four years ago. It is illegally constituted with the Director and Deputy Director never being appointed by this honourable House, as is mandated by the SARA Act. Yet, these two officers were allowed to draw salaries at a rate of \$1.7 million each per month, with gratuity and benefits, for the past four years. These two illegal appointees alone carted off from the treasury over \$100 million in emoluments and other benefits over the period. All that this unit has done, since its existence, was to find a few cases in respect of plots of lands sold by the PPP/C Administration at market value. It also filed proceedings against a leading commercial bank for a plot of land purchased from the State over a decade ago, upon which the bank has constructed a multi-million US dollars headquarters. In one ruling, the High Court made it clear that all the proceedings filed by SARA are defective and will fail. In short, this unit has accomplished nothing, but has plundered, from the treasury, in salaries, rental and operational costs, approximately \$1 billion over this period. Our Government will remove this humongous burden from the backs of taxpayers by shutting down this unit, shortly. Some of the staff will be absorbed by the various agencies of State.

With renewed visionary leadership, this Ministry has already reoriented itself on a new course and has a packed legislative agenda, which will begin to unfold just after the Budget debate is concluded. Many initiatives will be implemented in collaboration with the Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority which will modernise and bring greater efficiency to the functioning of this agency. Important measures will be implemented in collaboration with the judiciary that will produce greater speed in the justice system. This will include additional judges appointed under a new Judicial Service Commission, which is soon to be appointed.

Guyana’s AML/CFT structure will remain under constant review. Focus will be directed to the area of enforcement. In this regard, the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) will be transformed from a political witch-hunting unit to the investigative and enforcing arm of the AML/CFT structure. The US\$8 million Inter-American Development Bank support justice programme is being adjusted in collaboration with the bank, and from which many initiatives will flow.

3.31 p.m.

This includes the launch of a new programme at the University of Guyana (UG) to train Bachelor of Law (LLB) graduates, as well as the police, and to place them as prosecutors in the Magistrates’ Courts right across Guyana. This single initiative ought to transform the quality of legal representation that the victims of crime and the State received at the Magistrates Court, where all criminal charges begin. Thus far, nearly 50 LLB graduates have signalled their intentions and their interests to join the programme. The Ministry, in further partnership with the Guyana Police Force and with the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), has already begun to use project funds to improve the prosecutorial capabilities of the police and the Chambers of the Director of Public Prosecutions by donating a huge quantity of office furniture, office equipment, furnishings, computers, printers, legal texts, *et cetera*. This initiative will continue. Guidelines will be formulated in relation to pretrial detention, non-custodial measures, rehabilitation programmes for drug users and restorative justice programmes will be launched. The Ministry will partner with other agencies in the Government to strengthen probation services, legal aid services, community service programmes and trainings, sentencing guidelines, and a series of legislative initiatives, all designed to keep young offenders from custodial detention.

In terms of a legislative agenda, a Bail Bill, a Hire-Purchase Bill, an Arbitration Act, Amendments to the Companies Act, and a series of legislation for the petroleum industries and various other sectors are already a work in progress.

Additionally, there is a provision in the *Budget 2020* of \$25 million for capital works, which will commence on the Ministry’s main building. This project is to complete a two-storey expansion of the Ministry’s main building to provide the badly needed physical space in order to accommodate existing and new staff as the Ministry continues to grow. These are only activities for the next four months. The 2021 budget will unfold the other plans.

Before I conclude, there are a few issues on which I would like to speak. Firstly, constitutional reform. This is a platform promise of the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic in its manifesto and referred to in the 2020 Budget. There are only four months left, but the work will begin. We will begin right here in the House, where the discussions and the modalities will be worked out through the Standing Committee on Constitutional Reform. Let me say what our concept is: our approach to constitutional reform will not be Government driven. It will be Government in partnership with the

Parliamentary Opposition and in partnership with civil society in a multi-state forum drive. It will be driven by the people of this country, who will be consulted, nationally, and then their comments and contributions will be taken onboard to be examined and analysed for forward progress. That is how we are going to do constitutional reform.

There is another area that is important, another campaign promise, which is the overhaul of the electoral system as far as possible. The Ministry of Legal Affairs will spearhead this reform, including legislative reform, to a re-electoral process to make it stronger, more transparent, more accountable, and to ensure that it is manned by persons of high integrity and of personal ethics, so as to prevent the electoral machinery from being hijacked by political fraudsters who cannot win government through the will of the people. What happened in our country, in relation to the 2020 elections, any of us who are loyal to this country and who love this country will never want to see a reoccurrence of that. Let us pledge here, in the National Assembly, that we will strengthen our electoral process so that the will of the people will eventually prevail in the end. There is silence on the other side.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, since you are begging for some noise, let us also beg for some time. Could someone move that you be given an extension to conclude?

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to ask that my Hon. Colleague be given five minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Nandlall: His Excellency has already pledged to the people of this country that a commission of inquiry (COI) of high quality will be established to investigate the horrendous tragedy that occurred at Region 5 over the past three weeks. Once instructed, the Ministry of Legal Affairs will spearhead that initiative. It is being assured, here, that international jurists will be recruited and that the highest quality of investigators are going to come to work along with the commission so that we can get to the bottom of what happened to those unfortunate souls in West Coast Berbice.

As I conclude, I want to refer to some statements made by the Hon. Members on the other side. Several of them said how great Hon. Member Mr. Jordan’s, stewardship of the economy was and how great he managed the economy over the past four or five years. Every time I hear the gentleman’s name, I look around, but I do not see him. Where is Mr. Jordan? He performed so well. He performed so well, and

you replaced him with Sherod Duncan. Oh my! They have also said that the 2020 Budget is theirs.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not know Sherod Duncan. I know the Hon. Member, Sherod Duncan.

Mr. Nandlall: The Hon. Member, Sir. The Hon. Members said that we copied from their budget and, at the same time, they are saying that the Budget provides nothing new and that it is a private sector budget. It is the same narrative that we heard during the elections. They won the elections, then the elections were fraudulent. They won the elections in the morning and in the afternoon the elections were fraudulent. It is a Budget with zero things in it, but it is their budget. That is the sort of incompetent narrative. Even in the House, they cannot construct a competent narrative that makes sense. They say that the Budget does not provide for poor people and that the Budget does not provide for the people of this country. With the removal of taxes alone, from the time the Appropriation Bill is passed and from the time those legislative measures are assented to, what will be unleashed in the pockets of the people of this country is disposable income. From those measures alone it is over \$50 billion. How can you come here and say that the 2020 Budget has nothing for anyone? There is removal of value added tax from water, removal of VAT from electricity, removal of VAT from agricultural equipment, removal of VAT from capital equipment, removal of VAT from cellular phones and the removal of VAT from all educational equipment. I can go on. The reversal of land taxes and rents alone from the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary – Agricultural Development Authority are billions and billions of dollars that will be available to the rice farmers.

How can you want to be taken seriously if those are the criticisms that you are going to mount against the budget? I have a responsibility to make you sound good and to make you look good, because you are Members of this House. I hold collective responsibilities for you. I do not want you to sound so false and so farcical. So, please, as I commend the 2020 Budget to you and as I commend the 2020 Budget to the House, I hope that they absorb some of my advice.

I thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Forde: Mr. Speaker, I first rise to offer congratulations to you on your election to the Office of Speaker of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Forde: I further acknowledge and congratulate the Hon. Member, Mr. Lenox Shuman, on his assumption to the Office of Deputy Speaker.

I also rise to strongly denounce and oppose the 2020 Estimates of Expenditure, which were brought to this House. In so doing, I am but compelled to thank President David Arthur Granger for his years of service to this nation. The Presidency, under the leadership of Brigadier (Ret’d) David Arthur Granger, was restored as an institution of integrity and respect and, by his leadership, he restored Guyana. However, in less than 50 days, we have witnessed the collapse – the utter collapse – of the institution and of Guyana under another PPP/C Administration. As the people of this country reflect on the 2020 Estimates and its expenditure, they yearn for the safe, sound, and clear articulation of the execution of fiscal and monetary policies, which have become the hallmark of successive budgets brought to this House by the APNU/AFC Government.

Former Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, is deserving of acknowledgement for his crafting of solid, empowering, and fair budgetary measures, which have put this nation on a path of years of notable growth and have set the platform and the launch pad for even greater growth in this country.

It would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge and thank the hundreds of thousands of Guyanese who voted for the APNU/AFC. We thank you and we assure you and all of Guyana, that we will represent you against the calamity, which is this fraudulent, visionless and installed PPP/C outfit of a Government.

It would also be remiss of me, as this is my maiden parliamentary presentation, to not thank my family for their support and understanding. I recognise and acknowledge my recently departed father, Neville Forde, for his nurturing and his guidance, and my Heavenly Father for his wisdom and blessing.

The 2020 Budget speech delivered by the Hon. Bishop Edghill, the Minister of Public Works, under the theme: *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment, Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law, Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation, and Enhancing Welfare* was extremely disoriented, deceptive and lacking in coherence. The presentation of *Budget 2020* was done, despite whatever they say, without the consultation, involvement and the participation of the people of this country. The 2020 Budget is undoubtedly deceptive. It starts

off on the premise that it seeks to conceal that this PPP/C outfit inherited a well-run, well-managed and functioning economy. The PPP/C were, nevertheless, compelled to confess it on the pages of this Budget.

At paragraph 3.1, the PPP acknowledged:

“...real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 5.4%, with non-oil growth was pegged at 4.3%.”

It had to acknowledge it. The PPP/C acknowledged, at paragraph 3.9, that the mining and quarrying industries expanded by over 10.6%; the emerging petroleum, gas and support services grew by 124%; goldmining, quarrying and bauxite all grew; the manufacturing industry grew by 14.7% in 2019; rice and other manufacturing increased by 26.4% and 14%, respectively; construction grew by 3.1%; real estate mortgages grew by 6.9%; loans for industrial and commercial properties increased by 19.2%; and growth in borrowing for private dwellings by 5.9%. The impression that the PPP/C wants to give the nation that the APNU/AFC did nothing for five years is dishonest.

3.46 p.m.

I am not surprised because dishonesty is associated with fraudulence and the PPP/C is a fraudulent Government.

“The service industries grew by 4.2%... expansions recorded across all major industries...”

These are the words of the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill.

“...wholesale and retail trade, by 5%, administrative and support services by 5.8% and transport and storage by 6.9%.”

What I have just referred to is the result of sound policies and careful management of the nation’s affairs by the APNU/AFC Government. The growth, in virtually every area of the economy, is inconsistent with the claims made by the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, of gross mismanagement, maladministration and mishandling of the entire State apparatus. How can there be gross mismanagement when the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, acknowledges at paragraphs 3.19 and 3.25 of the Budget speech that:

“The capital account recorded a substantially larger surplus, of US\$1.8 billion in 2019, 36% higher than in 2018.

Foreign direct investments increased by US\$463.6 million... when compared with 2018, reaching US\$1.7 billion.

Total liquid assets of the commercial banks increased by 25.2%, to \$150.6 billion...exceeded the minimum requirement by 54.5%.”

The fraudulent 33 Hon. Members here are trying to besmirch the great record of the APNU/AFC Government in the development and execution of sound fiscal policies that benefitted the entire country. We, the majority of the Guyanese people, and the true majority are with us, would have none of it. This Budget fails to advance the interest of the ordinary people of this country. It is a private sector budget. Despite the utterances and pretensions of being people centred and pro-poor, Mr. Ram, in his budget assessment for this year, stated:

“...there does not seem to be much in the way of progressive economics. The poor needs more than hand-outs. They need actions that raise their hopes and aspirations, they need to believe in their soul that they are part of a grand plan...”

As the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, stated, his Administration is decidedly pro-private sector. The Hon. Member, Mr. Deodat Indar, stated, that, yes, this Budget is pro-private sector.

This Government states that this is an emergency Budget to cater for the threats that COVID-19 poses to the country. There is not a single emergency measure to ensure that the people of this country are capable of accessing education and health services.

The Minister of Education has spoken of the delivery of education virtually. There is nothing in the Ministry of Education’s plan to ensure that the delivery of education can meet the needs of the majority of the people who are hurting at this time. The Budget has failed to address the needs of the ordinary people. This is what the ordinary people are saying. They are saying that this 2020 Budget has failed. This is the lamentation and the cry of people across the country.

I had the benefit, but misfortune, of having sent to me, as a Member of Parliament, the views and cries of a market vendor at Stabroek Market in the face of this Budget, of this heartless document brought to this House. She said that she did not know how online school would be done since everyone did not have access to the internet or tablets. She

asked about the folks living in the squatting areas. She said that she could not even buy tablets for her children because to buy a tablet one needed \$15,000. She said that she did not even sell anything for the day and still had to pay rent, bills and buy food. The vendor said that her daughter is teacher who has 15 children in her class, and she was only able to teach five of them online because the others did not have access to the internet. She said that it was not about black or Indian, but it is a poor people thing.

That is the cry of the people of this country in the face of this Budget. Out of love and commitment for their charges, many teachers are using their own resources, phones and data to keep in contact with their students and to provide instructions.

The APNU/AFC is pro-people. We are not anti-private sector; we are pro-people. When we look at the range of measures that have been announced by this Government, we find that they are overwhelmingly skewed in favour of the private sector and overwhelmingly beneficial to the private sector. The measures fall short of providing relief to the people of this country.

This is not the time for a private sector budget. How does bringing back used cars and old tyres assist in solving the problems of COVID-19? It is a private sector budget because the Government intends to remove corporate tax on private education and private healthcare. This effectively means that these businesses are free of the obligation of tax. This Budget places as its focus not the pandemic that we face. Whilst COVID-19 cases are spiralling out of control and deaths are increasing rapidly, the Budget creates the largest budget deficit of over \$75 billion, while giving tax concessions for all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) for mining, forestry and agriculture.

The Budget is so private sector skewed that it purports to even remove export taxes when, in fact, they do not even exist. The Budget is skewed in favour of the private sector in the face of death, in the face of pain and suffering of the ordinary Guyanese people in the hinterland, in the North West District, on the Corentyne Coast and in Georgetown. It removes tax on fertilisers, chemicals, pesticides and other inputs in the poultry sector.

Rather than reducing the VAT on data, rather than providing the laptops for use by the children and rather than providing real support to the working people of this country, the working poor, the sick and the aged and the pensioners, the Government implements a 50% reduction in licencing fees

when those fees were not increased for over 20 years, until they were increased in 2015. This is effectively taking those licence fees back to the 1992 levels. This is the record of this Government. This is its response to the COVID-19 crisis and its response to this emergency. I suggest and declare today, that it is abominable.

The APNU/AFC is not hostile to the private sector. Our budgets have been a testimony to the support of the private sector. The *Holy Bible* states that there is a time for everything under the sun. This is not the time for a private sector budget. It is only a time for a meaningful and measured response to the crisis that the people are facing in this country. The response to the COVID-19 crisis requires leadership, leadership of the type and of the quality that cannot be found within the belly of the PPP/C but leadership, which can only be found in the APNU/AFC.

We would support any budgetary deficit, which arises because of the implementation and execution of policies geared for the benefit of the ordinary people of this country, in this time of crisis. Certainly, these are not the circumstances before us. We see a deficit that has arisen because of contrivances, backward policies, *flights of fancy* and pure unadulterated silliness. I say, the PPP/C has completely lost its way. The Budget has failed the poor people throughout the length and breadth of this country. This Budget has failed to answer the question of the year, this being: how will the poor share in this private sector driven economy and growth? The IDB states:

“...incomes of the poor do not grow one-for-one with increases in average income, but considerably less. In fact, the gains are smaller at lower positions in the income distribution.”

The PPP/C has failed to grapple with the socioeconomic inequalities that exist, and which will worsen with the substantial increases in growth projected for this year. The PPP/C has chosen to cuddle the private sector, rather than to ensure that the poor people of this country gain a benefit from the expanding economy. They have chosen to abandon the poor people of Guyana. The APNU/AFC will stand by the vulnerable, poor and underprivileged people of this country.

It is humorous to see the PPP/C Members of this House say that the APNU/AFC Government was all about tax, ‘vampire economics’ they said. The Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, as the President of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), commended the APNU/AFC Government

in 2018, for reducing corporate tax by 25%. What we have now is ‘vulture economics’ or ‘vulturism’.

The PPP/C has continued its onslaught on the poor of this country by budgeting meagre and insufficient resources to the working people. It provides crumbs for the working people. There is no increase in salaries for the soldiers; no increases in salaries for the police; no increase in salaries for the public servants; no increase in salaries for the nurses; and no increase in salaries for the teachers.

It provides no support for single parents and low-skilled labour. It fails the sugar workers, the fishermen, the small farmers and the small business owners, by not being sensitive to their challenges to access and participate in this new and emerging economy created by the APNU/AFC. Despite being forced to acknowledge that the banking sector is awash with liquidity, there is not a single line or statement about the provision of a mechanism to support real, fair and equitable access to finance by all the people of this country. This Budget must be called out for what it is: an oppressive and insensitive Budget.

The provision of \$25,000 as a COVID-19 assistance does not cut it. Without any explanatory statements in the Budget and having regard to the track record of the PPP/C to marginally improving the lives of the people, the people of this country are compelled to conclude that this is a one-off payment. The families of this country deserve a real and sound safety net. They deserve more than \$25,000 as a one-off payment. I call on this insensitive outfit of a fraudulent Government to correct this and to replace it with, at least, \$25,000 a month.

In similar fashion, the pensioners of this country are left without any increase for this year. They are compelled to wait until January, 2021. Nothing for Christmas. So much for caring and loving the vulnerable people of Guyana. They will remember you. Though referring to, and recognising that all of our people are in a COVID-19 environment, which is in the title of the Budget, the Budget does little to incentivise growth. It does not support job creation and does not meaningfully support the welfare of the Guyanese people.

The Budget offers nothing to the workers of this country affected by the pandemic. There is no job support programme to assist companies throughout Guyana to retain employees by covering their salaries. The Budget is blind to the plight and condition of the employees sent home by employers who are unable to carry the burden of salary in these challenging times. There is nothing to assist small and medium sized

entities with the burdensome overheads, including rent, which is wreaking havoc on these establishments.

The installation of the fraudulent Government has set this country back by many years. *Budget 2020* states that “it is our plan for prosperity”, and I do believe so. It is the PPP/C’s plan for prosperity for themselves.

The viable plan for development has been laid out in the *Green State Development Strategy (GSDS): Vision 2040* and in the *Decade of Development (2020-2030)* by the APNU/AFC. This plan delivers equitable national development, but for the PPP/C’s installation into Government, small and medium sized enterprises would have been receiving financial aid and technical support, and not being left to wither away. Today, the Guyanese people would have been receiving critical support and welfare, whilst being the beneficiaries of a buoyant, growing and resilient economy.

The complete overlook in this Budget speech is the need for comprehensive citizenship, immigration and border policies. You have heard the Minister of Labour wailing about labour officers learning foreign languages.

4.01 p.m.

Nothing is wrong with learning foreign languages, but it is simply another manifestation of the need for a sound immigration and border policy. There was not a peep from the Minister of Labour on the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and a recovery plan for yet another institution plundered by the PPP/C. The failure to offer any plan is disturbing to the people of Guyana as it illustrates that these trespassers in Government are not serious about protecting the resources of the Guyanese people.

With respect to the judicial sector reform, the Budget speech at pages 29-31 contains seven paragraphs of very vacuous statements on the judicial sector reform and strengthening. These paragraphs are also deceptive. Usually, it ought to be uncomfortable to associate deception with a Bishop but, as Ms. Michelle Obama said, “It is what it is.” It inaccurately states that the Attorney General’s Chambers and the Ministry of Legal Affairs were demonstrably dormant for five years, and that, apart from a few anti-money laundering Bills, there were no major legislation passed. This is nothing further from the truth. The record of this very House shows that the period 2015-2020 has been one of the most active periods of legislative activity in this House and a period in which significant and consequential Bills were passed. A total of

over 96 Acts and 208 pieces of subsidiary legislation were produced.

The notable improvements to the AML/CFT legal and regulatory framework, by way of the enactment of amendment Acts and regulations under the APNU/AFC, ought to have been mentioned. This was indeed what was required to remove Guyana from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) blacklists, when my learned and Hon. Friend, Mr. Nandlall, had abandoned the country at that time. These progressive steps, coupled with the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism Action Plan, were actually commended by the FATF.

During the Eleventh Parliament, the legislative framework to address corruption was also strengthened by the enactment of the State Asset Recovery Act 2017; the Witness Protection Act 2018; and the Protected Disclosures Act 2018. Several pieces of legislation, aimed at promoting a strong and resilient financial system, modernising the financial sector and providing protection and greater access to services within the sector were enacted, including the Insurance Act, the National Payments System Act, the Deposit Insurance Act, the Bank of Guyana (Amendment) Act and the Financial Institutions (Amendment) Act. This deception extends to the statements with respect to the Judicial Sector Reform Project, funded by the IDB. The Hon. Member, the Attorney General, tells this nation that the Criminal Justice Sector Reform Programme was shrouded in secrecy but, far from it being so, it was in fact widely reported constantly in the media.

The Criminal Justice Sector Reform Programme’s guidelines, rules and procedures led to the implementation of a Restorative Justice Programme. Further, a Restorative Justice Bill of 2019 has been laid in this House.

With respect to the document before us, there is not a single piece of legislation identified in the Budget speech which would advance or improve the justice sector. This is unacceptable. The babble by the Attorney General failed to remedy this situation. It is manifest that there will be a grave policy incoherence. The proposal to have University of Guyana law students prosecute cases in the Magistrate’s Court is yet another knee-jerk reaction to a problem. The real solution is to provide scholarships to those very law students to complete their professional qualifications, the Legal Education Certificate (LEC). The solution lies and requires the development of human capital, to which the Attorney General is obviously averse to.

It is frightening because the skill to practice does not come after the Bachelor of Law (LLB), but after law school. We may feel that my learned Friend did not go to law school, my learned Friend Mr. Ramson. It is indeed unfair to thrust untrained graduates into prosecutorial work, much as it is unfair to thrust policemen into prosecutorial work. What is needed is a criminal prosecutions service, similar to what exists in Antigua and Barbuda, where the legislation exists. I call on my learned Friend and Hon. Member to look at Antigua and Barbuda, to adopt that system that caters for trained persons to be prosecutors. This proposal by the Attorney General is yet another ill-thought idea.

We, on this side of the House, but for the installation of the fraudulent Government, would have brought to this Assembly, and expeditiously enacted, several pieces of legislation: a family violence act, a data protection act, a Freedom of Information Act, a modern copyright legislation, an amendment to the Criminal Law Act, a revised High Court Act, a Legal Aid Act, a statutory tribunal act, an industrial court act, a police reform act and a Criminal Law (Procedure) Act.

We are told that this Budget is a budget which will result in the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law. The Budget is silent on any programme to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. We have heard much from the Attorney General and from Members on the Government side over the last few days, but we have also heard very little. Regrettably, this is nothing more than a resounding gong or clanging cymbal. Truly, a sounding brass. I say so because the Budget speech and the Attorney General have failed to answer the constitutional problems that face this country. The Budget and the Attorney General have failed to appreciate that there is a need for the establishment of a governance structure that recognises the reality of our ethnic composition, our ethnic insecurities, the devolution of power to the regions and a review and strengthening of the checks and balances in the constitutional framework. Paragraphs 4.6 to 4.10 of the Budget, which purport to address this issue, are completely vacuous, setting no timelines and definitive and measurable outcomes. The APNU/AFC – and I place it on record again – was, always will, and is still committed to an enhanced constitutional and governance system. It is clear from the Attorney General that there is nothing new to be expected from this Government.

The *Budget 2020* fails to recognise that there can be no real development, that the great potential of our country cannot be released, that the soul of this nation cannot soar unless the

constitutional fundamentals are responsive to the ethnic insecurities, to the dispossessed, victimised and marginalised people of our country. It ought to be beyond doubt that the current winner-take-all system is unsustainable. There is a need for urgent constitutional reform and social cohesion.

The Attorney General has indicated the Government’s intention to do away with the SARA, established under the State Assets Recovery Act 2017. This nation is fully aware of the principal reason why this Administration wants to get rid of the State Assets Recovery Agency. It is because it is an independent institution and because the State Assets Recovery Agency dared to institute proceedings against members of the PPP/C who were considered to have improperly acquired State assets.

The PPP/C has always been afraid of strong independent institutions. It is their ideological posture to suppress strong institutions. It is always their preoccupation to sap the institutions of their independence and subject them to the PPP/C’s political direction and control.

What decent government would want to get rid of an institution such as a State Assets Recovery Agency? To replace it with what – an institutional watchdog, in the nature of a pit-bull, with a watch poodle? The attack on the State Assets Recovery Agency is reprehensible. I have observed that the Attorney General has not said this for the first time in this House, he has said it repeatedly. I find it strange that, today, in this country, the civil society is quiet at a time of an attack on a State institution.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, in this House, at the moment, you will require an extension to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Forde: I was saying that the State Assets Recovery Agency is an important institution and the attack on it by this Government is reprehensible. I say also that this is the first salvo on the independence of public institutions. Dark, dark days are ahead.

The record shows that whenever the PPP/C is in power, there is societal collapse, high crime, discrimination, marginalisation and oppression. This Budget, the first of this Government, sets the blueprint for the return of societal collapse, high crime, discrimination, marginalisation and

oppression. Our National Pledge calls on us to dedicate ourselves towards the happiness and prosperity of Guyana.

This Budget fails to promote the happiness and prosperity of the Guyanese people. We were regaled by the Hon. Attorney General about votes and elections. My response to him is his own now classic babble, fraud is fraud! Fraud is fraud!

This is the first time in the Commonwealth that a government is so happy and so proud of coming to power before an elections petition. It shows that it is illegitimate! Illegitimate! Illegitimate! Mr. Speaker, you are happy... you have asked to sit in a House where a recount showed missing poll books, dead voters, migrant voters, more voters than on the voting list and thousands of unverified votes. So do not come to this honourable House to lecture anybody about fraud; you are guilty of it. Fraud is fraud! Fraud is fraud! Fraud is fraud!

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, order! Hon. Member Mr. Forde, be careful with respect to crossing that line on *sub judice*.

Mr. Forde: Despite the absence of wisdom and the flawed nature of *Budget 2020*, the other side, the fraudulent 33, unfortunately, will use their tainted authority to give effect to it, to the detriment of the Guyanese people. As the American Poet, Anne Bradstreet stated:

“Authority without wisdom is like a heavy axe without an edge, fitter to bruise than polish.”

The debate is near the end. The people of this country have listened to the debate and they are amazed at how lost this Government is, how inept, how incompetent, how happily at sea, how arrogant, how out of tune, how deaf and blind it is to the needs of the people of this country. The people of this country are ready to toss you out shortly. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: We now take, virtually, the contributions by the Hon. Member and Vice-President of Guyana, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo.

Members of the APNU/AFC withdrew from the Dome.

Vice-President [Mr. Jagdeo] Mr. Speaker, may I join the others in congratulating you on assuming the high office of Speaker of the National Assembly.

I wish to join my Colleagues in asking that the National Assembly supports the Budget that has been presented. I shall

briefly outline some of the reasons we make this request. I could not help but listen to the last presentation made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde. We have a context in which we are presenting this Budget.

4.16 p.m.

Mr. Forde needs to understand that the APNU/AFC has, since November, 2018, spent \$419.2 billion without parliamentary oversight. A significant part of these resources have been squandered and whittled away through corrupt practices. Four hundred and nineteen billion dollars was spent without parliamentary oversight; an unprecedented situation in any part of the Commonwealth where the parliament has not met for such a long period. Why did it not meet? It was because of the criminal-like behaviour on the part of the APNU/AFC Government and Administration, when they refused to comply with the Constitution of Guyana and tried to use the courts to keep them in Office illegally. Luckily, the Caribbean Court of Justice wiped the floor with APNU/AFC. Because of the Caribbean Court of Justice, the international pressure and the fight of the people of this country, we, first of all, got elections held, and then, finally, had democracy prevail. That is the first context in which we are presenting this first Budget of a new People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration.

The second thing is that, for the first time in our history, we have individuals who have been sanctioned in Guyana, and may face further sanctions internationally, for trying to steal an election. I dare say that some of those sanctioned individuals may be current Members of the National Assembly. This is unusual. Very few countries in the world have had a situation where individuals have faced international sanctions for trying to steal an election. Here in Guyana, in our midst, we have some of those.

Thirdly, we have heard a lot of talk about fraudulence from the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde. This Government has had the endorsement of the entire world – the Organization of American States (OAS), which is made up of the countries of the Caribbean and Latin America, CARICOM, the ABC countries and the European Union (EU). I dare say, the world has recognised the PPP/C Government as the legitimate Government in Guyana. Not one country, in any part of this world, recognises the APNU/AFC’s claims to having won the elections. In fact, we are very familiar with the saga of how they attempted to steal the elections and then use the courts to endorse that stealing. Right now, they have warmly embraced individuals who are before the courts and who will go before

the courts for trying to steal the elections. These are individuals who worked in the Elections Commission.

I could not help listening and realising that the Hon. Mr. Forde has a great affinity for the use of the word ‘fraudulence’. I believe he is very familiar with that word in the context of what took place at the Gaming Authority. Much more will be heard about this. This Administration has just started its term a few days ago when the Parliament convened. Over the course of the next year or so, there shall be a number of investigations and the country will be shocked by the revelation of fraudulence and high fraudulence, involving high officials of the former Regime. At the Gaming Authority, from our preliminary findings, we found a lot of fraudulent transactions – request for bribes to issue licences, *et cetera*. More shall be heard about that soon.

Even now we are coming to terms with the magnitude of the fraud in fuel smuggling, where billions of dollars in revenue were stolen because of widescale fraud in the fuel sector, which involved a number of officials, including former high officials of the former Regime. Just a few days ago, the Guyana Defence Force’s internal audit pointed out that over \$300 million in fraud has happened through the Guyana Oil Company (GUYOIL) transactions. Fraud and fuel smuggling at high seas, *et cetera*, will be exposed soon.

What is well known now as a key feature is bid tampering. In fact, it is one of the defining features that we had spoken about while in Opposition, as a characteristic of the APNU/AFC Government. There was bid tampering, illegal approval of contracts, splitting of bids, hiring friends and families and party supporters and giving them large sums of moneys. Just last year we saw an enormous number of these happening. An investigation is also pending in this regard. The country shall hear more about this.

If you go to the criminality that took place at the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL), you will see the large-scale criminal transfer of resources, and many high officials of the past Administration are neck-deep in those transactions. There was the transfer of billions of dollars’ worth of land, where not a cent has been paid but the properties have been vested in the names of individuals. This is criminality of the highest extent. You will hear more about this. Mr. Forde, therefore, knows a lot about the use of the word fraudulence, but I think it is misdirected. He should use it more in relation to the Regime that just demitted Office.

Mr. Forde spoke about societal collapse when the PPP/C had been in Office. I wish to point out to the Hon. Member and

other Members of the National Assembly that what has characterised APNU/AFC’s rule has always been the theft of elections. We had three decades of undemocratic rule. When this country loosened the grip – the stranglehold that they had on the country – through a return to free and fair elections, our country saw the development of independent institutions, including the Judiciary, which was subjected to executive control in the past. The other branches of the Government started flourishing. We had a free press and the economy developed – it grew.

I do not want to belabour the point, but if Mr. Forde looks at the economic history of the country and at all the parameters in which one measures economic development – from stock of debt, debt servicing, the inflation rate, interest rates, the balance of payment figures and fiscal deficit – he will see that in the 23 years’ tenure of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, it took a bankrupt country from 1992, which the Caribbean Council of Churches (CCC) and the entire world recognised as poor as or even poorer than Haiti and, by the time the PPP/C demitted Office, they left a middle-income country. They, by their lack of economic policies, were taking us down. Had it not been for the oil and gas sector, they would have been taking us back into the ranks of poor countries, if they were allowed to stay in Office. Thank God they were removed from Office.

I am not going respond to some of the points made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, because I think he was reading the wrong section of the Budget when he talked about all the sectors of our economy not doing well. He should look at the picture of the non-oil economy for this year. Every sector that he mentioned that has demonstrated positive growth, all of them were in deficit. Every one of them will record a deficit. These are the sectors that create employment for the majority of Guyanese, not the public sector but the private sector. The majority of our people are employed in the private sector. Therefore, you have to support private sector growth if you want our people to be employed and to enjoy a great standard of living.

The first problem with APNU/AFC is that they had no economic policy, therefore, they were always floundering in the wind. They had a disjointed approach to economic development. I believe that they felt that every cent in sight, that was saved by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic and in the pockets of the taxpayers, they had to spend and spend on themselves. This was the tragedy that we had. Therefore, what took place in the last Administration is a policy based on taxation and consumption. There was absolutely no

economic policy. The Budget is a tool of economic policies and if there is no economic policy then one cannot understand the Budget.

Let me make it clear that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic does not believe that collecting more taxes is a sign of progress. It is not. We believe that creating jobs and welfare is the right path for the country and for economic growth. I shall spend a few minutes outlining the economic policy of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government.

Secondly, the APNU/AFC had no welfare policy. You could not have had a welfare policy and dismantle the Ministry of Labour; you could not have had a welfare policy and send home 7,000 sugar workers and put them on the bread line; you could not have had a welfare policy and take away \$1.6 billion from our children through the cash grant; you could not have had a welfare policy and take away \$600 million in benefits from the pensioners through free water; you could not have had a welfare policy and then tax medicine, which ordinary people have to buy, or tax hinterland travel, or freight into the hinterland. You could not have had a welfare policy and increase fees by 500%.

4.31 p.m.

The same vendor who spoke with Mr. Roysdale Forde, and the vendors in the past, would have had to pay, under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), in 2014, a licensing fee of \$12,500 to do vending from a small vehicle. They increased that fee from \$12,500 to \$65,000, but the vendor would now have to pay half of that. That is how you helped poor people. I could go on to point out how their policies were anti-poor and anti-growth.

One may ask, where these huge taxes went that they were collecting. Public sector employment for cronies, friends, families, like the State Assets Recovery Agency group, made up of the top SARA members, were not people who had skills in forensic audit. All of them were politicians; look at the top individuals who were there. That is why they spent billions of dollars without recovering any state assets and, of course, they were illegal. These institutions were created to spend billions of dollars more.

The public service employment grew from 2014 to 2019, by nearly 10,000 more individuals who were added to the payroll of the Ministry of Finance; from about 34,000 to over 43,000. That is where the money was spent; the government grew. They increased employment for cronies, families and friends; paid them higher salaries; rented more buildings to

put them in, and \$1 billion more spent on that; more vehicles were purchased; more food to feed them, and \$1.6 million more spent on food per year.

That is their welfare; welfare for themselves, whilst the ordinary man – the vendor, the taxi driver, the sugar worker, the bauxite worker – had to contend with paying higher taxes on water, electricity, medicine, food stuff and paying higher licensing fees. The farmers had to pay for their fertilisers, pesticides, machinery and their entire productive sector. Whether one was in mining or forestry one had to pay taxes on one’s bulldozers, although one was importing these things to create wealth for the country, jobs and income for the people. One had to pay more taxes whilst this cabal just drove around in an arrogant way, trying to steal the resources of the country, by transferring to themselves large amounts of resources through the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GL&SC) and everything else. They just spent and had a great time in government. That era is over, and I can understand the sadness on their part, because the gravy-train has come to an end; the gravy-train that they are accustomed to has come to an end.

We intend to ensure that the Government is competent, that it is properly staffed, that the excesses are taken out, and that the money goes back to the people. If you lower taxes, the money stays with the people, in their pockets, so that they can spend more – the people who are working out there, the people who are creating wealth for this country, that they want to spend. The productive sectors of the economy, the ones that generate value or services and export things through hard labour, are the ones that will also get to keep some of the benefits of their hard labour, rather than these individuals – this parasitic group that sat in Government for the last few years, just to imbibe on the people through higher taxes and the people’s earnings. That is what took place in the last regime. They criminally tried to disenfranchise them through these measures.

Bravado cannot substitute for analysis. What we have is a ton of bravado on the other side, the reinventing of the narrative, as the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, pointed out. They reinvented the narrative so many times in the five-month period. It is that reinvented narrative and the adherence to it that promoted some of the current Members into the National Assembly, to the detriment of the others; their adherence to propagate the reinvented false narrative. They are doing it again; trying to rewrite history. The five-year tenure of the last Government has been disastrous.

In about one month, we have shown more coherence, as a country, in every single area. We promised these measures that we have implemented in this Budget, in our manifesto; we keep our promises. We promised them, not simply because we wanted to, but, because we knew they are vital for an economic policy to take hold. One has to have an economic policy in mind that cannot tax machinery and equipment, cannot tax imports and exports, and ensure that the cost of production is not driven up, by putting VAT on water and electricity. That is going to kill industries.

They believed that people would be there to pay taxes forever. But, if the industries are dead, one cannot raise taxes to pay public servants, or to implement one’s social policies, or take care of health and education.

That is why we offered a package of concessions, and we have no apology for trying to help the productive sectors of this country, whether they call it private sector or not. These are Guyanese individuals who work. The people who benefit from this are the people who work in the stores, in the markets and everywhere else. Not the cabal that squatted in Government for a while.

The last Government had no environmental policy, so it was a pathetic presentation from the Hon. Member Khemraj Ramjattan, who has a vague understanding of the concept of the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) and the concept of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). When he spoke, he said that they took off some taxes on vehicles, so one can bring in greener vehicles, used tires and old vehicles and those are the instruments of an environmental policy. It is such a pathetic understanding of an environmental policy, in a modern world that is linked to economic development.

These policies are defined globally; the Paris Agreement. It is clear that countries like ours make our contribution, but we are not the major polluters of the world. If you look at Guyana’s case, we are net carbon sink and we must leverage our assets to bring money into this country to support economic development. The good thing is that we have great environmental assets through our forests, but we have great needs on the adaptation side because of sea defences, and our vulnerabilities, from having a low-lying coastal plane. That is what the LCDS sought to do. It sought to earn resources from our forests, and we earned \$250 million, but they squandered some of those resources. Norway eventually had to put the last tranche on hold, because of a lack of democracy in

Guyana. Even now, we have started re-engaging Norway to move forward again.

The Green State Development Strategy was a sham. They farmed it out to the international consultants, but it was not grounded in the Guyanese reality, and could not have solved our problems. It was not a policy that could generate green jobs *et cetera*. They killed the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, which would have been in place now solving all our electricity woes, with the cost of electricity being about half of what it was. They killed all the big green initiatives, in favour of planting some trees *et cetera*. They then criticised our policies on used tires and bringing back vehicles over eight years old.

Those were done because Guyanese across the country complained about not being able to afford the used tires, but those guys in Government were living on state vehicles; they did not have to buy tires. The mere fact that one could import vehicles over eight years old, would allow one to drive down the cost of one of those vehicles by about \$1 million. That is for a young person trying to acquire a vehicle, for the first time. Affordability was an important concept.

Our emissions from transport are miniscule, if you look at the global scheme of things, but they do not understand that. It was a disastrous attempt, from the brief listen I had from Mr. Ramjattan, about our environmental policies.

The last Government had no policy to address oil and gas, no economic policy, no welfare policy and no environmental policy. That is why we had this disastrous situation. It was utterly shameful for the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, to lay the blame on us for flaring *et cetera*. We are an Administration that is one month old. He completely distorted, the gentleman from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), claiming he was an environmental specialist. He has never had a chance to look at that person’s curriculum vitae (CV). The fact remains that, right now, the key issues that should have been dealt with are being addressed in the licensing of *Liza-1* and *Liza-2*, as to how one treats wastewater and waste generally, and how one deals with flaring. These are issues currently being addressed, as part of this permitting process, only because the PPP/C decided to review what they were already doing. Had the PPP not come into office, the licence would have long been issued since last month.

As you know, they were severely criticised for hiring consultants who had worked with ExxonMobil before. That is why, apart from the work done by those consultants, we had

to bring in another set of eyes to overlook these issues. Apart from that, they made a mess of the local content of the entire oil and gas sector. They just sat on their hands and did absolutely nothing, whilst the oil company is running amok in terms of not employing Guyanese or spending money here. That will not happen, the PPP/C will change that. There will be legislation – not just a policy – to force oil companies to comply, to spend more money here and to employ more Guyanese. We have to share in the prosperity of this industry and that will be done.

4.46 p.m.

Secondly, a mess was made because many of them wanted to acquire land in the areas where the pipelines were going to land. There was no decision made from 2016. By now, we could have had a large facility of over 200 megawatts powered by gas that would have seen cheaper electricity, but no decision had been made. The Government has put together a task force that would work swiftly to ensure that happens, apart from us redoing, repealing or amending the Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) to ensure that it is more arms-length and greater criminalising non-disclosure of receipts.

The whole country would recall that when the former Minister of Finance was asked about the US\$18 million signing bonus that was kept out of the Consolidated Fund, illegally for many years, he said that he thought it was a gift. It was not a gift; it was moneys paid to the taxpayers of this country and that should be spent on the taxpayers. This will never happen again because the Government is criminalising non-disclosure.

The last Government was operating without any overarching framework. It had no policy in any one of these areas, and that is why it acted in the way it did. We will have to continue facing this sort of bravado because when one has nothing to speak and has no track records to run on, one has to criticise in an unthinkable way and not in a clear-cut analytic way. It tends to be very emotive and chant about ‘fraud is fraud’. The whole world knows that the Opposition is the only fraudulent group sitting in the National Assembly now, where they would be prone to sloganeering and politicising issues that should never be politicised because they could be harmful to the cohesion of our people.

We saw the unfortunate situation where two young kids – Joel and Isaiah – lost their lives and then, subsequently, another – Hareesh. These were horrific crimes. These youngsters were killed by monsters. Our entire country has to find and punish these unconscionable monsters who did the

acts. Everybody condemned it and, as vultures, the Opposition descended on the genuine grief of the families and tried to politicise the issue. Look at the consequences and the escalation. The Opposition wanted the situation to escalate more for its narrow political interest. If one would listen to the parents of the young people who lost their lives so tragically, the parents stood as a beacon of hope and showed what Guyana is about. Even other leaders from the People’s National Congress PNC who are not in the Parliament, because they were wiped out by the Opposition Leader from being in Parliament, stood and took a principled stand that it was a criminal act, and we must find the people.

As vultures preying on people’s grief, as I said before, the Opposition showed up and tried to escalate the situation in our country to serve its own need; suddenly the Opposition is concerned; people who had no concern about Afro-Guyanese in their tenure in Office; people who would appropriate \$160 million and give it to an agency controlled right here in Georgetown to a selected few; and people who never walked the ground or helped a single person on the ground in the Afro-Guyanese communities, but used resources dedicated for that purpose.

Now, the Opposition is concerned about them. When the Opposition took away money from the schoolchildren, many children in Afro-Guyanese communities lost their \$10,000 cash grant and our pensioners lost their free water and had to pay more for their medicines. The Opposition was not concerned, at that time, about Afro-Guyanese. In fact, one would look at the people... The Opposition spoke about the private sector that has been the biggest beneficiaries of wealth for the last five years and which was given taxpayers’ money. There are a few individuals from the private sector and many of them were not Afro-Guyanese. To *shed crocodile tears* now, just to polarise our country, is disingenuous.

The Opposition even made cries about Indigenous versus Amerindians. The Opposition is hung up on the name, but what the Opposition did was to decimate the Indigenous communities when the Opposition took away \$720 million from the Community Support Officers (CSO) programme. Moneys were spent in the village economies. As soon as the Opposition got into Office, people lost their jobs – nearly 2,000 Amerindians lost their jobs. That was the biggest act of discrimination against Amerindians, anytime in the last decade or maybe 25 years in this hemisphere. If one is to look at the extended family, over 10% of families in the Indigenous communities were affected and the Opposition had no concern.

The vendor who spoke to the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde told him that he cannot afford a tablet now; the Opposition took away the One Laptop per Family (OLPF). That family would have had a laptop. The Opposition took away the solar panels from the Indigenous communities too.

They are *shedding crocodile tears* now because they are out of Office and the people have rightsized them. The Opposition spoke about rightsizing the sugar industry and those were the words of the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. Rightsizing meant that 7,000 families and, maybe, another 4,000 families – indirectly 11,000 families – which worked out to be over 50,000 people, were put on the breadline, but for the Opposition it was rightsizing. The Opposition spent more on eating in Government and renting buildings than it would have taken to support the 11,000 families in subsidies. That is what they did.

The bauxite workers’ share was no better. Do you remember the people in Ituni with the placards stating that they were hungry, because the Opposition practically killed the forestry sector? Now, the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) is bankrupt. I could talk about the list of bankruptcies there too. This is the record. The re-invention, today, is so pathetic and it is apparent to any Guyanese who is listening now. This is an undemocratic group of people and I know why the Opposition is behaving in this way and why they want to stir trouble. It is because many are deeply fearful because of their deep involvement in many of the acts that I have mentioned before. The investigations will follow, and the Opposition will have to face the courts and the justice system. The Opposition would want to claim that it is discrimination. The Opposition is not concerned about real discrimination. What the Opposition is concerned about is saving themselves, because many of them know what they actually did.

Many persons called on us to engage in talks and we made it clear in our manifesto that we want to reach out and look at our governance model. The Government is committed to look at a governance model that includes more people and addresses more concerns, but persons have to understand the dilemma that we are faced with today. There is no honest interlocutor on the other side. The people who are in Parliament today, many of them, were the ones who not only sought to steal the elections, but they have absolutely no remorse about it. One would see the arrogance about that and even the attempt to steal the elections. How could they reasonably be honest interlocutors? This is what persons are saying out there: how does the Government work with people who have no remorse about the role they played in trying to

divide our country, first of all, by trying to steal the whole elections?

The people from the People’s National Congress, because of our long history together, both parties emerging from the same party even before our independence, although we came close many times to speak about the future – at least some of those people grew in the party and they had a vision of where we wanted to go – have been decimated and removed in favour of people who could have stuck with the rigging narrative. The problem today is that we are faced with a huge dilemma that there is no honest interlocutor, who commands the people of the country and the base, on the other side, we have seen that in the recent issue. We do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition or the Chairman of the party is in control of the base. When things get tough, as they often do, then somebody would have the courage to stand and speak the truth to his/her base. This is a huge problem that we have, as we move forward, because that is one of those issues that we would like to deal with.

I am not going to address many issues. The Budget is quite clear. The measures that the Government has put in place would put billions back into the pockets of the people, not keep it in Government through higher taxes to spend on Government officials. The Government will be shrunk back. We will get out of all those expensive buildings that the Opposition hired from its cronies and shrink back the Government to a level that is competent and enough to manage the affairs of the people of this country. We will have an economic policy that will drive growth and development, as we did in the past. We have already outlined that policy. Within one month, we have reprogrammed many of the things that have been stuck in the system. People are going to start seeing swift movement in many of these areas.

In terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had an enormous task. The fraud that took place with \$1.9 billion being spent by the APNU/AFC in that area was mostly spent on the hospital. Today, that is marred in controversy because the process was not transparent. That is another fraudulent transaction, Hon. Member Roysdale Forde. There are so many that I cannot mention here today.

We will try to get benefits for our people. A few moments ago, I emerged from a meeting trying to work to see that we are in the front row for the COVID-19 vaccine. Our capabilities have grown enormously, but the challenges are great. We are going to try, as quickly as possible, to put people back to work. We are going to try to make sure that

testing is done, and we have the medications in the hospitals so that we could offer the best care. We are going to try to assist people directly in their homes through grants, *et cetera*. We have already made significant changes, so that there will be greater working capital for the private sector to resume employment in these areas. These are all issues that we are working on; this is a challenge for the country. It is a major and global challenge, and we are tackling this challenge, here in Guyana, with the capabilities that we have.

5.01 p.m.

I am not seeing any major comments on fiscal, monetary or balance of payment policies. It is very hard to deal with it from a technical level, except the perfunctory mention of the words ‘not an analysis’. One thing that was mentioned by the former Minister of Finance was the fiscal deficit increase. Of course, the fiscal deficit has increased. If one is going to bring billions of dollars of rollover expenditure from 2019 and billions of dollars that was spent illegally in 2020, especially on capital projects, one is going to have a higher fiscal deficit. In the medium-term outlined trajectory, we will see the deficit reduced significantly and also see greater incentives to the private sector.

Another comment of a technical nature I saw by the former Minister of Finance was that that when annualised revenue lost to the treasury will greater next year. I made that point even before he spoke about it and that the tax measures, when annualised next year, would yield a bigger tax relief package for consumers as well as the private sector and that is deliberate. We believe that people who earn money should keep more of it. It must not all go to the Government so that people who sit in government offices can spend the money. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition knows about spending the money very well because of the excesses that the last Government pursued. I am going to expect the same.

I will take a friendly wager with the Hon. Members of the National Assembly that it is the same sort of speech we will hear from the Leader of the Opposition. It would be nothing of substance such as the essential of policy making and no in-depth analysis of the policies, whether they are monetary or balance of payment policies. There is no vision as to an economic policy. It will be the same thing; it is a private sector budget; we did a great job; this is our budget; and this is their budget, and the Government took it away. In fact, what we are doing is just resetting the clock at the start, because a lot of these things that we have done here is what the Opposition took from the people. I expect more than an

hour presentation from the Leader of the Opposition that is vacuous, as most of the presentations have been, and will continue to be political, but nobody will believe anything he will say. The international community knows that he cannot talk about anything else. In fact, just to stand in the National Assembly, which should be an introduction to democracy, having the undemocratic credentials that many of the people who stand there on the other side have, is almost like a contradiction.

It is an extremely short presentation. I just would like to say that my Colleagues, on the Government side, have done an excellent job in highlighting the details of the Budget, be it the measures that are in place for the Indigenous communities; sugar workers; other productive sectors; for all of our people regardless of their race; regions; hinterland roads; education; healthcare; and putting money back into our children’s and pensioners’ pockets. They have highlighted all of these things that are alien to the other side. I just want to join with my Colleagues in urging that the House supports the Budget. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension and let us try to resume at 6.00 p.m. The House is suspended.

Sitting suspended at 5.06 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.01 p.m.

Leader of the Opposition [Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon]: Mr. Speaker, first let me congratulate you and the Deputy Speaker on your elections to lead the business of this honourable House. I continue to trust that your decision will inure to the benefits of all of us in this House and to the people of Guyana whom we serve.

Let me also congratulate all of the Members of Parliament (MPs) who serve in this honourable House, who were elected from the list of electors that were submitted to the Elections Commission and who now have the opportunity to serve the people in the legislative branch of government. I more particularly want to thank the MPs on this side, my own MPs, who, throughout the last five days of debate, have done an excellent job. The people of Guyana will be proud of the Members, as I am, indeed, very proud of the Members.

Before I get into what I really want to say, I must offer some brief remarks on what the last speaker said. It is unfortunate that he did not choose to come into the Dome and prattle as he did. We really wish if the Hon. Member could have been

here, because those statements which he made are statements that certainly require some responses.

I chose this afternoon to take a different path, not the path of confrontation, as the last speaker did, and the path of threatening people about investigations which he will do. That is not going to affect us. It is not going to affect the stridency. **[Mr. McCoy: Jail time.]** My Friend over there is accustomed to that place; he has been there already. It is not a problem.

I believe that, this afternoon, we are looking at some very important matters in the life of this country. I would like to commend the staff of the budget office who have done a fairly good job in presenting this Budget.

I would like to also commiserate with the families of Joel and Isaiah Henry and Haresh Singh. Their gruesome death diminishes all of us. When a Guyanese life is lost anywhere, a Guyanese life is lost everywhere. We cherish and value the life of every Guyanese, more so, my Friend over there who I had to save in the 2015 elections.

The Budget, in some regard, identified priorities of our time. I will name those priorities as public security, social cohesion and the COVID-19 pandemic. All of these require, in my view, a national response in order for our country to progress and prosper. Unfortunately, in *Budget 2020*, while the writers recognise that this is an important priority, they give it low priority over the needs of the ordinary people, but compensating their political friends and giving rewards to those who helped them. It has sought to compensate its political base and those whom it wishes to target while neglecting the people and the areas perceived to be the Coalition support base.

This is a raw Budget. This is one which, by the way the resources are allocated, can only serve to further divide us. How could one explain 47 days in Office with over 100 persons, who are mainly Afro-Guyanese and single parent women, being dismissed? How does the Gentleman who spoke before me explain that? The Gentleman spoke about cohesion, but that is what we need to know. Many persons who were well-skilled in the positions they held had been actually removed, just like that, in *one fell swoop*. We spoke about Dr. Adams, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir and many other persons who are well qualified and who are the best persons for these jobs, but were removed, similarly, because there is a perception that they support the APNU/AFC.

Our intention has also been for the good of this country and that is why all of our budgets have always been about the ‘good life’.

6.13 p.m.

When the Minister of Agriculture stood here, in this honourable House, and said that the Government is going to downsize the headquarters of the GuySuCo, because it had too many people there, in the same breath, he talked about reopening the sugar estates. When the technical officers are sent home who are the ones that are going to do the studies? Who are the ones that are going to fix the estates? What sense does that make? It is backward thinking. At the same time, the Government is giving to the GuySuCo \$600 million to deal with salaries. Are these not the same workers of GuySuCo who we actually gave all of their benefits when they left? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order. I know we have no issues with heckling, but when the tone is vile and vulgar, we have a problem with it. Mr. Speaker, could you caution the Hon. Member on the Government side to exercise restraint with his language being used in this honourable House, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, please, proceed. Hon. Members, please...

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, before I proceed much further, permit me, please, to respond to some statements made by the other side, which seek to allude as to why we are here in this present situation.

The Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, in reading the three-man Budget where none of them could have identified themselves as the Minister of Finance, one wonders if there is something in that Budget that none of them want to identify themselves with and none of them want to take ownership of.

At page four of the Budget speech, Bishop Edghill states:

“We witnessed an unprecedented assault on lawful Governance, on the constitution, the rule of law and on parliamentary governance, which culminated with a globally published attempt of rigging the March 2nd, 2020 Elections. The vulgar display of authoritarianism costs taxpayers’ tens of millions of dollars to defend the indefensible.

The National Assembly and the country will certainly hear more about these as time permits as investigations are ongoing.”

That is all the Government is doing – investigating, investigating and investigating. **[Mr. McCoy:** You were here.] Govern; that is why you are there.

Various other speakers, including the Hon. Minister, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, I am sorry he is not here to hear me now, the Hon. Minister, Mr. Vickram Bharrat, and, most recently, the Hon. Minister Mr. Brindley Benn, Minister of Home Affairs... This Minister is a special person. He ought not to have been here given responsibility for public security, as by his own utterances in the public and in this House, he appears to be a menace to public security rather than a Minister. He should be minding the affairs at home and allow someone with the temperament and aptitude to lead this critical Ministry at this stage of our nation’s development. This choice is the worst that this Government has made. He knows no bounds to this jurisdiction as a Minister when it comes to police investigations. This Hon. Member regaled the House with all the PPP/C propaganda concerning 2nd March, 2020, Elections. Even when I rose to seek a Point of Clarification about a reckless statement he had made concerning President Granger and my visit to the West Coast of Berbice, he did not have the decency to yield and allow for the Point of Clarification to be dealt with.

In light of all of those unchallenged assertions of rigging by the PPP/C that has gone in the *Hansard*, it is my duty to put on that record the facts of the matter. One thing that we have to understand is, as my Friend Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan always says, that the PPP/C is about *control freakism*. I do not expect all of what I say here to actually get on the National Communications Network (NCN). In fact, nothing that our Members of Parliament said in the debate was carried in the news. The Government must be put on notice that is a national resource and we will not sit idly by and allow the NCN to marginalise us. We represent the people of Guyana and our voices must be heard on those resources.

Let me put on record these facts, after 2nd March, 2020 Elections, all of the reports that came out were that this was a peaceful and fair elections. When the tabulation of those results was taking place for Region 4, the PPP/C’s hierarchy barged in on that office and almost *bruk it up*. The *Kaieteur News* newspaper on 5th May, 2020 spoke about what the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharat Jagdeo, said to them. He said:

“Amidst the ruckus, leader of the PPP/C Bharrat Jagdeo told the media that his party objected to the declaration, since there was no adequate verification conducted prior.”

That is what he said. Then, of course, in the following day in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper, it speaks to exactly what took place. The Opposition storming of the GECOM building. Mr. McCoy was one of them. He is over there; he should have been in the lockup. The then Opposition stormed the building. What were you doing there? All of the nonsense that went on after that – policemen being threatened, doors being kicked down – all of this in the presence of the cameras and in the presence of the international observers. Yet, the Hon. Member has the temerity to say that we were the ones who did that.

Immediately after that, the PPP/C went to court and spoke a lot here about how many cases we won, how many we lost and how often we went to court. Let me tell Members, Mr. Hollander alone was there three times with Mr. Anil Nandlall. The last time the Chief Justice said to Mr. Nandlall that he was wasting the court’s time and that the matter had nowhere to go. The matter was putdown. What happened is that this action caused the Chairman of the Elections Commission to commit herself to not take certain steps on the penalty of perjury and being in contempt of the court.

This was a halo that was held over the heads of Guyanese for over three months. There was no case. The Chief Justice told Mr. Nandlall that he had no case. After three months, when the recount started in July, he came and withdrew the case; no evidence. That was the halo which was held over the heads of Guyanese people. In the meantime, there was a declaration made by the Chief Elections Officer which was handed it to the Chairman of Elections Commission which showed that the APNU/AFC had the most votes. They went to court again. Then, of course, the Chairman of CARICOM got involved and met with the President David Granger and the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo as the Leader of the Opposition. Mr. McCoy was nowhere there. At that meeting, there was an agreement that there will be a recount. The first attempt at doing so was met with some legal challenges and, therefore, that process was scuttled. The second time, of course, the process went ahead and Order 60 of 2020 was issued by the Elections Commission and gazetted to control the recount that was going to take place right here.

At that time, when the recount started, we were always of the view that the PPP/C was always engaged in fraudulent

activities. This Arthur Chung Conference Centre is what dispelled all doubts. When the boxes started to open one after the other, this is where the frogs started jumping out *suh* like *crapo*, all these different things. Let me make a point on the Statements of Poll that the PPP/C asked about since the Hon. Member heckled over there and talked about the Statements of Poll. This Party over here had created Statements of Poll and circulated them on the internet. Even before people had voted the Statements of Polls were dated 28th February or 29th February; whichever date it was, and the Hon. Member is talking about Statements of Poll.

When the recount was done, it was clear to all of the world that this was what we call the epicentre of electoral fraud, the East Coast of Demerara.

6.28 *p.m.*

There were, at least, 47 boxes with over 11,500 votes, for which there were no statutory documents. People came out from their graves, like my Friend over there, to vote. We have the evidence of the death certificates. People who are overseas residents, and were not in Guyana at that time, voted. There were so many other issues that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic ought to hide its head in shame. The Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, talked about people being sorry and all of that. He should be the one who is sorry because he has taken and sat on the will of the Guyanese people by fraud and is sitting there in Office. Everybody knows it. It came out right here.

The report of the Chief Elections Officer (CEO) on the recount showed that the tabulations and the matrix had one figure and then, of course, there was the actual issue, which arose, of getting the credible votes. One had to take out from the bulk that was there – which was called the matrix or the tabulation – all these issues that arose here. As one of the Members of the APNU/AFC’s team, I met right here, in this Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC), in this room, with the Chairperson of the Elections Commission and the Commissioners and all these matters were raised. We had asked that they inquire into them and they said, yes, that they were going to give us what they called a basket of issues and that they were going to deal with them. I, personally, wrote and asked that we get a position on these matters before the end of the recount. We were told, yes. The Chairperson and the Commissioners agreed that these issues, which we raised, were accurate and would be dealt with. Then, all sorts of things started to happen right here. [**Mr. McCoy:** Bandits.] I am glad that you know it – bandits; that is what it was.

One afternoon, when everybody agreed that these 11,000 and more votes had to be parked, by the next morning it was changed that these things were not going to be parked anymore, but that they were going to be driven straight into the rest of the votes. The 233,000 or so votes that were awarded to the PPP/C included all these different things. So, you will note that you are sitting on a time bomb. The elections petition has been filed; enjoy your short tenure over there. Once these things are done, I do not know if you will be back over here the next time because you might not qualify.

It is important that we understand that, in this country, the PPP/C was awarded 233,000 votes, or thereabout and, we, the APNU/AFC, 217, 926 votes. You over there cannot operate as if 233,000 votes are equal to 100% and that 217, 926 votes are equal to 0%.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I just want to caution about, ‘you over there.’ You know we have been sticking with the parliamentary language of saying, ‘Hon. Members over there.’

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I heard you and I will refrain from that, but I would ask that you also caution the heckler over there. He is making it difficult for me to even hear you, please.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Let me continue. The political and security environment, which now exists in Guyana, requires political will and the budgetary allocations to help heal the wounds in our society.

The PPP/C’s decision *to throw cold water* on social cohesion; the appointment of Mr. Benn as the Minister of Home Affairs; the reorganising of the Guyana Police Force, the decision to bring back senior officers, who were discredited and place them in senior critical positions; and the restructuring of the Guyana Defence Force all point to a mindset that says that the PPP/C will not be interested in any compromise to move forward with the affairs of Guyana. That is what it says. It is either the PPP/C’s way or the United States of America’s (USA) way. That is what it is.

In one *fell swoop*, the Department of Social Cohesion was dismantled and all the skills, which were acquired and developed over the last five years, have gone to waste. How will we solve the problems of society in this way? The Members of the other side must remember that 233,000 is not

100% and that 217, 926 is not 0%. In this House, we will rage an unrelenting struggle to ensure not only justice for the people, but equality in how the national patrimony of this country is allocated.

Last Sunday, I had a chance meeting with President Mohamed Irfaan Ali at the funeral of Isaiah and Joel Henry. He told me something there that I would not repeat because that the Gentleman, over there would go and make a story out of it. He told me something and my response to him was that we all want peace in this country. I, as the Leader of the Opposition, am prepared to work with you for peace, but equality and justice must also be given priority. President Ali agreed and I trust that after his engagement with visiting dignitaries, there can be some meaningful dialogues on that matter.

On this side of the House, we represent. And while, in the language of some of my Colleagues, they will ask ... I beg and pray that these are just ways of speaking. But over here, we do not beg; we represent.

On 2nd September, when we were sworn in here as Members of Parliament, I made a public statement and said that we in the Opposition will only support the Government as it relates to the issues of the sovereignty of our nation, public security and any other matter that we determine to be in the public’s interest. We said that, so let there be no doubts about it. Any issue that has to do with the sovereignty of our State, any issue that has to do with the public security of this country and any issue that has to do with what we determine to be in the public’s interest, we will support. Yes, we are prepared to work with this Government on these issues. However, certain things have to be done on the Government’s side.

First of all, the killers of Joel and Isaiah Henry and Harish Singh must be brought to justice. We demand an update on this investigation and a speedy trial of suspects. The Minister of Home Affairs, last night, balked at the opportunity to give this House a report on this most important matter. Any Minister, *worth his salt*, would have been happy to give the National Assembly an update on a matter that is as important as this.

Secondly, the relentless and pointless investigation of the officers of the Elections Commission and the trumped-up charges brought against Ms. Volda Lawrence, Mr. Keith Lowenfield, Mr. Mingo and others of GECOM should be withdrawn and discontinued.

Thirdly, the oppressive police presence in some villages, particularly on the West Coast of Berbice, should be reviewed. Their presence appears to be oppressive in nature and it should be reviewed. I am not saying a withdrawal, altogether, but it should be reviewed. The Prime Minister, who is here, I know will take that matter up.

Fourthly, constitutional reform must be treated as a priority. While that can take some time, we can examine a bipartisan Bill that seeks to amend certain aspects of our electoral laws, to take into consideration the findings of the Caribbean Court of Justice and our own Court of Appeal and the High Court. Alternatively, if we do not get buy-in from the Government’s side on this matter, because we consider it so important, we will consult with civil society and bring a motion on this floor to that effect.

After the petitions are heard and determined, we want to say that we cannot go back to other elections with the same laws and the same bloated list. It is a travesty; we cannot go back. We, on this side of the House, are prepared to support an upward review of allocations in this sector to facilitate these recommendations. We are prepared to do that.

6.43 p.m.

If the Minister of Finance wants to see how best we can sit and achieve a sum to deal with constitutional reform and to achieve a sum to deal with urgent matters, which relate to the amendment of our electoral laws, we are prepared to work with you on that.

The second issue, which I want to address in this Budget, is the question of the COVID-19 and the response to COVID-19. Our MPs on this side have done an excellent job in dealing with this matter. Member of Parliament after MP did an excellent job in dealing with COVID-19. The Budget theme speaks to protecting our people in a COVID-19 environment, but where in the Budget was your emphasis placed? There is the sum of \$150 million for frontline workers, but where is the plan that shows that this Budget was drafted upon a foundation which reflects that we are in a COVID-19 environment? Every allocation, in every sector, must reflect that reality. If you are saying that this is the foundation of your budget, then every sector must reflect it, and not just a \$150 million for frontline workers and \$25,000 per household. That would not work. The \$25,000 will end up in Pradoville 1, Pradoville 2, and all those places. They are not entitled to it. The people who are vulnerable and require this are the ones who should get it. This has been a lazy approach to a budget arrangement. Lazy! For you to get to the

vulnerable people, you will have to do work and eliminate certain categories; all of that has to be done. In the last five months of 2020, we did all of that. [Mr. Ramkissoon: What did you give them?] Mr. Region 3 Gentleman, you, too, might have benefited from what we gave out.

Every allocation must be reflective of our current reality. Let me turn to the issue I alluded to earlier, that is, as a nation and the wider world, we are combatting this global pandemic. Since 2nd August, 2020, COVID-19 has completely spiralled out of control in Guyana. It has now reached catastrophic levels where confirmed cases are skyrocketing and now, we have over 1,000 cases. The cases are skyrocketing, and deaths are piling up. I think we are at 62 deaths, or something like that; they are piling up. Where is the Minister of Health on this? Is he missing in action?

When we left Office on 2nd August, after managing this pandemic for five months since patient zero on 11th March, there were 474 confirmed cases and 21 deaths from COVID-19. Today, one month and a half later, there are 1,958 confirmed cases and 58 deaths at that time. I think, as of today, it is at 62 deaths. For five months, under APNU/AFC Coalition Government, there were 474 confirmed cases. In six weeks of this woeful Administration, we are now at 1,958 more than 1,484. How are you managing COVID-19? How are you doing that? It deeply saddens and troubles me to have to quote these horrific figures, but these are the facts. The PPP/C is unconscionably playing *Russian roulette* with the lives of the people of Guyana.

After months of pontificating, boasting and lecturing, the PPP/C regime’s management of the pandemic has been an unmitigated travesty. Guyanese are dying in record numbers; Guyanese are becoming infected in huge numbers; and Guyanese are living in fear across this land. Whether it is the economy, security or the pandemic, there is an absence of leadership on that side of the House. The Guyanese people have little confidence in you to manage the stewardship on this issue.

It is necessary to illustrate the stark differences in the approach of our Coalition Government and the management of the COVID-19 pandemic based on guess work, politics or profit, as it is in that case. Ours were based on sound science, sound structured approach and a comprehensive hold of Government plan. Every Ministry of the Government had to submit a plan of action to the secretariat of which I was the Chief Executive Officer. The Prime Minister was in charge of the whole apparatus. We paid so much attention to it that we

placed our Prime Minister in charge of it. All of what happened in this country could have been reported on and responded to in a very short space of time because of that mechanism which we had in place. Every administrative region had to provide a COVID-19 plan. On a weekly basis, all the regions had to report on what was taking place in those regions. This is how a national plan is dealt with. This is how resources are allocated to a problem that is considered to be at that level. One has to plan. One does not sit, guess, heckle and make noise like my Friend over there. One has to sit, think and work it out; one has to plan.

On 14th March, the Health Emergency Operation Centre (HEOC) within the Ministry of Public Health was established and activated. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I refer you to Standing Order 47 – Order in the National Assembly and in the Committee. Earlier, I mentioned to you that, in terms of the decay in which this Assembly is going, with the loud shouts, vile and degrading heckling that is coming from this House, I am fearful that the tone and language being used in this House would only serve to degrade this Twelfth Parliament of this country under your watch.

Sir, I refer you to Standing Order 47(2), for your guidance, please.

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

Hon. Members, please, we have come a far way. Please let us keep our decorum and order in the National Assembly, to a level that we will all be pleased with. Thank you very much.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: On 16th March, President Granger issued directions, under the Public Health Ordinance Act, authorising the Minister of Public Health to take all appropriate measures to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19. Regional COVID-19 task forces were established in every administrative region. As I said, a national secretariat was also set up and working. We took a scientific, structured and planned approach to managing COVID-19 and we were well on the way to flattening the curve. Since 2nd August, what has happened? There is no plan. There has been the dismantling of the structures that we put in place. There has been the distancing from science and the pandemic is *running amuck* all over the country.

We are all aware of the reason we are here, and why you are here presiding in this manner. These virtual proceedings are a testimony to what is now happening in our country.

Regrettably, only this week, 14 members of staff of this National Assembly were tested positive for COVID-19. We pray for their full and fast recovery, as we do for your recovery, Mr. Speaker. This sad and unfortunate wildfire spread of the pandemic is entirely because of the poor and incoherent management by the PPP/C Regime. What is doubly worse and will imperil our country in the months to come is that those who cobbled together this Budget gave nothing but lip service to a COVID-19 recovery plan. There is not a single hint of a COVID-19 recovery plan in this Budget. It is important for me to contextualise the need for a dedicated and comprehensive COVID-19 recovery plan. Every one of our CARICOM neighbours that presented budgets during this period, hinged its budget on a COVID-19 recovery plan. They, like the rest of the world, recognised that we cannot continue with business as usual after the pandemic. We are in unprecedented times, operating in a new normal and it will require a structured and programmed approach for our people to recover.

The lives and livelihoods of Guyanese have been adversely affected and a \$25,000 handout will only get someone some groceries for the short-term. What is the PPP/C’s plan to get the economy going and our people working again? There is no such plan in this Budget. They have ignored it or have avoided it because they do not possess the intellectual acumen or the economic capacity to produce such a plan.

What are our colleagues in the Caribbean doing? Let us look abroad a little bit. They are pursuing structured COVID-19 recovery plans. I share with you, for your edification and to illustrate the deficiencies in this Budget, two examples: one in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the other one in Jamaica.

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago’s Minister of Finance, Mr. Colm Imbert, in his budget presentation, last month, stated:

“... the macro-economic stability and revival of growth in. Trinidad and Tobago under this PNM Government have been anchored on an economic reform programme designed within a medium-term framework.”

He then announced the planned implementation of direct measures aimed at aiding their people to recover from the ravages of the pandemic. They have increased the minimum wage, granted incentives to the creative industry and are reviewing the public pension with a view to increase it. They

have also made the entire agriculture industry tax free; real policies and measures to rebuild and revitalise the economy.

In Jamaica, the Minister of Finance, Dr. Nigel Clarke, in speaking to the COVID-19 plan, stated in his budget presentation:

“Policymakers around the world have been responding with monetary and fiscal stimuli inclusive of tax cuts [and] interest rates to counteract the effects...”

He then went on to announce a reduction in Jamaica’s general consumption tax, which is equivalent to our value-added tax, and a full-fledged COVID-19 recovery programme.

6.58 p.m.

Dr. Clarke announced JM\$2 billion for the expansion and intensification of the management of the pandemic and JM\$7 billion COVID-19 contingency to mitigate against the impact of the pandemic. He stated that Jamaica was able to provide these tax reductions and cushion a fiscal contingency buffer in the face of a global shock.

We desperately need a COVID-19 recovery plan here. On this side of the House, we are prepared to lend some of the skills, which are here, to work with the Government to ensure that we have a plan. It is the health of our people that is important. We do not see politics or side where this matter is concerned. This is a matter of national importance and we are prepared to give our full support to it. It requires a whole-of-government approach. It requires that every administrative region get involved. A one-time handout will not rescue our people and their livelihoods. The planning and paperwork had already started under us; rather than slash and burn, the Minister should read and learn. Too much is at stake for a hit and miss approach on this matter.

Let me now deal with our vision. Our vision of a ‘good life’ for all Guyanese has been temporarily interrupted by these elections. That theme permeated every budget, from 2015 to 2019, which was done by the Hon. Winston DaCosta Jordan. Every year of the budget, the theme included the ‘good life’. It was either, ‘the good life continues’ or ‘the good life beckons’, but all of it had a central theme, which was called ‘the good life’. That is called vision. That is possible when one can project and that is something, my Friend, you need to have – some vision. If you keep your mouth closed long enough you may understand something.

Unfortunately, this Budget does not outline a vision. One cannot discern a path that will take to achieve the ‘plan for prosperity’. These are just words put together. This Budget, which was hurriedly done and without proper consultation, takes much of what former Minister Winston Jordan would have done – a real Minister of Finance and his team – to have this matter dealt with.

Our vision for the Guyanese people, titled, Decade of Development:2020-2029 encompasses sound and professional study and widespread consultation. We had begun to set out that vision which is now temporarily interrupted. That vision is based on four main pillars, namely: a green state, a digital state, the petroleum state and an education nation. Our MPs have, throughout these last few days, given elements of that vision – elements of those plans. Our people have done that. This is a document called the Decade of Development:2020-2029, and this the ‘green’ State...

[The Hon. Member displayed documents]

Our intention is to bring this document, the Decade of Development: 2020-2029, as a White Paper to the National Assembly for further consultation. Our work has already started and, shortly, we will come to this House with that White Paper. We believe that all the people of Guyana have a right to say how they see their future and to be part of delineation of that developmental path. This is our approach – an inclusionary one.

Budget 2020 falls short of the key objectives of enhancing social cohesion, guaranteeing the peace and security of our people, justice, and a practical and methodological approach to dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. For these reasons stated and unless there is a willingness on the part of the Government to review the allocations to the sectors that I have identified, I, on this side of the House, cannot support this Budget.

Finally, let me say that it has been a tradition in this House, which the other side has insisted upon while we were in Office, that is, the Leader of the Opposition is the penultimate speaker and they insisted upon it. This is not the case here. Added to this, the vulgar abuse by the Minister of Public Works on the Hon. Amanza Walton-Desir is unacceptable. In light of those circumstances, we on the Opposition side wish to thank you for listening to our presentations and for ruling in the way you did.

My good Friend, the Hon. Prime Minister, in deference to you, some of my Colleague MPs have decided that they will stay, but generally speaking because of the points I have raised, I cannot stay. I cannot sit anymore based on what has happened here. Those MPs who consider it an honour to listen to the maiden speech of the Hon. Prime Minister are free to do so.

I thank you very much, Ladies and Gentlemen. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Leader of the Opposition for your speech and thank you for staying on track with respect to the time.

Hon. Minister Teixeira, would you want to move the suspension of the Standing Order, so that we can go beyond 8.00 p.m., and that the Prime Minister can proceed uninterrupted?

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 11

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 11 be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 8.00 p.m.”

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, just one moment.

I ask of you that we consider the suspension of the Standing Order that allows for the debate to conclude by 8.00 p.m., and we apply for an extension, so that we can work until the close of business. That is the Government’s application on this matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you can proceed with your maiden presentation, uninterrupted.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First, let me first congratulate you on your ascension to the high Office of the Speaker of this House after many years of public service to Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Sir.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate Mr. Lenox Shuman on his election to the Office of the Deputy Speaker. This is a signal

achievement, and an event that is important in the history of Guyana, as we observe a month of celebration of our Amerindian brothers and sisters and their contributions to life, culture and the development of Guyana.

I am reminded of a quotation by Mr. Thomas Paine:

“To argue with a man who has renounced the use and authority of reason, and whose philosophy consists in holding humanity in contempt, is like administering medicine to the dead.”

I rise to convey my full and unwavering support for *Budget 2020*, which was ably and eloquently presented by our Hon. Minister of Public Works, Bishop Juan Edghill. A Budget presented under the theme: *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Growth and Job Creation; Enhancing Welfare.*

We have previously heard about the four states, but there is no need for a ‘green state’ or an education state, as mentioned by the previous speaker; now is the time for prosperity for all of the people of Guyana.

Prepared within just 38 days following the official, yet delayed, declaration of Guyana’s General and Regional Elections results, this \$329.5 billion Budget was completed in record timing, despite the challenges faced by our country in the face of a global pandemic, coupled with a national political crisis, in which our democracy had been severely threatened. I, therefore, wish to commend the Hon. Vice-President Bharrat Jagdeo, the Hon. Minister Bishop Edghill, and their team for the arduous, but much appreciated, effort invested in developing this Budget, which aims at delivering economic relief to our citizens and our country as a whole. The completion of this Budget, even in this latter part of 2020, is a shining assertion of our Government’s unwavering commitment to driving our country forward into a future where prosperity is secured.

Our journey to this point has not been an easy one. The last several months of our country’s history have tested our resilience as a people. Yet, despite the unorthodox circumstances and conditions under which it was conceived, those on the opposite side of this House continue to make noise with their unfounded claims about the inadequacy of this Budget to address the needs of the people of Guyana, when, in fact, much of the woes, which have been foisted on us as a people, came from the very same APNU/AFC Administration. It is they who are guilty of doing nothing

much for the people of this country for the past five years while sitting in Office.

7.13 p.m.

They are the ones who filled their pockets and the pockets of their friends by handing out jobs and contracts, while the ordinary man was burdened with the inimical policies created by the APNU/AFC Administration and had to struggle to provide for his family. The people they now pretend to defend are the ones who they punished, while they sat comfortably in Office enjoyed the sweet, looked on as the people suffered, and brought no benefit to the Guyanese people.

I humbly submit that, with a 48.4% to 51.2 % projected growth in our economy and with the provisions of this Budget, Guyana is primed to emerge in a better economic state than we were at the beginning of 2020. Allow me to assure you that this will be achieved in keeping with this Government’s vision and determination for a country that is free, prosperous, socially just, globally competitive and which serves every Guyanese equitably, as declared in the PPP/C’s manifesto.

So, it is with great pleasure that I highlight the developments under the portfolio of the Office of the Prime Minister that will see the vision become a reality. The Office of the Prime Minister’s portfolio consists of four key programmes, for which a total of \$7.5 billion has been catered for in this 2020 Budget. As the real Prime Minister, I am loaded with the responsibilities of power generation, which aims at the effective and efficient provision of energy services countrywide; telecommunications and innovation, which centres on telecommunications policies, the creation of a viable information and communications technology (ICT) sector and the seamless sharing of data among Government’s Ministries and agencies; thirdly, Government information and communications services, which ensures the execution of the Government’s policies on broadcasting and public information to expand the Government’s media presence across the country; and fourthly, disaster preparedness, response and management, which focuses on developing, improving and implementing policies aimed at ensuring our country’s readiness and relief operations.

Though each programme possesses a distinct mandate, a nexus among the agencies under these programmes can clearly be ascertained and that is the enhancement of the lives of our people through energy, innovation, information and preparedness. These programmes together, bring

empowerment to our people, allowing them to forge even forward, while being equipped with adequate tools to contribute to the development of our country.

Today’s world is full of environmental challenges that threaten the very survival of humankind. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals outline a clear-cut pathway that encourages international participation in the achievement of a sustainable future. These are highlighted explicitly in the SDG 7, which zeroes in on increasing renewable energy in the global energy mix and doubling the global rate of improved efficiency.

My Government recognises the potential that energy holds for the economic growth of Guyana, through its ability to usher in an enhanced quality of life for our citizens. We intend to achieve the provision of affordable, stable and reliable energy, through an energy mix, which incorporates hydropower, solar and wind, along with an increased capacity for electricity to be utilised by residential and commercial/industrial users. With a budget allocation of \$3 billion for this sector, these and other initiatives will see immediate continuation and commencement of activities by agencies that fall within this programme, which I will discuss.

Energy is necessary for economic growth and an enhanced quality of life for all Guyanese. As my Colleague, the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, stated in his Budget presentation, the former APNU/AFC Administration failed to develop sufficient baseload generation capacity to ensure a stable and reliable supply of energy to our people, resulting in severe and prolonged inconvenience. Our PPP/C Government will, therefore, immediately, tackle the irregular power supply and frequent blackouts that we all have been experiencing in the recent past.

Our Government will provide affordable, stable and reliable energy to benefit households and businesses by utilising an energy mix, as mentioned before of hydropower, solar and wind. The Government has already advanced a transparent expression of interest process to engage local suppliers to fulfil the country’s growing immediate power demand.

Our Government is also pursuing a medium-to-long-term path that will allow for the completion of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, which we will work towards, and for the use of natural gas to bring cheaper energy to all Guyanese by the year 2024. We will continue to pursue low carbon initiatives, such as mini-hydro grid tied systems, as part of our energy diversification efforts. The Guyana Energy Agency (GEA) will install hydrological measurement

equipment to assess the potential for mini and micro hydropower development, at various locations across the country. Data has already been collected at Paruima in Region 7 and the hydropower engineers are currently preparing a pre-feasibility study for the site. Data is currently being collected at Waramadong, again in Region 7. Subject to travel restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, hydrological loggers will soon be installed at Monkey Mountain in Region 8 and Eclipse Falls in Region 1, to determine the hydropower potential of those sites.

Solar and wind systems for off-grid areas will be advanced as a top priority, to provide renewable energy for the hinterland under the Hinterland Electrification Programme (HEP). The Guyana Energy Agency will also be advancing the installation of solar farms for Bartica and Lethem. Also, the GEA is supporting the Hinterland Electrification Company Incorporated (HECI), by conducting energy needs assessment for all 200 plus hinterland communities across our country. Assessments have already been completed at Sebai, Mainstay/Whyaka and Tapakuma/St. Deny’s Mission, Moraikobai, Paruima, Waramadong, Kurukabaru, Annai and Ituni.

The solar maintenance programme will effect repairs to solar photovoltaic systems at Karia Karia Nursery and Primary Schools, Karia Karia Health Outpost, Capoey Nursery and Primary Schools, La Harmonie Primary School, St. Deny’s Health Centre, Tapakuma Lake Primary School, Abrams Creek Primary School, Bethany Primary School, 47 Miles Health Post and St. Monica Health Post.

As a first step towards providing low carbon energy, some 25,000 households in Amerindian, hinterland and deep riverain communities can expect an upgrade and replacement of their solar panels. The Guyana Energy Agency’s energy efficiency programme will advance the installation of energy-efficient lights at Government buildings and hinterland homes and businesses. The Agency will continue to manage the issuance of licence for importing, wholesale, retail, consumption installation, bulk transportation carriers and storage of fuel and petroleum products. It will continue to administer the Fuel Marking Programme to mark and test fuel under the Guyana Energy Agency Act and Government’s policy and prosecute offenders – known offenders – we all know them, in accordance with the law. It is envisaged that this extensive programme, under the GEA, will lead to more than 400 megawatts of newly installed capacity for our residential and commercial and industrial users, over the period 2020 to 2025.

The Hinterland Electrification Company Incorporated has been budgeted the sum of \$42.2 million, to conduct its work. Approximately 15% of Guyana’s 750,000 inhabitants, who live in the hinterland in about 200 communities, will benefit from the Hinterland Electrification Programme. These communities are often neglected basic necessities such as power, leaving them to fend in the proverbial and literal darkness, while citizens in other parts of the country enjoy these amenities. As such, the Hinterland Electrification Programme is a top priority for our Government with \$400.6 million allocated towards its expansion.

The electrification strategy for the hinterland was developed under the PPP/C Government since 2006. The programme saw about 20,000 households provided with access to electricity through the provision of solar home systems or the extension of electricity grids. However, the households that were supplied with solar photovoltaic (PV) home systems were just able to satisfy a fundamental demand for electricity. Today, these households have a much greater demand for electricity. In this regard, our Government intends to implement projects at the community level to provide hinterland communities with increased access to modern energy, to support the delivery of social services and to create new economic opportunities in these communities. The economic development that follows is expected to facilitate the gradual expansion of electricity service to meet the needs at the household level.

In addition, electricity grid systems will continue to be upgraded and expanded, adding renewable energy technologies to reduce dependency on fossil fuels to support the socio-economic development of the associated communities.

7.28 *p.m.*

The general objective is to improve the public infrastructure in the communities to satisfy increasing energy demand, and, thus, offer services to improve the living conditions of the residents in these communities.

Developments in the oil and gas sector have led to projections of significant growth in the demand for electricity. And so, the Guyana Power and Light Inc. must receive the support it needs to develop its capacity to meet these demands in order to satisfy the people of our country. However, this institution has, over the years, faced numerous challenges to supply industrial and domestic consumers with a low-cost, reliable supply of electricity.

Added to these insufficiencies, GPL is currently owed over \$18.1 billion in debt by other Government agencies and private entities. This shortfall in payments began a steady decline, from 2015 to date, and has had a significant impact on the company’s financial standing. The company has to face the issue of the unavailability of operating funds to adequately meet its operating expenditures. This *hot mess*, inherited from the APNU/AFC Administration, has placed the institution at a further disadvantage with regard to its own capacity building and operations. These are problems which our Government has the task of rectifying. However, we will face it and we will fix it, once and for all, in our tenure. We will ensure that what is owed to GPL is paid by our Government - a Government that will show leadership and financial discipline in supporting all its entities.

A total of \$3 billion has been budgeted for power companies and projects over Guyana: Lethem Power Company, Kwakwani Utilities Inc., Linden Mining Enterprise (LINMINE), Mabaruma Power Company, Mahdia Power and Light Company Inc., Moruca Power and Light Company Inc., Matthew’s Ridge Power and Light Company Inc. and the Port Kaituma Power and Light Company. All these companies will be adequately funded by the Budget, through the Office of the Prime Minister.

Included in *Budget 2020* are provisions that will fund activities geared towards improving the operations of GPL by addressing the following aspects: infrastructural upgrade to decrease line losses; reinforcement of infrastructure to improve reliability; institutional strengthening through training and reinforcement of techniques required for efficient management at the executive and senior management levels; operational efficiency through consultancies in system planning, economic demand forecasting, Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) operation and maintenance.

With a focus on building an advanced and robust economy and with the rapid technological advancements occurring globally, it is imperative that attention is given to information and communications technology, particularly as it relates to its use as a tool of economic and social empowerment.

Today, ICT is ever-present. It has been one of the significant contemporary pillars of social and economic development throughout the world. It is for this reason that many countries have deployed substantial efforts and resources in the area of ICT. While developed countries have made tremendous strides, developing countries, such as Guyana, still have a long way to go.

Sustainable Development Goal 9 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals speaks to technology development, research and innovation, and its use as a mechanism for economic prosperity.

There is tremendous potential for ICT to be used for developments in all sectors of our society – in health, education, security, infrastructure, agriculture and social development. Moreover, ICTs enable innovation to develop solutions that can lead to the enhancement of the quality of life. Against this backdrop, our Government is aware of the need for improved access to ICTs across the country and has allocated \$5.2 billion in this Budget towards ICT development, which includes focusing on access to the internet and enhanced e-Government services. Five hundred and thirty-three million, seven hundred thousand dollars of the Government’s ICT development allocation will support the agencies in the telecommunications and innovation sector in helping to achieve our overall objectives.

With the continued robust agenda of the agencies under this programme, this vision can begin to take form and come to fruition. A total of \$476.1 million has been budgeted for the National Data Management Authority (NDMA). The National Data Management Authority will continue to expand its fibre optic network this year to meet the demands of Ministries and Government agencies. By the end of October, the network will span from Parika to Skeldon and further network expansion will continue in the south of Guyana, in the hinterland regions, providing much-needed connectivity for our citizens, especially during this ongoing pandemic. All schools and educational institutions will also be supported by the network, as our classrooms are now going online for the rest of this year. The ICT hubs, established across the country, will also come into play, providing those without internet connectivity and computers with a means to participate in the online education drive.

Significant effort will be put into ensuring that application forms for Government services are placed online to reduce the need for in-person interactions. The applications received can then be processed, manually or digitally, by the Ministry or agency, as the circumstance warrants. Over 200 forms have been developed, and we are now in the process of verifying their functionality with representatives from the various ministries and Government agencies, before carrying out the implementation process.

The Centre for Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT), which is a school to help bridge the gap between

academia and industry, launched in June, 2019, through a partnership between the Governments of Guyana and India, will be re-tuned and re-fitted to provide online courses instead. Courses will continue to be provided in the areas of network security, Linux administration, data communication and networking, business computing, information technology and advanced web technologies. A total of \$57.6 million has been budgeted for the Industry and Innovation Unit.

In keeping with the overall vision of ICT and national development, the responsibility of the Unit has now been extended to coordinate strategies and related activities in support of the post-implementation phases of the Government’s vision to provide connectivity and support in ICT infrastructure in over 200 communities nationwide. The role of the Unit to ensure that the digital transformation needed to advance ICT literacy and overall readiness of our citizens is assured and sustainable.

The policy work will continue through to the end of this year, with the development of draft legislation and explanatory memoranda for the protection of ever-increasing electronic information being provided by our citizens and utilised by the Government and other sectors. One of the significant effects of COVID-19 will be a considerable growth of citizen-related information being stored and processed online. It is critical, therefore, that legislation and supporting regulation be established to govern the access and utilisation of same.

The Unit is in the final stages of completing a draft national ICT plan. The next stage is the coordination and implementation of a public comment period and the stakeholder consultation process. The Unit will also be coordinating the development of the electronic transactions or e-commerce legislation for public comment and consultation.

One of the more critical activities this year is the oversight of the refurbishment of the Linden Call Centre. Government has allocated \$65.6 million for its completion. The objective is the repair and launch of the Centre to attract industry investors and create at least 250 jobs in the Linden community. This centre is projected to be completed by the end of November, 2020.

Information and communications technology is critical to our ability to quickly respond to what is becoming the new normal, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The need to avoid mass gatherings, while still providing for routine matters, such as classroom-like learning and meetings in the work setting, will demand not only the deployment of telecommunications networks but the provision of affordable

access to them. Added to this is the need to reduce in-person interaction by providing online applications and services. The Government has a duty to meet the needs of our people, despite the pandemic and so, we are committed to the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector in order to unleash the competition that is indispensable to reducing prices, thus, making access to telecommunications networks affordable for our citizens.

This initiative will see increased entrepreneurship for our people, increased investment *via* a bigger marketplace for telecommunications providers, a wider and more affordable list of telecommunications options for Guyanese, and more jobs and greater opportunities for innovation.

We cannot put off the liberalisation any longer. As a result, since our assumption to Office, the PPP/C Government has literally *hit the ground running* in this regard by initiating the process towards the liberalisation of our telecommunications sector. Moreover, it was a campaign promise that we know we must deliver on in the shortest possible time frame.

The liberalisation of the sector will be accompanied by promulgation of the Universality Fund by which access to telecommunications networks will be supported and subsidised for the most vulnerable among us.

7.43 p.m.

Our Government recognises that in order to operate in the new dispensation of a liberalised sector, capacity will have to be built in the regulatory entities, thus, special attention will be paid to strengthening the Telecommunications Agency, Guyana in preparation for regulating in a liberalised environment.

Our Government will also eliminate, as you heard, VAT on mobile phones. This is a measure that has long been requested by consumers and the industry because the mobile phone is the poor person’s computer. These devices are dependent upon by thousands of Guyanese for access to data and internet services.

Oversight of the ICT Access for Hinterland, Poor and Remote Communities’ project also falls under the Office of the Prime Minister. This is a US\$17 million transformative project and is funded by the Guyana Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)+ Investment Fund (GRIF) and aims at enhancing access to ICT and Government services to hinterland, poor and remote communities, which are considered to have the greatest need

because of their location and economic circumstances. One of my first directives on becoming Prime Minister was the order for the immediate commencement of the installation of equipment for the establishment of the 200 fully-functioning ICT hubs under this project, given its potential to place Guyana on the digital map and to enable us to provide Government services to an additional 100,000 Guyanese.

Moreover, this initiative becomes even more imperative, given the need for remote forms of communication, in light of the ongoing Coronavirus disease pandemic.

With regard to the Government information and communications services, with the advent of technology, our people are now exposed to more information, leading to a demand from the public for accountability and transparency from their Government. Moreover, it is the fundamental right for citizens to be informed of what their Government is doing, leading to the need for a strong system that enables Government to disseminate large amounts of information. Such a system, built on durable policies, ensures trust, increases accountability and even aids in guiding decision-making by citizens and the private sector.

Our Government acknowledges the solemn right of citizens to information, including all matters concerning their welfare and the status of the State and its assets, national policies, plans and programmes and projects, which impact their lives and well-being. Further, our Government acknowledges that the State has an obligation to provide information to our citizens on all matters relating to policy decisions. Such information is fundamental to promoting both an understanding of all public issues and encouraging meaningful engagement with and involvement of the Guyanese people.

Coordination of such information is equally vital in a State that has many separate ministries, departments, regional, municipal and local administrative bodies. They are all required in a democracy to present to the people factual and timely information of laws and regulations, policies, programmes and activities.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard from the Hon. Minister, Mr. Kwame McCoy, in his presentation, about the major plans in store under the Government information and communication services programme, which include media development, broadcast modernisation and increased interaction with our citizens to receive feedback on Government policies. With the budgeted \$221.5 million for this sector, ensuring the strengthened capacity of the agencies under this programme

is high on our list of priorities, in order to achieve these goals and bring information to our people.

The National Communications Network (NCN), the State broadcaster, has been riddled with mass corruption and gross mismanagement. The financials of this company, as well as a simple walk through of the agency will prove this. The staff has been working in the most horrendous conditions for the past five years, while those now sitting on the opposite side watched on from their high horses and did nothing. Instead, they paid millions of dollars to their incompetent associates, who sat in executive offices and ran the company into the ground; near bankruptcy. They left the staff to battle daily in a workplace where they were threatened; no wonder the grave underperformance. This is one of the many State agencies that our PPP/C Government now has to save after the APNU/AFC left it in shambles.

Based on projections, for the period October to December, 2020, the NCN will receive a total subvention of \$118.1 million. This allocation will ensure that the agency fulfils its mandate of creating a connected and informed society, while providing the functionality of transmission and studio equipment and enhancing staff development and growth.

The NCN’s vast network reaches across all 10 administrative regions. Its mission is to promote social and human development through accurate and up-to-date information *via* live TV and radio shows, news and current affairs, outside broadcasts on national development plans, programmes, activities and priorities of the Government to both coastal and hinterland regions.

The allocation will enable the agency to invest in training and upgrades for permanent and contract staff across the network. Further, there is need for preventative maintenance and servicing at all locations. At Radio Essequibo, plans to train and recruit personnel to start local broadcasting by year-end are in place. Another priority in the final quarter is to upgrade the company’s website and build an NCN application (app).

The capital subvention will assist in retooling the network to keep the national network online through NCN’s three coastal radio stations, eight regional radio stations, and over the NCN TV network, which has 10 live TV transmission facilities, *via* satellite. Capital investment represents the purchase of equipment and spares needed to maintain the agency’s multimedia satellite earth stations and the satellite downlink systems, nationwide.

With \$87.1 million allocated to the Department of Public Information (DPI), the remainder of the year bodes well for the coordination and dissemination of public information to our citizens, as the DPI seeks to fulfil its mandate of advising Government on communications and public relations, executing the Government’s public information programme, implementing feedback mechanisms to allow Guyanese in Guyana and abroad to provide thoughts and views, and participate in, as well as support national development goals. The allocation in this Budget will see this institution being able to purchase much-needed software and equipment necessary for undertaking its mandate and building the capacity of its staff to ensure the highest quality output of public information.

With regard to disaster preparedness, response and management, the Hon. Minister of Public Works alluded to the need for the evolution and expansion of our disaster preparedness response and management capabilities, in the face of the ongoing novel COVID-19 pandemic, other emerging diseases that threaten our health and well-being, as well as natural disasters that could upend the routine functioning of our lives. As such, the Government has allocated \$3 billion to the Civil Defence Commission (CDC), to provide social relief to persons impacted by the COVID-19, and to also respond, effectively, to the impacts of floods, droughts and other natural and manmade disasters across the country.

Earlier, we heard that there is no plan for COVID-19 by our Government. This \$3 billion is separate and apart from the \$4.5 billion as was previously announced by His Excellency President Irfaan Ali.

Our country is particularly susceptible to the effects of flooding because, approximately 90% of the population reside on the coastal plain, and the country’s central economic and administrative hub is one to three meters below the main sea level. Further, a large part of the agriculture sector, which contributes to 32% of our GDP, is also located on the coast. Apart from the coastal regions being susceptible to flooding, the interior regions such as Region 7, Region 8 and Region 9, have been experiencing severe flooding as a result of heavy and persistent rainfall in Guyana, Brazil and Venezuela.

Guyana is also susceptible to droughts that significantly affect agriculture on the coast and in the interior, forest fires, diseases such as Zika, Chikungunya and now COVID-19 and, of course, high winds which cause severe damage to, or

complete loss of homes, as in the recent cases in Regions 7, 8, and 10. These are all threats that impact our country. Added to the increase in severity and frequency with which natural disasters are occurring around the world, Guyana may not be spared.

The current Disaster Risk Management and Reduction Strategy to reduce the country’s vulnerabilities will, therefore, be enhanced with a renewed focus and greater emphasis placed on disaster risk reduction and building resilience at all levels. This approach is necessary because hazards impact communities first, so they must have the capacity to reduce their risk and to respond efficiently, while awaiting additional support from the regional and national levels. These approaches include both structural and non-structural mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery measures.

According to the World Bank:

“Poverty projections suggest that the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are likely to be quite significant. Estimates based on growth projections from the June 2020 Global Economic Prospects report show that, when compared with pre-crisis forecasts, COVID-19 could push 71 million people into extreme poverty in 2020 under the baseline scenario and 100 million people under the down side scenario.”

7.58 *p.m.*

It is increasingly evident, in Guyana, that the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the economic circumstances of individuals and households, with many households losing large amounts of income due to loss of jobs, closure of industries and restrictions to sectors.

Further, closure of schools and offices and restrictions to movement, in an attempt to curb transmission, have resulted in additional persons being confined to their homes for extended periods, thereby, increasing the consumption of food and other essential supplies. The COVID-19, therefore, is expected to cause an increase to the number of households locally categorised as living in poverty, thereby, warranting the Government’s support and relief. The Civil Defence Commission’s 2020 budget for COVID-19 response, therefore, was developed on this underpinning and caters for the continued provision of relief to the most vulnerable groups during the final quarter of this year, 2020.

An approach of two modalities will be utilised to ensure that households are accessed through a mechanism that is more feasible at this time, given the local realities of the individuals, their communities and the existing threats of the pandemic. The logistical costs related to the physical distribution, primarily the transporting of these resources to remote communities, are catered for in the Budget, as are the expenses related to the procedures required to effectively and efficiently implement the Public Assistance Programme (PAP) across the 10 administrative regions.

Further, maintaining the safety and security of CDC’s personnel and volunteers will remain a necessity in all activities. The Budget, therefore, incorporates provision of the necessary resources to safeguard health and wellbeing, while providing support during a pandemic response.

These measures outlined will definitely help to reduce the devastating impacts of COVID-19, as well as natural and manmade disasters on the citizens of Guyana.

I wish to reiterate my support for this Budget, especially given the constraints under which my Government has had to operate upon assuming Office. This Budget is, indeed, a people-centred Budget, with a simple goal of achieving the long hoped for prosperity, which our people deserve. It will not be an easy road and it will take patience and perseverance.

The Opposition called it an emergency budget, but it is visionary in its outlook. It covers and makes substantial provisions for the issues that matter to all Guyanese and those that will transform Guyana over the coming years.

Energy expansion and diversification, education, housing, health, water and sanitation, ICT, youth, children, senior citizens, petroleum, public safety and security, agriculture and food security and Amerindian and hinterland development are all aspects that are covered, adequately, in this Budget to take us to the end of 2020. Those who stand in the House and criticise this Budget clearly lack vision. They do not support progress and development. They do not genuinely care about the Guyanese people and, obviously, they have not even an iota of how to manage or run a country.

In the past five years, our citizens have been sold promises that never came to life, leading to disappointments and downfalls that set our country back in several areas of our development and wellbeing. Now, we have a chance to move forward, along a more prosperous and successful path,

towards a future that, with the PPP/C Government’s continued drive, will certainly be achieved.

The Opposition continues to illustrate to the world at large why the people of Guyana lack confidence in their leadership and why, after just five years of being in Office, they were voted out and now have to spend the next five years and, perhaps longer, sitting in their rightful place, that is in opposition.

Never again must we allow our people to suffer and live in dark days. Never again must the rights of our people be threatened and disrespected by power hungry and selfish individuals. Our Government promises to ensure that all our people are treated equally. We will serve in the best interest of all our Guyanese citizens, and all will live in prosperity in this our beautiful and beloved native Guyana. Guyana, the free. I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, just give me two minutes to rearrange two items. I will be back shortly.

Sitting suspended at 8.05 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.06 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: To close the debate on the 2020 Budget contributions, I call on the Hon. Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill, to make his summing up presentation.

Bishop Edghill (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Let me begin by thanking all of my Colleagues, on this side of the House, for standing and defending *Budget 2020*, a budget for the people of Guyana. I also want to thank the Members of the Opposition, who participated in this debate, for displaying for the public to see the reasons they are not in Government. This Budget debate made it clear to all of Guyana why the APNU/AFC is not in Government.

They came to the National Assembly and behaved as though they were under the tent, on the road, where they were spinning narratives for five months, expecting people to believe their misinformation campaign. The fact that we are in this House tonight tells the world and every Guyanese that democracy is back in place.

Secondly, the fact that we have a budget that we are debating restores hope to the Guyanese people that transparency, accountability and parliamentary scrutiny, in a parliamentary

democracy, are back in action in Guyana. We will spend the entire next week scrutinising the Estimates. It means that Guyanese will have an opportunity to know how, where and who are spending their money. Since December, 2018, moneys have been expended and not even the investigative reporters in our media were able to discover what was going on.

One of the reasons the APNU/AFC lost the no confidence motion and then lost the elections is because the people in Guyana cannot trust their words and what they are saying.

I listened to Mr. Roysdale Forde, Mr. Christopher Jones and the motley band of APNU/AFC Parliamentarians. Do you know what they reminded me of? They reminded me of the Misenga Jones court case, the Ulita Moore court case and the Eslyn David court case, where people went to the courts, spun narratives, read what the Constitution never said and tried to say something that was inaccurate, when everybody knew it was wrong. It reminded me of the Richardson case and all the other cases they went out there with – about 34, 33, a ‘half man’ and all the explanations that we got.

Obviously, they did not read the Budget; but I cannot be blamed for their lack of comprehension. The nation now knows that the APNU/AFC has problems with both Mathematics and English. The Minister of Education needs a lot more resources in her budget to help them in Mathematics and English. I do not know what next to do.

Allow me to explain a few things. The world over, in a COVID-19 pandemic environment, is focusing on three things – protecting lives, which is extremely important; protecting livelihoods; and preparing for the recovery of the economy. The world has said to us, by way of the COVID-19 pandemic, that it is one thing to save lives, but if the economy flattens, people will soon die from hunger and starvation.

When we approached *Budget 2020*, we knew that the priorities had to do with making the necessary investments so as to safeguard the livelihoods of people. That is why we spared no investment in health by ensuring that every Ministry, every budget agency and every region had sufficient moneys appropriated to deal with this pandemic.

There is nothing worse than having our children at home and not going back to school because, while they should be progressing, if they are not learning, they could start regressing. We made the necessary investments to ensure that learning takes place, virtually, in a COVID-19 environment.

We put more moneys in to ensure that the Guyana Learning Channel Trust is expanded.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman, this morning, raised concerns about the Amerindian communities. He will be well advised and should know that we are not just dealing with the internet, but we are dealing with radio, television and print materials.

8.13 p.m.

The people of the hinterland will have packages delivered to their homes. There will be community learning. We have developed a capacity, in partnership with other outfits, to ensure that the Guyana Learning Channel Trust would be able to broadcast five or six different modules, simultaneously, to reach different age groups.

The investment in education was to deal with the reality, but we also had to put investments to deal with infrastructure. The schools have to have the washrooms upgraded, sinks for the washing of hands, proper ventilation and proper environment. Of course, if my Colleagues, who are having problems with both Mathematics and English, had read the Budget, they would have understood that those interventions are being made.

It was the Hon. Member, Dr. Nicolette Henry, who said people deserve much better than a PPP/C Government. Then I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, referring to them as the representatives of the majority. That is why I said that we are still under the tent. But, thank God that one Hon. Member was willing enough to admit that they represent 217,000 votes and it was the first admission that they lost the elections. We, on this side, even though we got more than 233,000 votes, do not only represent those 233,412 voters – I think that was the number. We represent, as the legitimate Government, every Guyanese living in Guyana, and this Budget was designed and prepared to enhance the lives and safeguard all our people in Guyana.

I heard words used to describe this Budget that really made me wonder if APNU/AFC really understands the meaning of words or they are just getting involved in semantics. I heard them say that the Budget is discriminatory. Who is the Budget discriminating against? The more than 11,000 members of the Joint Services that will benefit from the two-week bonus, which one of them will not get it? More than 200,000 households will get the \$25,000 COVID-19 assistance. Who is the Budget discriminating against? The health workers, who are on the frontline fighting, will benefit

from the \$150 million. Who will the Budget discriminate against? I do not understand. These words, to the Hon. Members of the Opposition, are words that are catchy, and are meant to create misinformation and to misguide a group of people into a belief.

I also heard them say that the Budget is divisive. Well, who is the Budget dividing? If they understood the meaning of divisive then the rhetoric in this House would have been different. They had been divisive in Government. They had been divisive during the elections campaign. They have been divisive since 2nd March, during the past five months. They have been divisive since President Irfaan Ali was sworn into Government. When they got an opportunity, they capitalised, opportunistically, on the mishap of two young men and became more divisive. In coming to this House, in the pretence of paying solidarity on the death of the young men, they used the occasion to divide. Why did one of them not – including the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, who puts himself up to the world as someone who believes in reconciliation, is a mediator and believes in the resolving of conflicts – get up and apologise to the hundreds and thousands of Guyanese who were beaten, robbed and harmed while trying to go about their legitimate business of getting home or getting to Georgetown for business during that period of time? A wrong is a wrong and it must be condemned as wrong. When politicians use the occasion of a budget debate to get press opportunities to spread divisive language, it must be condemned in the strongest possible terms and I so do, tonight, as I close this debate.

They said that the Budget is defective. Well, help me to correct it. If it is defective, put out to the public one suggestion to correct it. Have we heard any over the five days? Have we received any recommendation that could make us produce, for the people of Guyana, something better? We, in Government, do not claim to be know-it-all. In as much as we have one of the best, practical applied Economist in the Caribbean in our camp, in the person of Vice-President Bharrat Jagdeo, we do not claim to know it all. But, if the Opposition is going to come to the Parliament and make criticisms that the Budget is defective, then point out how it is defective. They could not do that, but they could have gone to the media and use fancy language to deceive.

Then, they said the Budget is deceptive. I got worried. In 2015, in their first budget, I accused the APNU/AFC of being an urban middle-class, pseudo-Christian elite bunch, but I was wrong. I discovered that they are a bold, brazen and

barefaced group. That is how I describe them now – bold, brazen and barefaced.

They have lied. Mr. Speaker, I apologise. They have spoken untruths. They have spoken things that do not resemble the truth. They have spoken things that could never be near to the truth. They have developed an art of alternative facts and spinning narratives. One cannot be a legislator, representing people, and be delusional at the same time. I am concerned about what Guyana’s future would be like if we have to be in a partnership with people who are still in denial and are operating in an environment of delusion.

To refer to this Government as unlawful, illegal and fraudulent, one has to be of a special nature and character. One has to be bold. People saw the Opposition, listened to them and were led by them. Then, all of a sudden, they disappeared because the cookie jar broke and the whole world saw what was in the cookie jar. Then, they come to this august Assembly to say that the Budget is deceptive.

I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, reading from the Budget and using arguments from the Budget to say that the economy was great when the Opposition left Office. Well, if the language that he used and read is in the Budget document, how could the budget be deceptive when the Government placed the truth on the table and when we brought the truth as it relates to the state of the non-oil economy, the sectors that were struggling and the sectors that were limping along? We brought the truth to the table and we told the entire nation that, while we pay attention to petroleum and put in place the things that are needed for the development of the oil and gas sector, we have to pay attention to the non-oil sector. That is why the Government put \$5 billion in the Budget for the GuySuCo to reopen the sugar estates. They have a problem with that.

Some overzealous person in the Opposition, who probably got somebody to write a speech for him/her, came with a written script that asked, where are the jobs? If they had listened to the Hon. Members, Mr. Collin Croal and Ms. Susan Rodrigues, about what is going to take place just in one sector – housing and water – they would know that if someone is building houses, it is jobs being created. The hardware store, the canter driver, the dray-cart man and even the *junkie*, who has to clean up after the construction workers, will get work. If they had read the Budget, they would have understood that.

If they had listened to the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, they would have heard that we are going

towards industrial estates and opening up opportunities for manufacturing. That is where jobs are. If we are speaking of agro-processing, it is jobs. If we are speaking of incentives for the planting of corn and soya beans, plantation agriculture, it is jobs. If we are speaking of removing VAT on mining, forestry and heavy-duty equipment, it means that the boys at Golden Grove, Stewartville and Dem Amstel, who are liming at 8'o clock in the morning, could head back into the interior and come out shouting and sweating, going back to their families happy and not *sucking blows*, like they did during the last five years. It is jobs.

When we spoke about recapitalising the forestry sector and putting in new policies, including the possibility for the export of logs, communities of Hururu, Ituni, Mabura, Coomacka, Moritari, Malawi and all those areas in Region 10, where people were helpless and hopeless, could start smiling again because they are going back to work. Whether it is with the power-saw or with the skidder, they are going back to work. It is jobs.

There are some issues that the public must understand as we close this debate. The APNU/AFC Opposition took over Government in 2015. The Vice-President alluded to the following in his presentation this afternoon: on the Government payroll were 34,073 active employees. Last year, 2019, it went up by 26.9%. Now, they may want to make an argument about more persons being employed. Do they have anything to show what these ‘more’ persons, who they employed, did to make Guyana better?

8.28 *p.m.*

They moved employment up to 43,169. Some 9,000 more persons they packed in the public service. Do you know what that meant? It meant their friends, families and political activists were put on the payroll to do political work. They still lost the elections and many of the agencies and departments did not see improvements and modernisation. The delivery of goods and services were so poor that adjectives to describe it will cause us to have to move from Friday night to Saturday.

When we talk about mismanagement... There are people who are bold, barefaced and brazen, like the Hon. David Patterson and Hon. Annette Ferguson, who would come to this House to tell us all the nice things that they did and about the David Arthur Granger Administration. The most important thing about their speeches is the pronunciation of ‘David Arthur Granger’. Well Comrades, Mr. Speaker and Friends, it is not

how the name is called that make one successful, it is what one does.

I have, in my hands, a document and you know the APNU/AFC has problems with Bishop Edghill holding documents. They threatened me with a \$200 million lawsuit. In the previous Parliament, they took me to the Committee of Privileges and they tried to silence me, but documents do not lie. I am talking about the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). The original contract for the Airport required that we have 9,000 square metres of construction. Do you know what we ended up with in the revised contract? We ended up with some 4,046 square metres – less than half was done. Not only the fact that less than half was done, but they have now saddled us with a bill. There is no space for the offices of airlines. The cargo facilities still need to be upgraded. The commercial centre still needs to be fixed and built.

I have an estimate in my hand that, apart from the US\$150 million that was already spent, plus more than \$2 million for the two additional air bridges, we will have to find more than \$1.3 plus billion to fix the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. Thanks to Brigadier (Ret’d) David Arthur Granger, Hon. David Patterson, Hon. Annette Ferguson and the rest of the APNU/AFC. A round of applause for them. They have done well. They should go under the tent and explain it to people.

I challenge Hon. Member Mr. Sherod Duncan and Hon. Member Mr. Christopher Jones to go under the tent or on their website or come back to Parliament – they have run and gone tonight – to explain these atrocities. They were paying more and getting less. There was bloat in employment and one still could not have gotten anything done.

The Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, spoke and he told us about what took place in the Ministry of Public Health. I want to report to this House that, as the Hon. Minister with some responsibility to deal with some matters of finance, after being delegated by His Excellency the President, I went to the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) to extract from it information as it relates to procurement of drugs and medical supplies during the period. When my Colleague stood here and said there is no information available and that since 2017, even though a large amount of money, billions of dollars, were appropriated, there is no evidence of procurement. Where has the money gone? When the Hon. Minister told us that the Materials Management Unit (MMU), what we call the drug bond at Diamond, contains 60% expired drugs, it tells you about the sort of management the APNU/AFC offered to us.

I do not want to have to go through each and every item that was mentioned. Even though they stood up to praise the fact that Mr. Winston Jordan did all of these excellent budgets, where is Mr. Winston Jordan? Why is he not in the Parliament to defend his legacy? Where is the financial expert among them who can come and speak to both the fiscal and monetary policies? Do you know that, in all five days of presentations coming from the Opposition, none of them have been able to point to a single item in the Budget that they have problems with as it relates to its allocation, appropriation and if it would really benefit the people? They came with vacuous statements, broad brushing the Budget; it is defective, deceptive, divisive and discriminatory. They have a fetish for these nice sounding phases because it seems as though it catches on *Facebook* and they get people to believe the rhetoric.

It is Friday night and my Colleagues have so eloquently defended this Budget that it makes my time in rebutting, tonight, very simple and I do not have to be long.

Let me wrap up this debate by telling everybody in Guyana that the nature of an emergency budget, at a national level, has required us to address, swiftly and decisively, some issues. We got into Office and we had to diagnose and solve problems. Every Hon. Minister, when they got to their sector after they were sworn in, had to diagnose and find solutions.

This COVID-19 pandemic is before us and we have to collectively work to ensure that we all remain safe. Our livelihoods, businesses and small businesses must be protected. We have to find the balance between keeping people safe and making sure that the economy does not collapse. We have to expand access to and the capacity for testing. We have to implement the wearing of a mask as a compulsory measure.

Mr. Speaker, we were very saddened that you could not have been physically with us, but we must congratulate you for the great job you did, even though conducting virtually. If we did not have some irresponsible people, you would have been safe and many of the Parliament staff would have been spared being tested positive. We have people who are more interested in their images on *Facebook* than in taking care of themselves and their brothers and sisters.

When I came here last Wednesday and presented ‘our Budget’, and I say ‘our Budget’ because this Budget that was read by me, in as much as I led a team that had to produce it, it was ‘our budget’. Every Hon. Minister and every one of us participated in putting it together and I want to thank my

Colleagues for their hard work and participation. The APNU/AFC has been in denial so long. If they had allowed democracy to have its course, we would have been in a better place today.

Last night, I had the opportunity of saying thanks to the US Secretary of State, Mr. Pompeo, and Mr. Kozak for what they did for Guyana. Is it not interesting that the language that we are hearing from top US officials is no longer about protecting democracy and respecting the will of the Guyanese people? Just today, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that will see American businesses coming to Guyana, in a fair and transparent way, to invest in energy and infrastructure to take Guyana to the next level. That could have been happening much earlier and my Colleagues spoke about this.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not just happen after the elections. I know that Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon, who for some reason was moved from being...Remember, he was Minister of State, then he became Director-General and then he became Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the COVID-19 Secretariat. Then, he did not want to give up his job. If the Hon. Member and the APNU/AFC Government had been more proactive, since November and December, 2019 and January, February and March, 2020, much more than this could have been done. They were too busy under the tent, spinning narratives and leading a campaign of misinformation. Did they answer the questions that the Guyanese people were asking? Did they prepare to ensure that Guyanese lives and their livelihoods were protected? The answer is no. There was no real planning and because there was no planning, when we came into Government, we had to rescue the ship.

This Budget does not speak to everything that the PPP/C will do in the next five years. This is an emergency Budget. Because it is an emergency Budget, we were faithful to keep promises that we made to the electorate, to make the necessary interventions that could be done, immediately, and to create fiscal space to ensure that we address the emergencies of COVID-19. That is why we have put money in the Budget for the emergency purchasing of drugs and medical supplies – over \$3 billion.

8.43 p.m.

That is why we put, in the 2020 Budget, moneys to be of support to households that have been impacted – \$4.5 billion. That is why we put moneys in the 2020 Budget to help with education – \$300 million. That is why we put in the

Budget... Because we know Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 are heavily impacted as our interior regions, we put in \$300 million to be able to equip those communities with tractors and trailers so that they could get back to agriculture and could move to agro-processing. That is why we put, in the 2020 Budget, opportunities for individuals. Small, medium and largescale investments could benefit from the removal of VAT on import items.

We told our men and our women in uniform that we will restore their bonuses. Even in an environment where we had to create fiscal space to deal with funding in a pandemic, we did not forget our men and women in uniform. In this emergency environment, we are giving them a two-week bonus.

We will deliver to the people of Guyana. We will, like we always did in the 23 years that we were in Government – 1992 to 2015 – hold our hands out to the people of Guyana. While I ask that the 2020 Budget be adopted and passed in this House, I stretch out my arms of friendship saying to the men and women who were elected to sit in this noble House and who now sit in the Opposition benches, that it is not too late to repent. It is not too late to tell your supporters that you are sorry; it is not too late to turn your life around; it is not too late to start behaving responsibly; and it is not too late to start being human again.

It is one thing and I listened...Everybody has scriptures now in their speeches, as if a scripture, when one quotes it, makes one more righteous than those who did not quote it. The same scriptures that they are quoting tells one that by one’s fruits ‘you shall know them’. Guava tree has to bear guava; cherry tree has to bear cherry; and righteous trees have to bear righteousness, not steal elections and deceive a nation. Quoting scriptures and thanking Almighty God... Jesus spoke about that, you know, Mr. Speaker, and I know you read *The Bible*. He referred to people like that as Scribes and Pharisees. His language was not very complementary. It was not my language. He called it ‘whitened sepulchres with dead men bones.’ In everyday language, ‘you are a tomb painted nicely but inside full of stench’. It is not too late. The PPP/C comes to this House with *Budget 2020*, not for prosperity for PPP/C’s supporters but for prosperity for all Guyanese. The PPP/C comes to this House not to incentivise PPP/C friendly private sector businesses. We come to this House with measures to incentivise every business in Guyana. Whether one voted or financed the APNU/AFC, one would still be benefiting from these measures.

We have to make it known. We stand willing and ready to stretch out our hands of partnership. There is a saying in Guyana that *one hand cannot clap*. In as much as we are ready to work, they must show the willingness. Whenever there is a conflict, a crisis or a problem, the number one thing that is needed for dispute resolution is an acknowledgment that a wrong was done. If there are people coming here to still justify, to sing from a song sheet or to read a script that the PPP/C is illegal and fraudulent, to breathe threats in the National Assembly such as, ‘just now you will be moved, two years you will be there’ and all of the other threats, we have to change our attitudes.

I say, we are willing, ready and able. Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and team PPP/C will lead Guyana for all Guyanese and I recommend *Budget 2020* to you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. God bless Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I was most honoured to have presided over my first budget debate as Speaker. The contributions of Hon. Members were of a welcomed very high standard. The new Hon. Members acquainted themselves admirably, while the stalwarts and the veterans performed with much confidence and vibrancy. I congratulate Members and pray that the standards you have set here will continue throughout this Twelfth Parliament.

Yes, we had many challenges, challenges with respect to operating remotely, challenges with food, challenges with internet, challenges with power and so forth. There were also very many memorable moments, especially for me. I remember a comment by one media person about Mrs. Nadir’s curtains and a comment about my tie, whether I know to tie a Windsor Knot or whether I have a Frank Sinatra knot on my tie. It has all been good and we have ended this week in a very high sense of accomplishment from all sides.

While we still have a week to go, I still want to offer thanks to all those who worked under constrictions and new restrictions, the media for the coverage, the staff of the service providers, the security personnel and, not in the least, the parliamentary staff. I offer thanks on all of our behalf.

Hon. Members, before we conclude, we have some housekeeping business to take care of, which is the resolution of the Business Sub-Committee of Supply. Hon. Members, we will have to go into Committee of Supply for this purpose.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

HOURS OF SITTING

WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(1) provides for every sitting of the National Assembly to begin at 2.00 p.m. and unless previously adjourned, end at 10.00 p.m. on the same day;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(2) provides that the Speaker may at any time suspend the sitting for a stated period but, unless the Assembly otherwise resolved, the Speaker shall, at 4.00 p.m., suspend the sitting for one hour, and at 7.00 p.m. suspend the sitting for half an hour;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(3) provides for the Assembly at any time by motion made and carried without amendment or debate suspend or vary the provisions of paragraphs one (1) and two (2) of Standing Order No. 10;

AND WHEREAS Standing Order No. 10(4) provides for the Assembly from time to time, alter, by Resolution, the hours provided by Standing Order No. 10 for the beginning and ending of a sitting.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Order No. 10(1) and (2) be suspended to enable the Assembly to sit in the Twelfth Parliament during the following hours due to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID – 19) pandemic, to proceed with the work of the National Assembly:

- | | | | | | |
|------------|---|-------------|---|------------|---|
| Sitting | • | 10.00 a.m. | - | 12.00 noon | - |
| Suspension | • | 12.00 noon. | - | 1.00 p.m. | – |
| Sitting | • | 1.00 pm. | - | 4.00 p.m. | – |
| Suspension | • | 4.00 p.m. | - | 5.00 p.m. | - |
| Sitting | • | 5.00 p.m. | - | 8.00 p.m. | - |

Mr. Chairman: The Assembly is in Committee of Supply. Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met yesterday, Thursday, 17th September, 2020, and it considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2020 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Sub-Committee passed the Resolution on this matter. Copies of

the Sub-Committee’s Minutes, Resolution and Schedule have been circulated. Will the Hon. Minister of Public Works kindly now move the necessary motion?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I now move:

“That this Committee doth agree with the Business Sub-Committee in the said Resolution.”

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Committee of Supply has allocated five days for the consideration of the Estimates. Considerations will begin on Monday, 21st September, 2020 at 9.30 a.m. and will continue, thereafter, on Tuesday, 22nd September, 2020 at 10.00 a.m.; on Wednesday, 23rd September, 2020 at 9.30 a.m.; on Thursday, 24th September, 2020 at 10.00 a.m.; and on Friday, 25th September, 2020 at 9.30 a.m. Please note these start times very carefully.

Being the last day for the consideration of the Budget Estimates, this is in accordance with the Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee. Let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 9.30 a.m. on Monday, 21st September, 2020.”

[Prime Minister]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. Hon. Prime Minister, kindly move the motion.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the House stands adjourned to Monday, 21st September, 2020.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. The Assembly now stands adjourned to 9.30 a.m. on Monday. Hon. Members, thank you very much.

Adjourned accordingly at 8.56 p.m.