



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

OFFICIAL REPORT

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

80TH Sitting

Friday, 2ND February, 2024

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 10.20 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Final Day for Budget 2024

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, today is the final day for *Budget 2024*. I just want to give you some feedback. The feedback I have had has been exemplary for the House in how it has been conducting the people's business. This is from a lot of ordinary people. Congratulations, Hon. Members.

Birthday Greetings to former Clerk of the National Assembly, Mr. Frank Narain

Hon. Members, today, the former Clerk of the National Assembly, Mr. Frank Narain, celebrates his 92nd birthday. On your behalf and on behalf of our staff, happy birthday, Frank or Mr. Narain, because some people say I should not call persons by their first names in the House.

Visit by St. Stanislaus College

We will be welcoming a school today, the St. Stanislaus College. It is the school of President Ali. They are running late.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

Civil Aviation (Amendment) Bill – Bill No. 3/2024

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Civil Aviation Act 2018”.

[*Minister of Public Works*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Before we go into Committee, there is an observation which I should have raised yesterday. Too many persons are talking on their phones while the session is going on. That is a bit disrespectful. The volume of the telephones, please let them be on silent. There is *WhatsApp*.

Many of you text me rather than call and so I cannot see why you cannot do the same for those persons who are trying to reach you.

I see the Hon. Member, Ms. Philadelphia. I am giving you a lot of time. By the time I am ready for the suspension at lunch, I will be calling on you to make good on the comment you made with respect to the Hon. Minister of Education. The House will now resolve itself into Committee to continue consideration of the Estimates.

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024

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

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73.02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

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

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

Assembly resolved itself into Committee of Supply.

In Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: I invite the Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Manickchand, and her team to join us as we go through Agency 40, Ministry of Education.

An. Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*.

Mr. Chairman: You were talking to the image. Thank you, Hon. Members. Let me invite you to turn to pages 198 and 199.

Agency: 40 Ministry of Education

Current Expenditure

Programme: 401– Policy Development and Administration – \$2,452,132,000

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me just find these pages.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. McDonald: Under Programme 401, 2023, we have seen there...instead of having an increase in 2024, under line item 6111, Administrative, we are recognising that there is a decrease. We would be happy to have the Hon. Minister share with us the reason for the decrease.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Three members of staff have retired – the Registry Supervisor, the Accountant and the Chief Schools Welfare Officer – with salaries that amount to the reduction.

Ms. McDonald: Under line item 6116, Contracted employees, in 2023, there were 95 contracted employees. In 2024, there are 159. We are wondering whether the Hon. Minister would be kind enough to say why the huge increase and whether it would not be a good thing for us to have permanent staff rather than contracted staff.

Ms. Manickchand: I thank the Member for that question. We have 64 new appointments to serve the children of Guyana. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has always believed in giving people a choice, whether they want to be on the fixed establishment or as contracted employees, and we usually heed the request of persons. I am sure you too believe in giving people a choice and not forcing them into one type of employment or another.

Ms. McDonald: Could we have the Hon. Minister share with us the ranges of those employees who are now contracted?

Ms. Manickchand: We have three Accounts Clerks, 16 Clerks (General), 18 Field Monitors, three Typist/Clerks, two Cleaners, two Office Assistants, two Personnel Officers, one Co-ordinator of the Migrant Unit, one Data Processing Officer, one Deputy Chief Education Officer (DCEO), one Driver, one Engineer, one Chauffeur, one Chief Quality Assurance Officer, one Handyman, one Liaison Officer and one Administrative Officer.

Ms. McDonald: I thank the Minister for that. Under line item 6284, Other, we have seen that in 2023 there was a \$166,936,000, and in 2024 there is \$280,000,000. We are talking about millions here. Could the Hon. Minister say clearly to us what 'Other' comprises?

Ms. Manickchand: The country, Guyana, has a relationship with the World Bank that has produced great benefits for us, particularly our children, over the years. One of the recommendations to us, in which we find value, is that the Ministry of Education creates an Examinations Unit. That Examinations Unit is the place at which all matters related to examinations will be dealt. I am happy to say that we have done that. The moneys, which were spread across various lines ordinarily, are now concentrated in one place, hence the increase.

Ms. McDonald: Under line item 6291, National and Other Events, we have Other and then we have National and Other Events. Would the Hon. Minister be kind to say to us what Other entails? We understand National and Other Events, but we want to find out what this Other entails.

Ms. Manickchand: It is under this line item that we would do things such as hosting the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), when it chooses our beautiful Guyana as its destination for regional awards. It is the line item from which we would do national sports. We have a lusty

relationship with the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU), the teachers and the students across the country. It is the line item from which we would cater for things like International Women's Day when we celebrate the women in the Ministry – the backbone of education across this land. It is things like that.

Ms. McDonald: Line item 6301. We are talking here about education subvention and grants. Could the Hon. Minister clearly say to us the institutions that will benefit under this heading?

Ms. Manickchand: The Guyana Teachers' Union receives a benefit from the Government of Guyana every year to do union business and pay teachers and so on, when they have hardships and when they fall into hard times. I am sure they will be coming to you looking for some of that. It is for CXC subsidies and the National Accreditation Council (NAC). That is it. When teachers fall into hardships, Sir, the Government helps, through the union, with this subvention. I would invite teachers to visit their union for that help.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, let me quickly correct the Hon. Minister's inaccuracy. The moneys that you said ...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, let me just correct you. If you are going to correct the Minister for inaccuracy, you are imputing. If you have information that refutes, you can say that you have that and lay it over. If you are going to accuse the Minister of inaccuracies and you want to correct, I would not allow that.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I am guided, but we just want to note that the GTU does not pay moneys for hardships that fall under the line item that the Hon. Minister is talking about. We move on, Mr. Chairman, to line item 6114.

10.35 a.m.

In 2023, we recognised that there were 121 staff members, but in 2024, we have 99. If we are talking about expanding and we are talking about all the services we want to render, we would like to find out why there is this decrease.

Ms. Manickchand: Two reasons. We had 22 resignations and we had persons moving from this line item to line item 6116 – Contracted Employees. So, that catered for the increase that the Hon. Member asked about earlier. That is the answer, Sir.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Under line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings, for budget 2023 and the revised of 2023, \$39 million was spent. In 2024, there is an increase of 500,000. Can the Hon. Minister say if these maintenance are fixed or there are additional buildings that will be maintained?

Ms. Manickchand: Could the Hon. Member kindly ask me again?

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you. If you look at line item 6242, \$39 million was budgeted for 2023. It was used up. You budgeted \$39,500,000 for 2024. If you are maintaining something it should be fixed. I am asking if there is additional maintenance, or it is the same maintenance you did last year.

Ms. Manickchand: It is continuous maintenance. We have beautiful wooden buildings matching the architecture of the city of Georgetown. Every year, we have maintenance of floorboards, (*inaudible*) on the wall, a roof, and a ceiling. It is continuous maintenance.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I listened to the Hon. Minister keenly in her explanation for line item 6301, which caters for the Caribbean Examination Council, the Guyana Teachers' Union and the National Accreditation Council. The Minister was kind enough to say that the subvention to the Guyana Teachers' Union is \$5 million, was \$5 million last year and was \$5 million the year before also. She explained nicely, Sir, that it caters for teachers to seek help and to provide in times of hardship and so on. Sir, we have had a significant increase in our teaching population. Would the Minister explain why the sum has remained the same and state if there can be a consideration for an increase from that \$5 million to address the many concerns teachers may have? Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you for your interest in teachers. It matches ours. This is not the only place where we provide for teachers' welfare. In fact, a significant portion of teachers have asked us not to attach their welfare to the Guyana Teachers' Union because they are either not members or the benefits that they get are sporadic, absent or biased, and that has been publicly

said. So, this \$5 million is not the only thing we give to teachers. In fact, the Chief Education Officer published a letter, within last 48 hours, which detailed 28 actions taken over the last two years that are aimed specifically at improving the welfare of teachers. The teaching service in Guyana is over 13,000 teachers. The union does not enjoy the membership of 13,000 persons and their last election had under 4,000 persons present and voting. So, it may indicate to you why it is not a sensible plan to invest all that we have for teachers in one body whose leadership has come under question by its membership.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you may need to withdraw. Please.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was just going to ask.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, that last part. You have been going good so far. Good start. No? Minister, I asked you to withdraw the imputation in the last statement because we can identify the person. Remember that piece of legal principle I read a few days ago?

Ms. Manickchand: There has been public commentary on this matter, Sir, and I have not seen a refuting from the body about which I spoke. Out of respect for Your Honour, I will withdraw.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, please. I have seen in our Standing Orders, and I have before me even the British rules with respect to the particular issue we are dealing with, which I will read later on...

Ms. Manickchand: Withdrawn, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, because I would have asked that the Member provide the information and lay it over in this House. Mr. Chairman, we look at the same line item.

Ms. Manickchand: If that would clarify it, Sir, I would be happy to do that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, please.

Ms. McDonald: Please.

Mr. Chairman: To intervene when someone is speaking, you have to raise on a Point of Order, not just when you feel like talking. It is on a Point of Order, which I have been applying to everyone in this House and you are no exception. Hon. Member, Ms. McDonald.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Sir. Under Line item 6301 – Education Subventions and Grants, I recognise too that there is the Critchlow Labour College. Would the Minister be kind to share with us – because there is a sum allocated there for the Critchlow Labour College – whether the Critchlow Labour College will be receiving its subvention this year? If that is so, could we ask them to apply for the subvention that they did not get last year?

Ms. Manickchand: Wrong line item, Sir.

Programme: 401 – Policy Development and Administration – \$2,452,132,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 402 – Training and Development – \$2,774,721,000

Ms. McDonald: Under line item 6112 – Senior Technical, we have seen a huge increase from 48 in 2023 to 121 in 2024. Would the Minister be kind enough to elaborate on this for us?

Ms. Manickchand: I would be happy to elaborate, Sir. The PPP/C Government of Guyana has taken a position that the only way we can change output for the better at the various levels of education – nursery, primary, secondary as well as post-secondary – would be to train more teachers and to train them at a higher quality. Having undertaken that programme, we now have, for the first time in the history of our country, 99% of our teachers trained or in training. We have increased the number of teachers who are able to train from 500 to now an indefinite number, but what we usually see is 2,000 to 2,500 in training. This line caters for the increase of 73 staff, 65 Lecturer II and eight Senior Lecturers at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE). This is where they would be paid, and we are very happy with this programme.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, there is also a Standing Order with respect to where information is available. So, I think that is detailed in the T account on page 683. Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie.

Mr. Charlie: Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships). Hon. Minister, how are you utilising this year’s budgetary allocation to guarantee that children in the hinterland receive the benefit of trained teachers?

Ms. Manickchand: It is a very good question. I am happy that the Member of Parliament (MP) is representing the people whom he was sworn in here to represent. Hitherto this year, Mr. Chairman, we had 31 hinterland teachers being trained from Regions 1,7,8 and 9. We now have 1,011 teachers from Regions 1,7,8 and 9 being trained. That means that we will have more teachers in those regions and teachers of a higher quality in those regions, improving the individual teachers’ lives, the lives of each child in their classroom and their community and region as a whole. I hope that answered the MP’s question.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, we have seen again in 2023...Line item 6114 – Clerical and Office Support: 21 to 555. Could we ask the Minister to lay over that for us, please?

Ms. Manickchand: I think I heard the question to be who this caters for.

Mr. Chairman: Let me ask the Member to repeat.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, could we ask the Minister to lay over the persons who fall under this category and to kindly lay over the salary ratings for us?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, but I would be happy to also give a range and then I will lay it over afterwards.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: It is Typist Clerks, Data Processing Officers, Office Assistants, Clerk Generals, Receptionists and so on, but we would be happy to lay it over afterwards.

Ms. McDonald: Just a follow-up to that, Mr. Chairman. Could the Minister say to us whether these Data Clerks are going to be posted to schools, how many schools, and which regions? Thank you.

Ms. Manickchand: Under this programme, this is for CPCE. This is a particular programme, Sir. It is the developmental programme. I would be happy to tell the Hon. Member that it is our intention to have Data Processing Clerks at all schools. We are now implementing and rolling out the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which would be a game changer in our country's education system, and to do that we will need Data Processing Clerks across the country in every single school. We will be doing that shortly.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, under line item 6281 – Security Services, we have seen quite a jump there. Could the Minister indicate to us the security services, the security providers who will be providing the security services and where?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. All our contracts for security services are derived from public bids that we advertise in the newspapers for all the world to see, and that is how they are awarded. The companies are RK's Guyana Security Services, Hoosein's Security Service Incorporated and Atlas Security Service Incorporated.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. There is Hon. Mr. Mahipaul and then we have Mr. Cox after.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Just one question. I see under line item 6301 – Education Subventions and Grants, there is the subvention for Cyril Potter College of Education's stipend. I see a reduction to \$1.905 million from what was last year's \$2.379 million. Would the Hon. Minister please explain the reduction?

Ms. Manickchand: The reduction is because we are no longer paying \$12,000. Let me tell you how this is. When your party was in office, you paid \$12,000 to each teacher trainee per month. What we are paying now is \$104,000 to each teacher trainee per month and so they are being paid under a different line. but I could tell you which one. It is under employment costs in the salary. We could sit with you afterwards and show you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: That is ok.

Mr. Chairman: You are good. Hon. Member, Mr. Cox and then we have the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

10.50 a.m.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to the Hon. Minister of Education. Mr. Chairman, line item 6112 – Senior Technical. While we welcome the number of lecturers for the training of the Cyril Potter College of Education trainees, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister if she could tell us how many of these lecturers would service the training centre in Mabaruma, and probably, by extension, Region 1. Could she also state what are the qualifications of these lecturers within Region 1 to be specific? Remember, you said earlier that you want the best and, of course, you want to advance teacher training so that they could be experts in their fields.

Ms. Manickchand: That is a really good question. Thank you for it. The trainees from Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9, many of them are coming out to Turkeyen. Although we are wholly online, we are not solely online because we cannot reach people in some of the regions. These trainees are coming out to Turkeyen. In fact, they have begun to come out this week. They will benefit from the lecturers out here. Those who remain online or who can access the internet and stay online benefit from the same lecturers because we are now online.

Mr. Cox: Just a follow-up question. I am aware that some of those teachers are coming out to Georgetown this week. As a matter of fact, 11 of them are from the school at which I teach – the North West Secondary School. A large number, especially, those from the riverine communities, are not so fortunate to be coming to Georgetown to access directly so they will still be in the region. Again, for lecturers, how many will serve the Mabaruma centre so there can be equal access for those riverine teachers?

Ms. Manickchand: A total of 90 trainees are coming out from Region 1. They are on their way out. I do not have, at this point, exactly how many will be at the Mabaruma centre, unless Mr. Marti De Souza has it. I would be happy to lay that over to you today. We are also doing a hybrid thing where lecturers are going into regions so that both the local lecturers and students could benefit from the expertise of people who have been lecturing this category of persons for a long time. I could lay over for you today who might be going into Region 1. We would be able to do it today.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: A pleasant morning to you and the Members of this august Assembly.

Mr. Chairman: And to you too, my dear.

Ms. Ferguson: Welcome to the staff of the Ministry of Education. Mr. Chairman, I have a follow-up to line item 6281, Security Services. I heard the Hon. Member mention the three firms that are providing services to the Ministry. I think RK's Guyana Security Services and Hossein's Security Service Incorporated. I did not hear the other one. What I would like the Hon. Minister to provide this Committee of Supply with is the date on which Hossein's Security Service Incorporated was established. I know RK's Guyana Security Services has been around for a very long time. If she could provide us with that information, I would be more than grateful.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, we would be more than grateful.

Ms. Manickchand: Two things. It is Hossein's Security Service Incorporated, RK's Guyana Security Services and Atlas Security Service Incorporated. **[Ms. Ferguson: (Inaudible)]**

I do not know. You seem to know them better than me. We do not know when Hossein's Security Service Incorporated was established. I am looking at our procurement head to see if he knows that. He does not know when it was established.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, remember...

Ms. Manickchand: We could give that to you, but I am also saying, Hon. Member, that these awards were made pursuant to public tender. We went out and said, *hear ye, hear ye*, all the world, who wants to work with us as security, please tell us whether you can do this for what price. Then, the National Procurement and Tender Administration Broad (NPTAB) said that these were the most responsive people at the best prices, which is how it was done.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for her response, and I look forward to the promised information. Could the Hon. Member say whether the sums being sought will be sufficient and we would not see her coming back with a supplementary later in the year for additional sums because of a change in rates per hour or a change in the firm?

Ms. Manickchand: When we come here, we believe that it is sufficient, but I would say that the security of the Ministry's building and the security of schools should be given all that they need. If we have to come back, I am sure you would support it.

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Member provide to this Committee the contracted period for the security firms that are currently providing services at the Ministry of Education? Thank you.

Ms. Manickchand: It would be for one calendar year at this point.

Ms. Ferguson: One calendar year is not a period. If she says to me that it is from January, 2024 to January, 2025, that is a period. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister of Education, it seems that... and you ought to be the authority and the definition of a period.

Ms. Manickchand: I think my learned friend obviously has a reason she needs this information and just not to mislead this House, could I lay that over? I do not know if it is 1st February, 3rd February or midnight on the 4th. I do not know, but I could lay it over for you. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6302 – Training (Including Scholarships): Minister, you had indicated that the Ministry has seen a significant increase in trained teachers, which is indeed commendable. With regard to this very line item, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) has created a plethora of opportunities to enhance learning. Has the Ministry taken into consideration the use of AI in the school systems to help teachers better their craft in the education delivery and would this cater for that?

Ms. Manickchand: It is a beautiful question. I do not think that we could escape AI being integrated into education, given the direction and the trajectory of the world. How we do that to maximise results, even as we teach our children about plagiarism and how that would not inure their benefit, is something many of us are studying across the region. What we have done is expanded our Information and Communication Technology (ICT) access across schools. So, now all of our secondary schools have computer laboratories and most of our primary schools are outfitted with computer laboratories. We have more than 60% of our secondary schools with

smart classrooms, and we are moving to the point where we want to have smart schools where every classroom is connected. That is going to be a beautiful Guyana that will have to... We do not have to do it one or the other. We could do it simultaneously, as we study how we incorporate AI into education which is something we would be able to stop anyway. Given the trajectory of the world and AI, how do we build out the infrastructure so that people can use that constructively? That is the undertaking.

Mr. Figueira: I appreciate the response. The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) had presented many disadvantages but also advantages, especially in the education sector. More teachers were exposed to using Information Technology (IT) to teach, but the need for more training is still needed in the sector. So, would this line item also aid in regard to continuing the IT training for a wider cross section of teachers, not only at the secondary but as far as the nursery level?

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you very much. I did hear somewhere in the debate that someone stated, in a substantive part of their presentation, that we were not COVID-19 ready, were it to be something we had to face again. That is the furthest thing from the truth about the Guyana education system. In fact, we were the first country to get back to physical, face-to-face classrooms in the Caribbean. We were the first and remain the only country in the Caribbean that could deliver all of our lessons, from nursery to Grade 9, on a channel dedicated to education – the Guyana Learning Channel. We are the first and only country in the Caribbean that has a dedicated radio station for teaching and learning.

We were the best responding country in the Caribbean to something called ProFuturo. It is a Spanish programme where all of our teachers, 100% of our teachers, were offered training for free – well, free to them; it cost us some – in innovation and ICT. We are one of the few countries in this hemisphere that has all of our subjects in nursery, primary and up to Grade 9 as worksheets that are available online also. We have established a robust website where every parent, teacher and student has access to these items – all of the products that we have produced. We have written our own textbooks so that it is now cheaper for us to provide them. We have bought textbooks from persons who wrote locally and so we now have rights to reprint. I think Guyana, while we would never see the kind of shutdown we had in COVID, is easily the country in this part of the region that is best prepared for that kind of shutdown. That is never to say that we do not understand the value of a teacher in front of the classroom.

Now, do we need further training? What we learnt in 2020 was very different from the needs in 2021 and 2022. In 2020, we were not talking about AI. We are talking about AI now in 2024, with a rapidity that is mind boggling. So, there is always a need for continuous training and always need for upgrading our teachers, students and parents about what are the facilities available out there to make them competitive in the world and to make them able to access everything that is available to them on the world wide web. So, to answer you in one sentence, absolutely, there is a need for more training. To answer you again, this budget provides for that.

Mr. Figueira: My final question. Thank you very much for your very lengthy but informative response. In that very response, you mentioned Spanish, which has now become part of the national curriculum. With regard to training, would the Ministry take into consideration the geographical layout of the country with regard to our neighbours and the proximity of certain regions to those neighbouring countries? For example, Regions 10, 8 and 9 are closest to the south – Brazil. Even though we accept the advantages being bilingual offers, we would want the Ministry of Education to also take into consideration our geography. With the opening of the corridor, the people of Regions 10, 9 and 8 would be in a more advantageous position if they could speak Portuguese. Likewise, the people in Region 6 and closer to Suriname could benefit from understanding the language of the Dutch, and Regions 2 and 1, Spanish, which is already on the curriculum. Would this training give serious consideration to the geographical layout of the country, particularly in educating the students in another language closest to their bordering country? Thank you.

11.05 a.m.

Ms. Manickchand: Again, a useful contribution. Guyana started teaching... we wrote our own Portuguese book and curriculum somewhere around 2013, when I was in my previous iteration as Minister, and then we went to the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). So we started it first in this part of the region. We went to CXC and we asked them to make this a CXC/Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) subject, which they did. So we are not writing Portuguese as a subject and learning it across the secondary schools. It was something we noted for a long time. Students have a choice of Portuguese, Spanish, and French, in the academic setting and in each classroom, but we have also said very publicly – and we are going to launch that soon – that in addition to having strong academic performers, which we already

have, we want to see our children coming out more rounded at the secondary level. So we are going to put systems in place and we are doing that; the build-out is happening right now to make sure each child is exposed at least to one sport, one foreign language, one technical and vocational education and training (TVET) subject, one musical instrument, and a strong sense of volunteerism – at least one. They could do ten, they could do how many they want, and that is what we are trying to build-out across secondary schools. We have not limited that to Spanish; the exposure could be Japanese, it could be Mandarin, it could be Hindi, wherever we have teachers who can give the instruction.

It is true that we are training teachers across the country through EdYou FM – the sole radio station I was talking about – in Spanish. And we hope that 100% of our teachers would avail themselves of that training, but we are not limited to Spanish. I think the effort is to build out a population that has appreciation for being fluent in more than one language in this small village that we call the world.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chair, under Security Services we have recognised the risk that our teachers and our learners face every day, and we noticed that the security service allotment has been increased. Could the Minister be kind enough to lay over for us security services for schools by regions and the amount of security personnel that we are going to have in the schools?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, this House spent all of yesterday asking the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development questions on regions. It continues to be an error the Honourable Members of this House continue to make. The laws of Guyana provide for decentralisation of the education system. The consequence of that is that the Ministry of Education does not provide for the maintenance and upkeep of regional schools, does not provide for security of regional schools. Indeed, I sat in this House and heard many questions surrounding the security of regional schools yesterday, perhaps they can help the Hon. Member with understanding that better.

Ms. Veerasammy: Good morning, Mr. Chairman. A few days ago, in this House, there was the issue of untrained teachers being graduated. I would like the Minister to provide some clarity on

this because this information that is out there is misleading the public. We are sending our children to school...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I need you to cite a line item and to frame the question in terms of...

Ms. Veerasammy: Yes, I will do that, Sir. At line item 6302, I would like the Minister to provide some information to this honourable House on whether teachers are actually being graduated without being qualified.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Chairman, that is a live issue. The Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) is an institution of great repute. In fact, all over the Caribbean, all over the world you go, you could find Guyanese teachers who are *hailed up* for being excellent educators; and they come out of the Cyril Potter College of Education. So we have to be very careful when we fling around those kinds of disreputable statements that will bring all of our teachers into disrepute. I am advised by the Cyril Potter College of Education that we did not graduate any teacher who did not complete the course of study as recorded in their curriculum and in their requirements for graduation; but I do look forward to the list that the Hon. Member is going to provide later today of any, all, or even one such teacher, and we will take the action if there is any teacher who graduated without completing their course of study because we will not let the Cyril Potter College of Education suffer from anyone who graduates without having completed their course of study.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, security is indeed important and while we understand that our security has been decentralised because they are in the regions, we have a sum that is allotted under this heading here, and since the Minister is refusing to give this...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, please, I am not stopping you. You are using the word "refusing". She answered the question so you cannot say she refused.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, I asked a question and I asked that the Hon. Minister layover that information for us. This is showing that there is no unity amongst the sectors, and permit me to say that, because if we cannot get some information laid over then something is wrong. Whether it has been argued yesterday, there is a sum that is allotted here, today, and I do not

understand why the Minister cannot lay over for us. But I am hoping... I know that all of Guyana...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you asked a question with respect to the allocation in relation to the regions. The Minister answered it. I gave you an opportunity to go back to the head to formulate another question specific to this allocation. If you do not have that, I will give the Minister an opportunity to comment on your comment.

Ms. Manickchand: This line item, Mr. Chairman, does not cater for schools; it caters for the National Center of Educational Resources Development (NCERD) and it caters for CPCE; this is a different programme. Perhaps the Member would benefit from some training on how to read the budget, Sir.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, while we understand that the security services... If the Minister had answered the question earlier when it was asked by my colleague, then there would have been no follow up on that question. Mr. Chairman, we move to line item 6292, Dietary, and I recognised that there were some comments that someone needed to stop spending a lot of money on dietary. But here we recognised that under Dietary we have moved from \$191 million to \$215 million. Could the Minister say to us what this dietary entails?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. We are very happy, let me be very clear, unapologetically so. We are very happy to increase money to feed the hinterland students who are coming out to stay at the dormitories (dorms) here for training at the Cyril Potter College of Education. There is no reduction, there is an increase of \$23 million. These are meals for our hinterland teachers who are coming out to be trained because we love training teachers of the hinterland and feeding them well in our new CPCE dorms which have been recently rehabilitated.

Ms. Fernandes: Through you, Sir, and this is a follow-up on the response for line item 6302 with training. I did note the Hon. Minister saying that we have, currently, 90 teachers traveling out to be trained and so forth from Region 1, and I note that the Hon. Mr. Charlie was asking about the other hinterland regions as well. My question to you Hon. Minister is, whilst these teachers are out training what is the operating system at the schools within the regions? I asked specifically because of the situation in 2023 with students being left unattended. Has there been

any revised guidelines from the Ministry put forward to the school so that when teachers are out training the students are not left unattended?

Ms. Manickchand: It is a question we are struggling with. Here is the thing: There has been such a dearth of training hinterland teachers, like I said – 30 in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 in 2019 versus 1,011 now – that if we were to apportion and give quotas about who could come out, the place that most needs trained teachers, which is the hinterland, would be the place that suffers the most because they have the most untrained teachers.

The battle philosophically at the central ministry is, do we continue to leave untrained teachers in the classroom as babysitters – because I know what you are talking about – or do we bring them out, train them and send them back in? When do we *bite the bullet*? How much of this bullet should we bite? That is a question we are also grappling with. It would have helped if more teachers had come out and been trained even in small batches. We have entire schools which have staff of 100% of the teachers untrained. Now, which one of those do I say, ‘you cannot come this year, you should come, or you should not come?’ We are looking at devising ways. We have some schools in the Barama River that if we were to bring out all of the untrained teachers, it is everyone coming out. So how do we provide education for them in the meanwhile while these teachers train? What is the balance? Is it better to have two years of untrained teachers, because they came out to train, of the entire school coming out to train, or one teacher coming out? What would be the value of that one teacher going back in and how long would we take to see the results of training?

I think at this point we are leaning on the side of *biting the bullet* and training everyone, everyone, so that we start seeing results. And we speak of results, numbers, and percentages, but it is really lives we are changing. If a child is in first form, primary top, because those places do not have secondary schools, which is why we need to build secondary schools, you do not have a single trained teacher in your classroom. If we just do it slowly, they will finish high school and very likely not have a single trained teacher in the classroom. If we *bite the bullet* now and train everyone in two years, when they are in third form they have all the teachers in that classroom trained. So those are some of the balances we have to struggle with.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you for the response, Hon. Minister. Through you again, Mr. Chair, has there been any consideration at the level of the Ministry...? And I want to just go back. We did have a system in place coming out of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic with the complete closure of schools; we did have a system in place in which students went to school like three days per week and so forth. I am asking then, has there been consideration for these schools so that we do not have unsupervised children in the school, because it is a really dangerous situation, and if not that, was there consideration to hire temporary teachers or to make provisions even for volunteers to go into the school just so that we do not have classrooms with unsupervised children in that dangerous setting?

Ms. Manickchand: No, no. I probably did not articulate that well enough to make you comfortable. Anywhere we bring teachers out for the whole school, we are putting staff in; they are not trained teachers. So we are not leaving children unsupervised. But I thought you were making the distinction between bringing out teachers to train while we leave untrained teachers in the classroom. There are two scenarios here. We are bringing out teachers to train, and I told you we are leaning on that side. I thought you meant we are leaving untrained teachers in the classroom; that would be true, but it is untrained people in the classroom. We are not leaving the classrooms unsupervised.

11.20 a.m.

In some cases, the people who are in the classrooms do not have the eligibility criteria right now to enter the College. In that case, we are upgrading and upskilling so that by the time the newly trained teachers go in they will be ready to come out. To be clear, Hon. Member, it is not our intention to leave a single child unsupervised in any classroom because of this training. That will be counterproductive to the plan.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you for that response. I know, particularly, that the Bartica Secondary School will be very happy to hear this, given that last year, they had almost 20 teachers absent because of that. Hon. Minister, on the same line item, could you say what is the policy right now as it pertains to these newly trained teachers – whether they have to reapply to be teachers and in the interim how are they paid?

Ms. Manickchand: No, Hon. Member. We need to be a little bit clearer at the Ministry. You are going to see us doing that over the next couple of days. Teachers are in the system as Temporary Qualified Masters/Mistresses (TQMs) and Temporary Unqualified Masters/Mistresses (TUMs) and they are getting a salary. There is no cessation of the salary when they are trained. What we do is, when they are trained, they have to upgrade to a trained, qualified Mistress or Master and their salary is upgraded. That process used to take long when it was 200 teachers. We are now giving the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) and the School Boards Secretariat 2,000 teachers, and they have not yet grappled with how to do that quickly. We have to change that, and we will do that shortly. The salary does not stop; the upgrade is what takes a little bit longer. It should not, so we have to fix that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I have Ms. Veerasammy holding.

Mr. Mahipaul: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, do you have a problem with me giving someone the floor?

Mr. Mahipaul: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: The Standing Order states, question period. It does not state, question period for one side of the Committee; it is for all Members of the Committee. If you have an objection, you can bring a motion and we can debate it – that the Government has no authority to ask questions during this period. Go ahead, Hon. Member Ms. Veerasammy.

Ms. Veerasammy: Education is very, very important to me; I must clarify that. In my time when I passed the Common Entrance Examination there was no school available for me although I had a qualifying mark. When my mother, who did not know to read and write, started running behind the education system, way back in the 1970s, what happened is that they put me in a school way on the East Coast and my family could not afford to send me to the school so far away. So, when we come here and ask questions all we are doing is seeking clarity. I am fully aware that our Government is doing a lot to improve the lives and working conditions of teachers.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I need you to point me to a line item and ask the question.

Ms. Veerasammy: I am sorry; it is line item 6301, Education Subventions and Grants. I would like the Hon. Minister to tell this Committee what provisions are made under this line item for schools to be given cash grants and how that is being dispersed.

Ms. Manickchand: It is not under this line item, but I will be happy to answer it.

Mr. Chairman: No, we have to be consistent. If it is not here...

Ms. Manickchand: It is not here, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: ...direct the Hon. Members to learn the budget process and wait to ask a question. Hon. Member Ms. Veerasammy, you have another question – you said. Hon. Member Ms. Maureen Philadelphia, you have the floor.

Ms. Philadelphia: Thank you, Chair. Good morning once again. Line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships): I recognise that there are social issues at our secondary schools. I am also aware that the welfare department may not be that staffed in order to take care of all of these. I am asking if any consideration is given to this sum to have more guidance counsellors so that every secondary school will have them attached to the institutions.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, is this catered for under this line item?

Ms. Manickchand: It is the wrong line item again, Sir. But it is our policy that we will have Guidance and Counselling Officers in every single secondary school. Right now, we are having these at 86 of our 116 secondary schools for the first time in the country. Where we do not have Guidance and Counselling Officers is because there is none available in that part of the country who can go into the schools and do that kind of work. But this is not the line item for it.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I know that we are at education and training. We had five budgets in this Committee, even for the first timers. This is the fifth budget, we had four. I am very perturbed with people manufacturing questions on their feet. Prepare for your questions because if you do not prepare, then you are going to prepare to fail and get yourself embarrassed. Hon. Member Ms. McDonald, you have the floor.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, under line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, I did request of the Minister because I noticed for the

Critchlow Labour College there is a sum stated of \$15,500,000. Would it be appropriate for the Critchlow Labour College to apply for that sum this year? If that is so, is the sum for last year that was slated in the budget still available for it?

Ms. Manickchand: That is the wrong line item.

Mr. Chairman: There is some information on page 471, too.

Ms. Manickchand: It is the wrong line item, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Is this the wrong line item again?

Ms. Manickchand: It is the wrong line item.

Mr. Chairman: I got you; ditto. Hon. Members, clearly, we have exhausted the questions under this head that people prepared for. I am putting the question.

Programme: 402 – Training and Development – \$2,774,721,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 403 – Nursery Education – \$4,881,254,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. McDonald, we are at Programme 403, Nursery Education.

Hon. Members: *(Inaudible)*

Hon. Members, please give way to the Hon. Member Ms. McDonald who has prepared properly for this session.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Sir. We are under line item 6111, Administrative. We recognise that in 2023 there were 88 persons and in 2024 we have a decrease to 85. Could the Minister state whether this decrease was by resignation, death or otherwise?

Ms. Manickchand: The decrease is due to the retirement and transfers of three staff which includes two Graduate Headmasters/Mistresses and a transferred Graduate Senior Assistant Master/Mistress (GSAM).

Ms. McDonald: Sir, under line item 6113, Other Technical and Craft Skilled, we recognise that there has been a huge increase from 66 to 87. Would the Minister be kind enough to lay that over for us.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, your kindness is required.

Ms. Manickchand: Well, not the names. Is the Hon. Member asking for the names of the 21 new, trained, qualified Mistresses whom we have employed?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, but we have a principle on naming people.

Ms. Manickchand: So, should I not do it, or do it?

Mr. Chairman: Do not do it.

Ms. Manickchand: That is all right.

Ms. McDonald: We just asked that you lay that over.

Ms. Manickchand: Lay what over? It is 21 new appointments. If I cannot lay over the names, then I will be giving you a page that states, 21 new appointments.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. McDonald, do you have another question?

Ms. McDonald: At line item 6291, National and Other Events, could the Minister indicate what those national and other events would entail under Nursery Education.

Ms. Manickchand: This is for Mashramani, Education Month, Independence Day, World Teachers' Day, Amerindian Heritage Month and Agriculture Month. This is for the celebration of those events.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chair, could the Minister say to us if we are going to have separate events for nursery and primary, especially for World Teachers' Day, or is it going to be a combined effort?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, this country benefits from programme budgeting. It does not mean that it is for separate events; it means that it appears on a separate page in the budget book. It is accounted for under a different line item. The nursery and primary schools in the same compound could have the same event, but it is catered for budgetarily under another programme. Perhaps some training from your end would help the Hon. Member.

Ms. McDonald: We would be happy for the Minister to be one of the facilitators at that training. If we look under line item 6115, Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled, we moved from 7 to 38. Could the Minister share with us this huge jump, why and where they are going to be?

Ms. Manickchand: The University of Guyana (UG) has established an Early Childhood Centre of Excellence (ECCE). It is supposed to be the model for how we teach and how we perfect our methodologies to our changing nursery population. We hired 31 Teacher Aides who are attached to that programme, and this is where they are catered for.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Madam Minister. Again, we see for contracted employees we are moving from 90 to 110. Could the Minister share this with us?

Ms. Manickchand: I am happy to, Your Honour. Twenty newly appointed Sweeper/Cleaners will be catered for under this line item. They have chosen contractual employment so that they could get their gratuities and pensions upfront.

Ms. McDonald: I am happy that the Minister is saying to us that Sweeper/Cleaners are some of the persons who are going to be employed. I am hoping that we will have Sweeper/Cleaners in every school, and we would not have teachers sweeping schools. Mr. Chair, I am under line item 6292, Dietary, but I will forego that question. I will forego that one.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, if I can turn the Committee's attention to line item 6243, Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies: Hon. Member, for 2022 we had a budgeted sum of \$14.5 million. Then there is a revised sum of some \$34.15 million. So, could you explain the reason for the increase, the revised amount in 2023? In 2024, you have a minute figure here of \$1.182 million. Do you think that this \$1.182 million is sufficient for 2024?

11.35 a.m.

Ms. Manickchand: Absolutely not; it is not sufficient. What happened is, before we catered for a centralised distribution of janitorial and cleaning supplies and so on. Centrally, we bought the Dettol, the bleach, the soap powder and so on. The teachers said to us that that was not satisfactory. They wanted some say in what they purchased, in what quantity, what brands, and so on. They wanted some autonomy in how they prepare their classrooms – chalks, cardboard, teaching aids, staple machines, paste/glue, scissors, and so on. What we decided to do for our teachers was to give them a grant to purchase their own materials. Before janitorial was here, it is now under the school grant, so that is why there is a reduction here and an increase in the school grant line. It is under line item 6301.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, do you have a follow-up? No. Hon. Member Ms. Mc Donald.

Ms. McDonald: Sir, under line item 6224, Print and Non-Print Materials, we recognise that in 2024 there has been an increase. Could the Minister share with us the reason for this?

Ms. Manickchand: There is no decrease here, Sir. Did the Hon. Member say line item 6224? There is no decrease here, Sir.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chair, there has been an increase there. Could the Minister share with us what this increase entails and where are we going to have these increases?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, for the princely increase of \$379,000, what is that for?

Ms. Manickchand: It is for workbooks for the early childhood learners.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chair, on workbooks for early learners, could the Minister state for us whether these have been equally distributed across the schools or are we going to have some in this region, some in that region, and then another region will have just a few?

Ms. Manickchand: The effort is to have a distribution system that is managed efficiently to make sure there is equity and equality. We are dealing with human beings and sometimes there are errors in that regard. But what happened with the early childhood learners is that we discovered that private schools were using programmes like *Abeka* and *Jolly Phonics* and getting remarkable success in areas of literacy and numeracy. At that time, the country, circa 2013,

could not have afforded *Abeka* and *Jolly Phonics*. At that time, *Jolly Phonics* was about \$56,000. I know that because I priced it at *Austins Book Services*. What we did was what we do in the PPP/C, we innovate it. We sat down and we wrote our own reader and workbook called the *Rorima Readers*. We have a reader, we have a workbook, and we are seeing remarkable successes from those. It is those books that we will be buying, complemented by other books recommended by experts, to distribute across the regions. We do not give one region over and above another. We try very hard to make sure that every region gets the same thing. If there are errors, we would be happy to receive where there are shortages, and we have asked schools for those, and we will meet those shortages. If the Hon. Member finds out in her walkabouts that any school does not have something, she should get that information to us, and we would be happy to replenish.

Ms. McDonald: Chair, of course, we would be happy to help as we have been doing all along. Line item 6283, which deals with Cleaning and Extermination Services: We have seen a decrease in 2024. Is this an indication that we no longer need to have cleaning and extermination services being done in schools or other educational facilities?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, there is no decrease here.

Ms. McDonald: Line item 6283.

Mr. Chairman: Clearly...

Ms. Manickchand: There is no decrease here, sir.

Ms. McDonald: We had two line items cited, line items 6283 and 6284. When I checked my page, unless we are having a 'Mahipaul moment', it states increases in both. Is that right?

Ms. Manickchand: On neither line item is there a decrease, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, that is what I am saying. Hon. Member Ms. McDonald, I think we are now manufacturing questions. So let us put the question.

Programme: 403 – Nursery Education – \$4,881,254,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I feel embarrassed with some of the questions, personally.

Programme: 404 – Primary Education – \$14,471,119,000

Ms. McDonald: Sir, I am sorry for misleading the House, but I had turned the page to primary...

Mr. Chairman: No, no, I do not think you are misleading.

Ms. McDonald: No, no, I am sorry because I am looking at \$96 million under cleaning...

Mr. Chairman: Challenges with our glasses, it happens...

Ms. McDonald: No, no, Sir. Sorry that I misled the Committee. I was looking at line item 6283 under Primary where we have \$96 million and \$93 million. That was...

Mr. Chairman: We are now at Primary Education.

Ms. McDonald: We are now at Primary Education. That is what I am saying, I am sorry that I misled the Committee there.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for the apology.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chair, I will ask the same question. Why do we have a decrease on the line item 6283, Primary Education?

Ms. Manickchand: There is a decrease by \$3 million, Sir. We believe this is going to work for the cleaning and extermination. It is a \$3 million decrease, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. McDonald: Sir, we are just trying to find out why we are having that decrease of \$3 million because we are dealing here with cleaning and extermination services. Why are we having that decrease, is it that we do not have much cleaning to do?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, there is an increase in budget but a decrease in how much we have spent. This is cleaning and extermination. With giving schools grants, we suspect, we hope, that many of these things that we had to 'grandfather in' will allow schools some autonomy to do these things in their time, at their speed, to their quality; so we believe this is going to do it. It is a reduction of \$3 million; we do not believe it is going to hurt us. That is the explanation.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chair, I would suspect that we are manufacturing some answers now. Under line item 6111, we have seen a huge leap there from 261 in the Administrative to 286. Would the Minister be kind to share with us that increase?

Ms. Manickchand: We have had 25 promotions and upgrades, which includes four Senior Assistant Masters/Mistresses (SAMS), four Deputy Heads, one Graduate SAM, one Head, and 14 GSAMs.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chair, we have also recognised that under line item 6112, Senior Technical, there has been a decrease from 298 to 240. Could the Minister be kind enough to state the positions that we no longer have there and why are we having the decreases?

Ms. Manickchand: Happily, Sir. There are 58 transfers and that would account for the decrease.

Ms. McDonald: Sir, the transfers that we are having, could the Minister state for us what are the categories that we have had those transfers in?

Ms. Manickchand: I think I should have been clearer, transfers to promotion. These are 58 Guyanese who are doing better professionally and in their pockets. They are six trained Graduate Masters and Mistresses, 33 Assistant Masters/Mistresses, two trained Graduate Masters/Mistresses, four Assistant Masters/Mistresses, and 13 Assistant Masters/Mistresses who used to be under line item 6111.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, may I turn the Committee's attention to line item 6222, Field Materials and Supplies. We had an appropriation of \$123 million for 2023. I noted that the Ministry came back for a supplementary provision of \$345 plus million. If we are to look in the Revised column of 2023, we are seeing here \$468,068,000. Perhaps the Hon. Member can explain to the Committee where the difference came from, the variation between the sum that was actually approved by way of supplementary and the Revised column for that period 2023. Thank you.

Ms. Manickchand: You answered it yourself. You said it was supplemental, but let me take you through this again. Historically, teachers have been saying to us that, 'we are not getting enough material to clean, to print, to decorate our classrooms to teach, we would like more from you', whether 'you' be the regional administration or central Government. Last year, we came for a

supplemental that went under specific lines – nursery, primary, secondary, janitorial, print and non-print, and those kinds of things. We give them to the schools so that teachers can have the materials they sought as well as be relieved in their pockets from spending on our children. What teachers have said to us is that it did not work out the way we intended last year because some school administrations did not give the teachers, some of them did not allow them to buy what they wanted, and so on. So this year we are doing it differently. We are giving the school a sum for the school, and we are giving each teacher what amount is for her as per the number of children in her classroom to determine by herself what is it that she wants. Of course, with parameters about what can be bought. What you see as a reduction here, you will see an increase in line item 6301 because it has been done under Subventions and Grants.

You will remember one of the complaints last year was that we gave a teacher this money, and I see someone clipped out a piece of what I said and misused that to say that I said teachers had this in their pockets. What I said, and which I continue to say, is if teachers do not have to come out of pocket to buy chalk, cardboard, and markers, then they have more disposable income from their salaries and other earnings in their pockets because they did not have to spend on teaching materials. What we are doing this year is putting it under Subventions and Grants so that teachers have more latitude in what they can buy, and they are not limited by the things that can be bought under these lines.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I respect the Hon. Member's comment, but I think she veered off a bit because my question does not surround the decrease for 2024. Hon. Member, what I am saying is that in 2023 we approved \$123 million; you came back by way of supplementary for \$345 million plus, but what I noted in the Revised column, for 2023, \$468 million was actually spent as against what was approved by way of supplementary provision. Could you explain where the difference came between the 365 and the 468? That is what I want, Hon. Member. I am not questioning the request for 2024.

11.50 a.m.

Ms. Manickchand: The 345 was the supplemental. The 123 was the budget. When we add 345 to 123, we get the 468 that is in the Revised Budget there that we spent.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Philadelphia, did you have a question earlier? I saw your microphone came on and off.

Ms. Philadelphia: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, that was under Nursery Education.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry.

Ms. McDonald: Line item 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure: Could the Minister share with us the sums that are there and the huge jump that is there?

Ms. Manickchand: This would be for weeding and cleaning at primary schools in the Georgetown district. We have 28 primary schools in the Georgetown district. I could list them.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you.

Ms. Manickchand: The primary schools are Enterprise Primary, Smith Memorial, Sophia, St Stephens, West Ruimveldt, Thomas Moores, St. Angela's, Comenius, St. Sidwells, Ketley, Grahams Hall, St Pius, Stella, Maris, Agricola, Bel Air, J. E. Burnham, Redeemer, South Ruimveldt, Tucville, St. Ambrose, St. Gabriel's, Winfer Gardens, St Margarets, F. E. Pollard, Dharmic Rama Krishna, North Georgetown, St. Annes, David Rose Special School and St. Agnes would be 28 schools.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Hon. Minister, for going all the way down rather than laying that over for us. Mr. Chairman, we would want to ask under the 6242, Maintenance of Buildings, Could the Minister clearly say to us which are the buildings we are referring to?

Ms. Manickchand: It would be the maintenance of those buildings or those schools that I just called. I did not list them to waste time; I was asked to list them by the Hon. Member.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I hope that while we are looking at the maintenance of the buildings in Georgetown, the Minister would also collaborate with our colleagues to ensure that we do not have another Saint John the Baptist that we had in Bartica just over a couple of days. I have no other questions, Mr. Chairman.

Programme: 404 – Primary Education – \$14,471,119,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, just for my clarity, once you press the button, I will notice you. I did forget Ms. Philadelphia on the Nursery Education part. You did capture my attention. I may miss one or two. Time management – right now, we just have two minutes remaining on the original allocation for education of one and a half hours. There were 55 minutes saved last evening and the Opposition Chief Whip has been consulting with me. He will allocate 30 minutes of that 55 more to education. You will have 32 minutes to complete the whole section. I will take a break at 12.10 p.m. where the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, will continue the session until we finish education. That will be finished at around 12.28 p.m.

Programme: 405 – Secondary Education - \$11,180,239,000

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, we have seen on the staffing details that we have some increases on the staffing under administrative, senior technical, other technical and skilled craft and semi-skilled and unskilled. Could the Minister layover for us, please?

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, you would have to guide us here. We have about 46. If I were to lay over they would not be names. If we are complying with the order or the practise not to do names.

Ms. McDonald: Categories we are asking for. We asked for categories, Madam Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, Sir. We would be happy to layover the 46 Temporary Qualified Master (TQM).

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. We really have to go paperless sooner rather than later.

Ms. Manickchand: I agree.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Sir. Under the heading 6291, National and Other Events, I guess we will hear the same things again. We have seen some increases there and so we will be happy for the Minister to share with us national and other events on this segment.

Ms. Manickchand: This is an increase by \$337,000 but I would be happy to do it. Costume competition, Steam Fair, Education Month activities, the JOF Haynes Debating Competition, World Teachers Day and along those lines.

Mr. Mahipaul: Line item 6301 – Education Subventions and Grants: I have noticed... It has been like this for quite a number of years. – ...the inclusion of Presidents College and Queens College in this sum for subvention. I know that we have a number of secondary schools or several secondary schools across our country which are all performing exceptionally well. Could the Hon. Minister explain why is it that Presidents College and Queens College are the only two secondary schools considered here for subvention?

Ms. Manickchand: When Presidents College came about, Sir, there was the *President's College Act*, which is a law in our country. It caters for some sort of autonomous management, which we know happened. Then, the other schools that were ran by board started rising because there is a benefit of schools being run by boards. In fact, we wanted all our secondary schools to be board schools. Historically, those two schools, I think Queens College might have been the first board school to come on and benefit from this subvention and we never did anymore and I say “we” very loosely, transcending ministers and governments. The schools themselves would tell you, for example, Queens College, this subvention really only pays their salaries. We do not pay their salaries. They have to get everything they need out from that subvention. The benefit of giving a subvention is in question now about whether the autonomy that was expected from it has been achieved. There are some schools who would argue that it is a no.

Ms. McDonald: Under line item 6255, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, could the Minister share with us the schools that would fall under that item?

Ms. Manickchand: That would be 33 secondary schools and five practical instruction centres namely, Cummings... Do you want me to lay it over?

Ms. McDonald: I will be happy to have you lay it over. Thank you so much.

Ms. Manickchand: I will be happy to lay it over.

Programme: 405 – Secondary Education – \$11,180,239,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 406 – Post – Secondary/Tertiary Education – \$6,140,866,000

Programme: 406 – Post – Secondary/Tertiary Education – \$6,140,866,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 401 – Policy Development and Administration – \$5,519,060,000

Ms. McDonald: Sir, under project code 1215000 – Administrative Buildings: We are seeing provisions for administrative buildings. Could the Minister share with us the administrative buildings we are referring to?

Ms. Manickchand: The three are *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation* (UNESCO), the Book Distribution Unit and the Ministry of Education (MOE) Annex.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, we are looking at project code 2610200 and it talks about Technical Assistance, provision for education sector reform initiatives. Could the Minister share with this Committee?

Ms. Manickchand: What is the project correct, Sir? We did not hear that. I do not think it was given.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, I did share the project code. It is project code 2610200, Furniture and Equipment.

Mr. Chairman: It states: Technical Assistance, education sector and allocation of \$820 million.

Ms. Manickchand: I am happy to say that Guyana is now a director on the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), I have the great privilege of serving on that Board too and for our children globally of course.

Mr. Chairman: Congratulations.

Ms. Manickchand: This is a grant from the GPE. We have benefited repeatedly from this partnership with the Global Partnership for Education. This is a grant for various consultancies and technical assistance across the sector.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, project code 2607100 –Furniture and Equipment: Could the Minister say to us what are some of these equipment we are talking about? Could the Minister indicate where are these equipment going to be distributed.

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, please. This would be the Management Information System Unit (MISU), that is our computer department; the Deputy Permanent Secretary (DPS) Department; the Education's Expenditure Planning Management Unit (EPMU), the hinterland education department; procurement office; national accreditation office; exams; school support; and breakfast programme.

[Mr. Chairman left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj assumed the Chair.]

12.05 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if I am to take the Committee's attention back to project code 1215000, Administrative Buildings, Mdm. Minister I note we have \$40.6 million to be expended for this year. Earlier in your response to my Colleague, you made mention about the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) building and I think another building that I cannot recall at this moment. Would you be kind enough to provide us with a disaggregation from this \$40 million to take care of the projects you intend to do under this particular project code?

Ms. Manickchand: We are extending the bond at the Book Distribution Unit (BDU). We are buying so many books for the benefit of our children right now that we do not have space to put them. They are coming in so quick and we cannot get them out fast enough so we have to actually extend this. We want to make sure we could replenish anytime a book is needed, so we have to get storage space and that is for \$23 million. The disaggregation is construction of a concrete walkway at the BDU for \$3 million, construction of a parking area at BDU for \$2 million, the UNESCO building at \$5 million, the Ministry's Annex \$1.8 million and then the upgrading of a power distribution system at lot 21 Brickdam for \$5.6 million.

Ms. McDonald: Going again to Furniture and Equipment, I am not sure if I heard the Minister listed schools under that one but Mdm. Minister would you be kind to repeat whether you listed schools under that one? Were schools listed there?

Ms. Manickchand: I am happy to help you Madam. There are no schools under this line or programme.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, a follow-up to this one. With regard to furniture and equipment, we heard of the furnishing that you are going to be having. Could you layover for us the schools that are going to benefit under this one and whether schools will benefit or not?

Ms. Manickchand: I said just now that there are no schools under this programme. Perhaps the Hon. Members of the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) could help the Hon. Member. We keep saying the same thing. There are no schools under this programme.

Ms. McDonald: We have no further questions under this one.

Mr. Seeraj: I think I see the Hon. Member, Ms. Philadelphia. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Philadelphia: Minister, Nursery Education, project code 1215300: "Provisions for schools and educational facilities."

It is not a question but I am making a proposal if I can. With regard to East Street Nursery School, from the road to the school is a long stretch. There is no facility there for shade. I am asking if I can, that some provision be made to create a shed there so our babies can have a place to shade.

Ms. Manickchand: I will give the same answer I gave twice. This is the wrong project code. Schools do not come under this project code, but I will take what you said into consideration. This is the wrong project code. We are being viewed on the worldwide web (WWW) you know. The least we can do is be a little better at our...

Programme: 401 – Policy Development and Administration – \$5,519,060,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 402 – Training and Development – \$239,856,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I turn your attention to project code 1215100 – Administrative Buildings: it states:

“Provision for upgrading of facilities, furniture, equipment and payment of retention.”

I am guided here that it is also catering for the completion of a kitchen and dormitory. Is this within the same complex of this teacher’s training complex that you are constructing a kitchen and a dormitory? Also, when you say payment of retention, is it payment for retention of projects that have been completed within this complex or projects to be completed within this complex?

Ms. Manickchand: This is a spanking new kitchen for the many trainees at the Cyril Potter College (CPC). I went myself. I was very pleased with the progress and it is now I am told completed. This is retention for projects completed. We rebuilt and rehabilitated the entire upstairs and downstairs of the female dorm.

Mr. Mahipaul: For my own clarity, there are a series of or several contracts for the completion of this complex.

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, a kitchen and the female dorms.

Mr. Mahipaul: The kitchen and the female dorms are two contracts and the total sum for this project is \$204,066,000. I also see rehabilitation of internal drainage network. I am wondering if that falls within the same contract for this kitchen and dormitory.

Ms. Manickchand: No, Sir. This is a new contract. That would be a new contract.

Mr. Mahipaul: Does the sum cater for multiple contracts?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, multiple.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister say to us the contracting firm that is associated with the various contracts in this sum of money and the start date for the projects within the complex? If I am guided correctly, it is one complex but there are multiple contracts for multiple projects within this one complex.

Ms. Manickchand: The rehabilitation of the internal drainage has not been awarded as yet. It would go to public tender. I heard you say multiple contracts for one complex. They are distinctly different jobs that went to public tender also. There is no splitting of anything here.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am well guided. The complex is the entire place. In this complex, one would have a building for a kitchen, one would have another building which is the dormitory, one would have of course the internal drain and the network for the complex to be drained properly and then one would also have to provide furniture and equipment for the various buildings within the complex. For ease of reference, I will say that the University of Guyana is a complex but it has multiple buildings. These different contracts for these different constructions within that complex must have a start date, a finish date and a contracted sum. For example, the kitchen, who is the contracting firm, what is the contracted sum, start date and finish date? If the Hon. Minister is kind enough to lay over the details surrounding it, that will be greatly appreciated.

Ms. Manickchand: The contracting firm is Dijiris Engineering and Construction – D-I-J-I-R-I-S – for the kitchen. The start date is from September, 2023 to December, 2023. For the rehabilitation of the female dormitory, it is Mohabir’s Construction. The start date is from December, 2023, to February, 2024. For the walkway and science laboratory it is VB Elite. The start date is from September, 2023, to December, 2023.

Mr. Mahipaul: What is the contract sum?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. For the kitchen it is \$7.715 million, for the walkway and the laboratory it is \$3,756,600 and for the dormitory it is \$31,003,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: For the dormitory, could the Hon. Minister say if the specifications will be in keeping with the standards that the Government have now accepted for school dormitories across the country? This is if the dormitory that caters for teachers will also have the same consideration in terms of fire prevention, equipment and all the other aspects surrounding protection of our lives.

Ms. Manickchand: This dormitory cannot be measured against the report and the recommendation for school dormitories because there are different requirements. For example, these are adults. They do not need a dorm parent and there would be no dorm parent. After we

finish this dormitory, we are going to invite the Guyana Fire Service to come in and make sure the fire fighting, fire prevention and alarm system are in place to its liking because we have to put them in place. [An Hon Member: Ow Mr. Mahipaul.] Yes. We are trying to change the culture in the country and one we all live with right now to make sure that when we are planning buildings, they do cater at an international standard for both fire prevention warning and fighting equipment and tools.

Mr. Mahipaul: I had no intention of rising again but I heard a heckle about ‘Ow Mahipaul’ when the Hon. Minister said that these are adults and they do not necessarily need dorm parents. May I say to the Hon. Minister, with your gracious permission Sir, that the dorm parent is not only intended to supervise the occupants, but also to ensure the premises is being protected and not destroyed. That is why there are dorm parents for adult students at the University of Guyana in the Dennis Irvine Hall of Residence, the New Building Society (NBS) Hall of Residence and the Beharry Hall of Residence. The intention is to ensure that the property is protected and maintained in such a way that it can cater for the other generation.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I recognise the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson. Hon. Minister, go ahead.

Ms. Manickchand: No, Sir. Dorm parent is a term of art. It is not something out of your imagination and it has specific Terms Of Reference (TORs). In the report, there is a ratio of dorm parent to children. I think perhaps Hon. Member what you were describing was a maintenance sort of person, a dorm manager. There is no need for one dorm parent to 25 students at the CPCE. These are adults. Once they stay within the parameters of the rules, they can go and come as they please, they can read as late as they want and they could stay up all night. There is a very different thing between a dorm parent and a manager of the facilities of the dorm. You are talking about a facilities manager. You may have been calling it in your life a dorm parent but that is not what it is.

Ms. Ferguson: If the Hon. Minister would indulge me, could the Hon. Minister point me to where under the Ministry of Education I can find the moneys for the ‘Because We Care’ programme?

Mr. Seeraj: Could you point the Minister to a particular code? Hon. Minister, go ahead.

Ms. Manickchand: That is recurrent Sir, so we passed that already.

Mr. Seeraj: A long time ago.

Ms. Manickchand: I will be happy to tell you. It is you and I like you a lot. We are now at capital. We are in the wrong place for it. We passed it in the nursery, secondary and primary.

Programme: 402 – Training and Development – \$239,856,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

12.20 p.m.

Programme: 403 – Nursery Education – \$3,076,000,000

Programme: 403 – Nursery Education – \$3,076,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 404 – Primary Education – \$3,226,865,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Project code 1215400 – Primary Schools: There is the description that speaks to the upgrading of electrical systems at West Ruimveldt Primary School, Redeemer, FE Pollard Primary School, Ketley Primary School and Sophia Primary School. Then there is provision for schools and educational facilities. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to say what is the sum that is there for provision for schools and educational facilities and expand some more on which schools and which educational facilities? These are Capital projects and I am sure that the design for whatever have to be done, that would have capped the sum for this project code is already in and the work only has to go now to tendering and the procurement process is for execution.

Ms. Manickchand: There is \$50 million for the schools you mentioned – West Ruimveldt Primary, Redeemer Primary School, Ketley Primary School and Sophia Primary School – and the remaining balance to other schools.

Mr. Mahipaul: The remaining balance cannot be for the other schools when payment of retention is here. A sum, I am sure is allocated for the payment of retention.

Ms. Manickchand: Sorry. I thought you wanted to know specifically regarding works.

Mr. Mahipaul: The sum for the retention will be helpful so I will know how much is actually going to the other schools.

Ms. Manickchand: The Information Technology (IT) laboratory at Riverstown Primary School, the retention is \$1,439,600. There is another retention here for the teachers' living quarters at Baitun and the retention is \$381,850.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member Ms. McDonald, proceed. We have three more minutes.

Ms. McDonald: Under project code 2607400, school furniture and equipment, there is a sum of \$80 million allocated. Could the Hon. Minister share with us?

Ms. Manickchand: This is a provision for the Assistant Chief Education Officer – Primary and for the Department of Georgetown, as well as for primary schools in and around Georgetown. I could give you what it is we are buying disaggregated.

Programme: 404 – Primary Education – \$3,226,865,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 405 – Secondary Education – \$18,668,500,000

Mr. Cox: Under secondary schools, I recognised that the completion of North West Secondary School is catered for under this project code. While we are eagerly awaiting the completion of this secondary school for obvious reasons, could the Hon. Minister state the percentage of the completion of this school, which was awarded sometime last year, because it was reported to be completed within 14 months? Could the Hon. Minister also state the completion date of this school and when it is likely to be completed?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, please. Your Honour, we are very glad to say that we hope that by the end of mid next year we are going to have universal secondary education in Region 1. Currently, in Region 1, we are building the North West Secondary, Hosororo Secondary, Kwebana Secondary. This year we will be starting the Waramuri Secondary School. This project at this point is 70% completed. The roof is 90% completed. They will start finishing works soon. We expect to get this by the revised end date, which is June, 2024.

Mr. Seeraj: We will take this last question under this Programme head. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Ferguson: Under this very project code 1215500, Secondary Schools, I notice that under profile page 175, there are three descriptions here. The last one speaks to provision for schools and educational facilities. Could you say from this provision, whether you have sums there for the completion of the northern block at the East Ruimveldt Secondary School?

My second question to you, is there any provision in this sum to take care of any works at the West Ruimveldt Secondary School? I do not know if you are aware, Hon. Member, the school is a very small school and the administrators have been complaining.

Ms. Manickchand: To start from the end, we do not have a West Ruimveldt Secondary School.

Ms. Ferguson: West Ruimveldt...

Ms. Manickchand: Ascension and West Ruimveldt is that what you are calling West Ruimveldt...

Ms. Ferguson: Firstly, it was David Rose.

Ms. Manickchand: Okay. The northern block at East Ruimveldt is finished. Children are occupying it. What you saw going up are two laboratories that will be finished shortly, if that is what you meant.

Ms. Ferguson: I am trying to get from you whether ...

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, ...

Ms. Ferguson: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. The Hon. Minister is seeking clarification so I am just providing her with clarity on something.

Mr. Seeraj: I am constrained by instructions also from your Chief Whip. I would gladly accommodate all the questions. I am certain the Hon. Minister will be happy to spend the rest of the day to satisfy your curiosity but we are bounded by some guidelines here.

Ms. Manickchand: We could talk outside.

Programme: 405 – Secondary Education – \$18,668,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 406 – Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education – \$1,794,500,000

Programme: 406 – Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education – \$1,794,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Seeraj: On your behalf, let me thank the Hon. Minister and her team for accommodating us over the past two hours. Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: Before I go, I too would like to extend deep gratitude to my staff, the wind behind the Education sail. I am very lucky. I want to let the nation know that our Chief Planning Officer has retired after 29 years of dedicated service. This is probably her budget appearance in numbering about 20. We now have acting as the Chief Planning Officer, Ms. Tonica Archer, here with us.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. We all join you in congratulating the acting officer, whilst we say farewell to the person retiring.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 12.33 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.48 p.m.

Assembly in Committee

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Members. We are now in Committee of Supply. I will invite the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, and his team to take their seats. It is now 1.49 p.m. We have one hour allocated for this Ministry and we will commence. I direct the Members attention to pages 214 and 215.

Agency: 44 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport

Current Expenditure

Programme: 441 – Policy Development and Administration – \$396,398,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Good afternoon, to everyone. Line item 6113 – Other technical and craft skilled: I note that there has been a decrease by two under this line item. What were the designations of the two persons who are no longer working there?

1.50 p.m.

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman and thank you very much to the Hon. Member for the question. Before I commence, I wanted to take the opportunity to say on behalf of the House that we welcomed back, yesterday, our newest international star, Shamar Joseph. It was a fitting tribute to him for bringing that international recognition, coming from a list of persons from remote areas in this country who have brought international success. I wanted to say on behalf of the House that we welcome him back, welcome him home, and we wish him all the best for his entire career. In relation to the specific question that the Hon. Member has asked about line item 6113 – Other Technical and Craft Skilled, the two persons who are no longer at the Ministry, one was as a result of retirement and that designation was an Expeditor and the other one was for a resignation and that programme or that designation was a Mason.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am also happy to hear the Minister congratulate our new ambassador for the country in sports, Mr. Shamar Joseph. My only wish Mr. Minister was that you would have passed him, since he had to pass at the Parliament, so that the legislature here could have given him a nice welcome, even if it was for two or three minutes, but that was very good. I followed what was happening. Moving along, line item 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, I note there was a meagre increase. I would like the Hon. Minister to say what infrastructures are being maintained under this line item.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you, very much, Cde. Chairman and thank you very much to the Hon. Member for her question and, also, for helping to bring more clarity to our budget and how the money is being used. It is a small increase, but not budgeted for a larger sum because this is catering for the maintenance of other infrastructure in our headquarters. There is no additional work to be done that is major and would require a larger allocation. This also caters for things like cleaning of the compounds, cleaning of the internal drains and the external drains as well,

and, also for work to do with Caribbean Festival of Arts (CARIFESTA). Just to be clear, not CARIFESTA the event, the CARIFESTA complex.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I now turn the Minister's attention to line item 6281, Security Services. Does this allocation cater for one security service or for more than one?

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member. Minister, if you feel more comfortable sitting, you can sit and answer, if that suits you.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman, and also thank you very much to the Hon. Member. It caters for two security services.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I would like to turn the Minister's attention to line item 6113 – Other Technical and Craft Skilled, again, but I am going to the Policy Development and Administration. The indicator at number two says, "Number of staff trained in key technical areas". What are the technical areas in which the staff will be trained?

Mr. Ramson: For 2024, we are going to be catering for payment for training in computer secretarial studies, office management, accountancy, information technology, procurement procedures, Microsoft advanced and supply chain and logistics management. There is a range of studies as well, which I would not want to list, but those are not catered for under the programme but catered for under the public service training allocation. For the line itself, this is what the training will entail for our Ministry based on the allocation.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I now turn my attention to line item 6284 – Other. In the policy and development statement, indicator number four says, "Legal framework updated to facilitate development of culture, youth and sports". Then number one states, "Number of policies developed or updated for culture, youth and/or sport". Does this line item cater for the updating of these policies?

Mr. Ramson: No to the question that was asked. Thank you, Hon. Member, for your question, but, no, this is not the line that caters for anything to do with support for updating policies or legislative frameworks.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Can the Hon. Minister name the areas which this line item covers?

Mr. Ramson: Yes, thank you, very much, Hon. Chairman and thank you very much Hon. Member for the question. This line item caters for the payment of graphic artists, production of digital content, quantity surveying services, bank charges, advertisements for tenders, services rendered such as payment for information technology (IT) services for software upgrades and installation and project-management related services.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Follow up on training, the indicators indicate for the year 2023... Sorry. Yes, number of trained staff, could the Hon. Minister indicate in what areas those staff were trained and where those staff were drawn from?

Mr. Ramson: Thank you, very much, Cde. Chairman and thank you very much to the Hon. Member. All of the staff who would have been trained under this programme, programme one, I will first go through their designations and then I will also go through their training area. The Principal Personnel Officer – Principles of Supervisory Management; Confidential Secretary – Computer Secretariat Studies; Office Assistant – Office Management; Assistant Accountant – Business Management; Project Officer – Business Management; Technical Assistant – Business Management; Accounts Clerk – Business Management; Stores Clerk – Procurement and Stores Training; Administrator (Ag) – Principles of Supervisory Management module; Office Assistant – training for Office Assistants; Accountants Clerk II – Customer Experience; Typist Clerk I – Induction and Orientation; Technical Assistant same area; Driver – training for Drivers; Storekeeper – Store Management; Confidential Secretary – Principles of Professional Secretariat Practice; Typist Clerk – Principles of Professional Secretariat Practice; Supply Officer – Procurement and Stores Management; Stores Clerk I – Procurement and Stores Management; Administrative Manager – Change Management; Cleaners – Social Worker Professionalism and Ethics in Workplace; same thing for Administrative Assistant and Technical Assistant; Stores Clerk – Procurement and Stores Management; Assistant Instructor – Leader Development; Confidential Secretary – Effective Communication in the Workplace; Administrator – Occupational Safety and Health; and Technical Assistant – Procurement Procedures.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. For the purpose of our accurate record keeping, that is the *Hansard*, it would be appreciated if you can speak up a little more. Thank you, very much. Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, you have the floor.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman. The Ministry's indicators indicate that, in 2023, "Number of policies developed or updated for culture, youth and or/sport". Could the Hon. Minister indicate to this House what were those policies that were updated in 2023? Similarly, for 2024, there is an indication that the Ministry intends for, similar again, policies to be updated, whether in culture, youth and/or sports, if the Minister could indicate what are those policies that will be updated in 2024?

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman. Thank you very much to the Hon. Member. The two active policies that are both being updated, as well as that process that will continue in the consultation segment, are the cultural policy as well as the sport policy. Both of those have gone through extensive preparation and submissions to the point where we now have the versions that are ready which we will be focusing on in 2024 to do our public consultation, which will inherently have an updating process in any event, because we expect that with public engagement. You will be required to make the accommodations to an amendment to what is being represented therein.

Mr. Jones: Could the Hon. Minister confirm if he is indicating to this House that, as it relates to the updating of the policies, whether sport, youth or culture, because when one looks back in 2022 and 2021 there is a similar indication of policy updated or to be updated, is the Hon. Minister essentially saying that in 2021, 2022 and 2023 the Ministry did not update any of the policies that the Minister made mention?

2.05 p.m.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman. The Hon. Member would know this too, that the cultural and sport policy did not exist. It did not exist. It was an elaborate process that required us to have a comprehensive engagement as well as a comprehensive submission. So, even though we had set targets on getting the consultation done or I should say the preparation that led into the consultation upon completion, because of the decision to make it a far more comprehensive policy that caters for many areas that were never originally included or even contemplated, and I want to take the opportunity to say how elaborate the process has been, I will use, for example, the sport policy for which there is 12-member working committee, it

started just last year alone in March or April and already had 15 meetings for which there was, upon completion, 86 pages covering 28 topics.

For the Hon. Member's and the country's benefit, I want to go through some of the areas. I want to give an idea about the nature of what will be included in the policy, which hitherto, never was part of the policy or never was part of the contemplation. Some of these catered for what transpired during the Coronavirus disease (COVID). What we saw during that time was a very serious mental impact that connected to what happened during COVID. I want to touch on some of the topics which include the business of sport – maybe we could have a copy brought down here in the meantime – disabilities in sports; fun and entertainment; health and wellbeing of athletes; mental health; physical activities in sports; the minimum standards for community grounds; minimum standards for sports disciplines; and minimum standards for travelling teams which was never originally contemplated in any policy. I just want to mention it for the sake of clarity and for the comprehensive awareness of both members of the House as well as the public. This is what was completed by our 12-member team. We also have the nexus with sport and sports organisations and their policies; sports in school; sports academy; sports awards, incentives and prizes; sports in media; unity and social cohesion; and women and girls in sport. There is a lot more, but I just wanted to touch on some of those areas to give an idea of how the framework of the sports policy has changed and why it took so much more time.

Having said that, the people who are connected to the area and have been part of the composition of the committee, they have had an extensive career in sports and have been extremely satisfied with what has been presented so far. We are looking forward to having the public consultation this year which we will have at our sports conference. In fact, it will be a specific design that deals with soliciting the engagement that is necessary to extract any amendments that might be included in the sports policy. It was an elaborate process. We are very pleased with the process that we initiated and then the outcome. This is because we wanted this to be the sports policy that represents the country where other countries could take our model and use it as the basis of either enacting their own or tailoring their own policy to reflect what we included.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am following up on what the Minister just gave as his response. I would like to know what area of expertise this 12-member committee is made up of. Secondly, the areas which you identify in the policies, all could be found in the syllabus for physical education in sports for

the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) and the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC). I would like to know if there is a physical education teacher or teachers on that committee.

Mr. Ramson: A composition in a curriculum is not the presentation of a policy. First of all, this is guided by the National Sports Commission Act. It is clear, in expressed terms, as part of the provisions that because of the nature of the engagement and the structure I should say between the National Sports Commission and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, which is a Government agency, there must be a sports policy under which they must conduct their affairs. It is not whether there is a curriculum or whether these topics are covered in the curriculum. It is a governing body at the sport level that has a legislation that governs its affairs which requires an expressed provision for a sports policy to exist.

What is the function of the sports policy so that we are clear? It is that the directions coming from the State actors – the Government actors. In this situation, the head of the sector would be the Minister. In the provision it states that they must give directions of a general nature to the National Sports Commission, but the composition through the sports policy... [Hon.

Member: (*Inaudible*)] I will get to that. It was a two-part question. The two-part question was: one was in relation to their area of expertise and then the second was, whether all these topics are contained in that. I am saying that, even though the topics are contained, it does not mean that it forms part of a sports policy. Having said that, I just want to answer the first part of the question. I do not have their Curriculum Vitae (CVs) on me. All of them have had extensive careers in sports and, also, sports training. We will be publishing that when the time comes. They will be part of the public consultation of which we will invite the Hon. Member to participate as well.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, I want to take the Minister back to the indicators because he did not give a specific answer whether it is yes or no. Based on these indicators it states – I went back to 2021, 2022 and 2023 – in terms of policy that would be updated by the Ministry, whether in culture, youth or sport, is an indication that the target is two. I am asking the Minister again, because it is reflected in 2021, 2022, 2023 and here again in 2024. Essentially, Minister, are you saying that, in 2023, this target of two which you set out to achieve was not? The second issue is that the Minister's response seems to be focused exclusively on sports and not culture or youth.

Again, in his indicators it has two policies, so is it sport, and sport are the two that he is referring to, or is it sport and which other is the policy he is making reference to, or he has not made reference to rather?

Mr. Ramson: I think if the Hon. Member was paying attention, I said at the outset that there were two policies. It was culture and sport. We have completed the culture policy. Again, it now requires us to take that into the consultation process. **[Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** No. That is false. We have completed what we are required to do in terms of its framing and submission. We now take it into the public consultation. Having said that, I know very clearly, and I could pull all of the articles that are connected to the statements made by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Administration during its tenure about the cultural and sports policies which were never completed. **[Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** Thank you. I am glad he said that was a fact. We have completed what we were required to do in relation to getting our draft done. Now, we take this into the baptism. The baptism will happen this year. We are satisfied with what we have been able to either update or complete and then we will take it into consultation this year.

Mr. Jones: Finally, on this point, Cde. Chairman. Could the Ministry of Finance remove ‘yes’ to achieving in 2023 the completion of two policies. This is because this document, in 2021, 2022 and 2023 is misleading. They know that the policies are not completed, therefore, it cannot put it as a target that has been achieved.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member, for your comment.

Programme: 441 – Policy Development and Administration – \$396,398,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 442 – Culture – \$1,358,808,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: I would like to turn the Hon. Minister’s attention to line item 6284, Other. Under the performance indicators for culture, it states: “Updated legal framework in areas pertaining to the preservation and conservation of our heritage”. Could the Hon. Minister say what legal framework is expected to be updated?

Mr. Ramson: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member for the question. So, last year, we set a target to review the National Trust legislation and we did not only complete the review, we also were able to complete a draft legislation.

2.20 p.m.

This new legislation of which has the approval by the Cabinet for tabling, upon its review, submission and tabling to the Parliament, we completed our review, we completed a draft legislation, and this completely new legislation will be tabled in this House in 2024 for debate consideration and then, ultimately, passage. I just wanted to say this too before I conclude because this area of the National Trust is extremely important. This is because we have not done a good job at, first of all, examining the legislation that governs the National Trust which was passed since...in the first legislation that was passed since 1972. As we become a more prosperous country, having the power to preserve our heritage through the identification of monuments and giving the support to keep it maintained or to restore it, that becomes extremely important as we move forward in our development. It also functions as an area where the heritage itself becomes an opportunity for monetising a particular area of tourism in the country.

We have some particular areas like Fort Island, Fort Zeelandia, lots and lots of areas where, already, there are attractions where people, both local and international, come to the country. They want to get an idea about our heritage; they want to get an idea about our history, which incidentally is extensive. It is rich in one way but also represents a period in human history which is marked by some of the most heinous bits of activities and that is one of the reasons it was extremely important. Having done the review, we realised that there were so many areas that were missing under our National Trust legislation which lacked Government power that is necessary for us to advance the preservation and protection of our heritage.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am just wondering if I would get back some time seeing that my questions are specific and require specific answers, but I am getting a lot of extra information, so, I am just wondering. Moving on, same line item – 6284, Other, can the Hon. Minister say, under this allotted sum of \$200 million, if the music industry, dance, drama and arts will receive funding from under this line item?

[Mr. Chairman resumed Chair]

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

Mr. Ramson: The answer to the question is that the area the Hon. Member refers to of dance and drama, this falls under four areas of which Minister Anthony, under his leadership, created the Institute of Creative Arts in 2014. It was a very important establishment in 2014 and covered four areas: Art, which is Visual Art; Dance; Drama; and Music. Now, what is also important is that it was 2014 this was established. Essentially, it functions as an academy. An academy where young people get an opportunity to be part of an institution which is State funded, where persons who are admitted do not pay anything for the training they receive. It is Government funded, State funded, for them to have that training. Under Minister Anthony's vision and leadership and the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, back then, when this was established, there had been no move towards getting the institute registered through the National Accreditation Council which would have been the absolute necessary step so that when those young people are receiving their certificates, those certificates that they are receiving are from a registered and accredited institution. I had an examination of what transpired during that period of time, and I saw the statement being made by the previous Administration on the Institute of Creative Arts. They were of the view that... this came from an article in 2017, it says on the caption:

“Institute of Creative Arts will be pursued...”

In there, a sum of money was assigned for the institute to be accredited. Their view was that this should be done through the University of Guyana (UG) even though the University of Guyana is not an accrediting body. It is not in and of itself an accrediting body. When we came here last year, during these same estimates, there was a discussion and an engagement where a particular Hon. Member of the Opposition had told us that we could not get this body registered or accredited. [An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*] I said Opposition. We had about five engagements with the National Accreditation Council of which I was in one of those meetings and I have here the Executive Director of the National Accreditation Council, who is sitting in the Chambers, and we had our assessment. They provided the standards, required criteria, that were necessary for us to show whether we could get accredited or not. On that assessment, we had satisfied more than what was required for our institute to be registered.

Upon the establishment of our board now, that is where the registration of the institute will happen and I want it to be very clear, because if the previous Administration, the APNU/AFC, had realised that the registration of the institute or the pursue of this institute was important. There was no vigour or serious interest in its pursuit to take it towards completion. In fact, in the very same article, which I will forward to you, Mr. Chairman, here is what was important for this House to know...

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, may I have the floor.

Mr. Chairman: Chief Whip, you may have the floor.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect to the Hon. Minister and his presentation, we accept and have no difficulty, like earlier, with the predecessors when they are making their answers to give a little statement, but the Minister is now going into speeches for several minutes, Sir, and we are losing time. It is very deliberate on his part, and he is not answering the questions.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Chief Whip, with due respect, I use that as a Point of Order and in order, but, at the same time, we cannot direct the Minister on how to answer. If he steps out of line with respect to the policy for the allocation, I will pull him in line. Clearly, what is happening is, we may have to now go back to the Standing Orders and say, 'Question should be of this length and answer similar'. Hon. Member and Minister, Please.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would want to expect, and I would want to believe that a comprehensive and extensive answer, so that the public could be aware of the work of the Ministry and our successes, is important. I would want to believe that the Hon. Member would want to solicit a response where I can give the description of what led us here. Otherwise, they would not have known. How many people in the country would have known that the institute was created since then under Minister Frank and that nothing was done by the APNU/AFC to have it registered. Should it not be stated? Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman.
[Interruption]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, we have...Hon. Members, we started the head at 1.49 p.m., and it is a one-hour allocation. Unless the Chief Whip will tell me he has...

But once you make a statement, please, let us see, as many responses, that we can get. Hon. Members, yes, we are still...Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, you may have the floor.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would have noted, and I am taking time of how long and I am still not getting the answers I asked.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, there were some people shouting, 'Bring back Frank'. He is coming next. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Based on all that the Minister just went on to say, last year in his answers, when my Comrade asked about the Institute of Creative Arts, he said that this year, this line item which is 6284 also caters for the completion of accreditation of the Institute of Creative Arts. But when he just spoke, he did not speak to completion. He spoke of a coming soon process that is still ongoing. That is what I want to know. Could the Hon. Minister lay over the disaggregated sum for the different areas that will be getting funding under this line item?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, is this coming soon?

Mr. Ramson: The one thing that I would not say is that, when it comes to the standards that are necessary for the registration of these institutions which is required by law, those are very elaborate standards of which we provided, we were able to get that completed so that all that is necessary is the establishment of the board which we would do now. I am clear on that. In relation to the disaggregation, I do not have the disaggregation. Actually, I do.

2.35 p.m.

So, for the Hon. Member, under this line item 6284, Other, you have the National School of Dance for \$10 million and the E.R. Burrowes School of Arts for \$16 million. It is actually \$10,151,000 and \$16,479,200. For the National School of Music, there is \$15,662,000 and for the National Dance Company, you have \$4.5 million.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6294 – Other: Does this allocated sum reflect the money for the International Decade for People of African Descent Assembly - Guyana (IDPADA-G)?

Mr. Ramson: The answer is yes. Thank you, Hon. Member. This money is contained in this line item, first of all, and the sum is the same for \$100 million.

Programme: 442 – Culture – \$1,358,808,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 443 – Youth – \$987,237,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6284 – Other: What programmes, if any, are listed under here for our youths?

Mr. Ramson: Could the Hon. Member please repeat the question?

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6284 – Other: What programmes are covered for our youths under this line item?

Mr. Ramson: It is not programmes that are covered here. This line item caters for things such as the payment for maintenance and existing Information Technology (IT) services and payment for the rental of skip bins, tents, chairs, training programmes and national events. It caters also for the payment of bank charges and wire transfers. There are also things such as the advertisements for tenders, cleaning and sanitisation, payment for the digitisation of the curriculum for the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training (YEST) centres and professional services for the development of tracer studies.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you. Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): Are there any scholarships for our youths to attend the University of Guyana (UG) or any programme at an accredited institution here?

Mr. Ramson: The Hon. Member would know that the training line item where people – young, middle aged or more mature – can get support for the University of Guyana would come under the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme and it would be under the Ministry of the Public Service.

Mr. Mahipaul: Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: Sir, I am sure you have a very good memory like mine, and you would recall that in 2020 that I had asked the Hon. Minister, under capital expenditure, about the completion of that youth training centre in Den Amstel. I did see that the zinc and so went on, but from then to now, I have not seen any work happening there.

There is no occupation of the sort. Does this line item cater for the maintenance of that facility to lead to its subsequent occupation by staff and its participation and utilisation?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member, except that I do not have a youthful memory as yours.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for the question. This line caters for the maintenance of buildings. It caters for existing programmes. So, where programmes are existing in institutions or buildings, maintenance would be done. In situations where we are looking to do the expansion – when I say expansion, I mean inclusion of additional institutions and facilities – that would require, as you know, capital injection. So, it would not be covered under this line item.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, let me go to the indicators. Indicator number three states:

“Number of youths 14 to 35 years old trained by the DoY”

The target in 2023 was 7333 and we note the target for 2024 is 9260. When you go to indicator number four, which speaks to the percentage of youths employed after the training programme, we note that in 2021 the target of youths who were trained were 4477 and the total number of youths employed after the training was 0%. In 2022, your target was 14,900 youths who were trained, and the number of youths employed after this training was 2%. In 2023, your target was 8,660 youths and I will mention here now the percentage of youths employed after this training was 15%. I note in 2024 that your target for training is 9260 and the number of youths that you predict are going to be employed after the training is 100%. Noting your less than stellar performance as it relates to the percentage of youths who were employed after these trainings, what brought you to the conclusion that in 2024 these 9260 youths will be employed?

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. This percentage here is really referring to our institutions. I think that we should make sure that is captured specifically so there is clarity in terms of the numbers trained versus the number who are going to be employed. I am focusing specifically on why we believe that, coming out of our institutions, we would get 100% of our young people employed.

We have established an engagement with the private sector, which would be taking many of our young people coming out of these institutes with training in the four areas – now coming on to be five – carpentry, plumbing, electrical installation and masonry. We reformed and now have for the first time ever.... I really want to stress this. Despite the fact that these institutes have been in existence for a very long time, they have never issued a certificate from the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (CTVET). They have never done that. It was never accredited and registered. We did a tremendous amount of work in the last year to ensure that our institute is now delivering a CTVET Level 1 Programme to young people when they complete our courses. This can now be taken to anywhere in the Caribbean, once it is registered with the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME).

The answer to the Hon. Member's question is, because we had that engagement with the private sector already on a number of occasions for it to say where the demand is and how many persons it is searching for in those areas, we are confident, by the establishment, that we will get them into employment. In fact, within the time that this was completed – the submission of this information to the Ministry of Finance – we were already able to get a number of them into employment. Yes, it is going to be a big jump for us to hit the target of 100%, but because we are confident about the demands in the market, we believe that it is something that we can secure.

Programme: 443 – Youth – \$987,237,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 444 – Sports – \$937,351,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6291 – National and Other Events: I would like to turn the Minister's attention to the Programme Performance Statements and indicator number three. Will this allocated sum cater for participation in international events?

Mr. Ramson: I am not quite sure what the Hon. Member is asking.

Ms. Flue-Bess: At line item 6291, National and Other Events, do the other events cover this area – attending these international events?

Mr. Ramson: The answer is no. I think the Hon. Mr. Jones will be able to assist you in this regard.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, I go to the indicators under Sports. Indicator number six states:

“Number of community sporting grounds upgraded”

There is a target in 2023 of 251 and I note that, in 2024, the target is the same 251. Could the Hon. Minister please name those grounds that were completed in 2023?

Mr. Ramson: I do not have the list with me now, but I would be able to do so for 2023. We set the exact number actually because we said that we will continue to do this work in phases. As you know, this used to be handled through the National Sports Commission (NSC). It is not handled there anymore. Every ground, first of all, is different. Having said that, every ground has different requirements for development. Last year, because of the demands that came from all of the communities, we focused mainly on the grounds and the fencing. Now, this year, once completed, we are going to focus on the pavilions and washrooms, in alignment with our sports policy that we will be publicising. All of that we would be aiming to conclude this year. Ultimately for next year, we will focus on things such as lights.

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Minister, for the information in terms of what works are going to be done on the grounds. Sir, for clarity, indicator number six states:

“Number of community sporting grounds upgraded”.

In 2023, it was 251 and the target for 2024 is 251. Could the Hon. Minister please give us the name of the grounds for 2023 and the names of the grounds that would be upgraded for 2024?

Mr. Ramson: I just responded to that. I have answered that question, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: He has answered that question, Hon. Member, Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones: Sir, for my clarity, could the Hon. Minister please provide the answer again. I missed it. Sorry, my apologies.

Mr. Chairman: We got distracted, Hon. Minister. In fact, Yours Truly did not hear either.

Mr. Ramson: I said I do not have the names of the grounds with me.

Mr. Jones: For which year?

Mr. Ramson: For 2023. The explanation was because we are doing them in phases, the same grounds that received support last year would be receiving the support this year to do the additional projects that are required. You would see that the allocation we made the announcement for is \$1 billion. That is by far the largest allocation in any budget presentation that we have ever had. **[Mr. Jones: *Big up yaself; big up yaself; tek a big up.*]** Thank you. You know, just as well as I do, that community grounds need that level of support. They need it. In fact, one could easily spend in excess of \$30 to \$50 million on a community ground just to bring it up to a certain level, depending on its size and its usage expectation. Having said that, too, there are a number of grounds that already have particular levels of development that would not require this scale of investment. That is why we believe that we will surpass the target of 251. Out of that 251 target though, I must state for the record, and I stated it during my presentation, we gave 100 Amerindian communities, the hinterland communities, \$1 million each and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs also gave them another \$100 million. In total, 200 Amerindian villages and communities were able to receive \$1 million for the support for the development of their grounds. We will continue to do that this year and every single year moving forward.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. For some time management, we have exhausted the one hour. In fact, we have gone over by five minutes. The Hon. Chief Whip for the Opposition has allocated the remaining 20 minutes of savings to this head. I would not deduct the extra five minutes, Hon. Chief Whip. We are still at Sports. Minister, you seem to have peeped the estimates of a particular ground that I am involved with at \$60 million from the minimum level, acceptable.

Mr. Ramson: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Chairman: Yes, but you only gave 10 out of the 60.

Mr. Duncan: Generous, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: My good friend.

Mr. Duncan: That is the same clarity we are looking for. Mr. Chairman, on that same line item, I think there is a fundamental difference between “upgraded and upgrading”. I think one is past tense and one is present continuous tense.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, I think your grammar is perfect.

Mr. Duncan: We have hundreds of grounds that were upgraded. They have already been upgraded or they are in the process, and that is the clarity that we are looking for on this particular subject matter.

Mr. Ramson: The Hon. Member made a fair comment. We can continue to upgrade community grounds. For as long as there is a government here, based on the system that we currently have, all of those community grounds will require support for upgrade. All of them. The question is, was there an upgrade? It is very simple. Was there an upgrade? I know you are saying English language is very simple. I would want to believe that there was an upgrade; very simple in the explanation provided. We are clear about the necessary investment. As the Chairman just said, the ground with which he is involved in terms of being part of the leadership, which is already in existence that already has facilities, is taking \$60 million, based on the assessment that he just shared with us. It means that as a government, you will always have to put investment into community grounds, which is, of course, the lifeblood of all communities. Was there an upgrade? The answer is yes.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, just for confirmation, the Hon. Minister indicated that the 251 grounds on which upgrading started in 2023 are being rolled over into 2024 and the upgrading will continue. Could the Hon. Minister provide us with the names of the 251 grounds? While he is on his feet, I will take him to indicator number seven which speaks to:

“Number of sporting facilities constructed.”

In 2023, it was five. Could the Hon. Minister please name those five? His target for 2024 is six. Could the Hon. Minister please name those six? It is three parts. If you can lay them over, that is fine. It is up to you.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, because 210 and if he takes 15 seconds...

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, we will cut Ministry of Health's time by half to allow the Minister to read out the 251 grounds.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have a challenge. Go ahead.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: They love you, Dr. Frank Anthony. One wants you back and the other one is cutting you.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much, Hon. Member, for the questions. Firstly, I will start with the six that will be completed this year.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you want to sit and pull the microphone close since you are height challenged?

Mr. Ramson: I prefer to stand.

Mr. Chairman: You will have to bend then because we are losing your volume.

Mr. Ramson: I will speak a bit louder if that is satisfactory. We have six being completed this year. Those projects all started last year. Those are: the construction of multipurpose hall in Region 1; the construction of the multipurpose hall in Region 3; the construction of the multipurpose hall in Region 7; the same for Region 8; the same for Region 9; the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall; and the construction and completion of the table tennis and badminton building at the National Racquet Centre. Those are the six.

The ones that we constructed in 2023, meaning the new facilities that were completed for part of our construction as well as the access for people, were the track in Bayrock; the outdoor courts for the National Gymnasium, which was renovated; the tennis courts at the National Racquet Centre; the multipurpose facility at Albion, Region 6; and the squash building at the National Racquet Centre. The internal fittings for those are actually happening as we speak and will be completed in a matter of days. **[An. Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** No, we do not have any more work to do. As far as our procurement is concerned and as far as our payment is concerned, we do not have additional work to do out of this year's budget.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Hon. Minister missed one question. There were three questions. The other one was, could he please provide us with the names of the 251 grounds that were started in 2023 and were rolled over in 2024 to be completed? Could he please provide that?

Mr. Ramson: I said I would have to lay it over because I do not have it with me.

Mr. Jones: Appreciated.

Programme: 444 – Sports – \$937,351,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 441 – Policy Development and Administration – \$33,500,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Project code 1205700, Buildings. I note that it states:

“Extension of building and payment of retention.”

How much of this allocated sum will be paid for the retention?

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. A sum of \$1,972,000 will be paid for retention.

Ms. Flue-Bess: The same project code, Extension of Building. Which building is being referred to?

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. The main building is cramped for space and not just for personnel but storage. The building is going to be extended now to cater for more space for both personnel as well as storage.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Project code 2506600, Furniture and Equipment. I see the status is new. Would furniture and equipment be purchased for this new building?

Mr. Ramson: Yes, absolutely, along with other things like air conditioners (ACs), desktops, backup batteries, refrigerators and those kinds of stuff.

Mr. Jones: Project code 2506600, Furniture and Equipment. We note in the explanation it speaks to four different items, one of which includes the completion of the recording studio. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what percentage of work has been done as it relates to the studio and could the location be named?

Mr. Ramson: Have we moved off of Programme 441 already?

Mr. Jones: Is it not the same thing?

Mr. Ramson: No. You do it one by one. Do you not?

Mr. Jones: I jumped the gun.

Mr. Ramson: He has moved off from Programme 441. We are on Programme 441.

Mr. Jones: Yes, the Minister is correct.

Mr. Chairman: He said that he jumped ahead. Hon. Members, since the Hon. Chief Whip is ahead, let us close this particular programme.

Programme: 441 – Policy Development and Administration – \$33,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

3.05 p.m.

Programme: 442 – Culture - \$1,330,000,000

Mr. Jones: Cde. Minister, I turn your attention to project code 1205700 – Buildings. The sum is there. Amongst the items listed is the completion of a recording studio. Could the Hon. Minister please indicate what percentage of work has been done and where the studio is located?

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Hon. Chairman, and thank you very much, Hon. Member, for the question. So, that project was only started in December of last year. As you know as well too, we have a recording studio in Georgetown on Brickdam, which is used quite frequently by a lot of the performing artistes. Many of the performers actually go there to use the facility to produce some of the songs that you hear produced locally. We have also expanded the number of persons who have their smaller-scale types of studios and funded a number of them so that they

can get their equipment, and they have already started to produce their own music. In relation to the one that we are building now, which is another public one, it is in Port Mourant and that is at 10%. The building will be completed this year, and we will also have to cater for the outfitting in terms of the equipment for the building.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Under the same project code, there is provision of community spaces for cultural performances. Where will these spaces be created and how many?

Mr. Ramson: For these ones, we are starting with our consultancy to design community spaces for creative persons and also to support the advice on their locations based on the criteria established. I am unable to share, at the moment, the locations because immediately after the passage of the budget we are going to go out for the designs as well as the... When I say designs, I mean the designs of the spaces. Based on that too, this will be subject to a Cabinet decision on their locations, along with the other item that is listed in the volume, which would be for the art gallery and the museum. Having said that though, and I know that the Hon. Member might want to ask about that too, this is something that the President made a commitment and a public statement about which is catered for in our budget.

We are going to go out to our consultancy for those designs as well. We all have our own specific ideas about where it would go. That will also be subject to a Cabinet decision. I just want to be clear though that we have not produced, created or constructed any museum or any art gallery of our own. We have taken buildings and accommodated spaces. For example, Castellani House is an example of where the building itself was taken and used for exhibitions. Other buildings, every now and again, are used for exhibitions for art. We have done some work there so that young people can get training in relation to visual arts, but we have not done the construction of new spaces in relation to art or for museums, for that matter, and that is something that we believe that it is now important for us to do that.

This area of culture is really an area of prosperity. It is a byproduct of prosperity. It has a lot to do with freedom of time and freedom of expression and creativity and the space to do that. So, that is why the investment is being made here now. It is very important for the public as well as Members in the House to know that this is the first time there will be such a large allocation on the capital side for culture. It has always been a much heavier recurrent expenditure just to do a

lot of our national and other events type of activities, patriotism, and bringing the country together, *etcetera*. In relation to our investment into new spaces, there was never a large allocation, especially one that is even marginally near what we are doing right now, and we believe that now is the time to start to make that investment in the area.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Following up on what the Minister said earlier about them doing consultation and designs and then deciding on where these facilities will be constructed, I would like the Hon. Minister to tell this Committee how much of this allocated sum will be used for the completion of the recording studio.

Mr. Ramson: Some \$26 million is to complete the studio. We still have to purchase the equipment which we are going out to tender for now. So, once that is finished, we can then outfit the building and it can come into operation immediately, similar to what we did, as an example, with the doubles court at the squash facility so that they were happening simultaneously. Just so that we are clear, you would not expect me to have the allocation next year. Once the contract is completed and we are not forced to terminate and then go back out to tender for the completion of the studio, you should not expect to see an allocation next year for the completion of the studio.

Programme: 442 – Culture - \$1,330,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, earlier today, I mentioned the issue of the use of telephones, and I was a bit distracted because there was one telephone that was being used in a very loud tone. So, I had to tap on the desk to get the person's attention. Hon. Members, we have two programmes remaining and the Hon. Chief Whip of the Opposition – I stopped the clock – has said that we can take a few minutes from the Hon. Minister of Health's programme. No? Hon. Members, we have now exhausted the time that we have added. So, I am now forced to put Programme 443, Youth, and Programme 444, Sport, both capital expenditures.

Programme: 443 – Youth- \$150,000,000

Programme: 443 – Youth - \$150,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 444 – Sports- \$3,702,174,000

Programme: 444 – Sports - \$3,702,174,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: On your behalf and on my own behalf, let us thank the Hon. Minister and his staff for a most interesting defence of the agency. Thank you. Hon. Members, the Hon. Minister of Health has a large team. I recognise the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in that team. We will have to sanitise this section too. So, give us a few minutes to get this impressive team from the Ministry of Health in place. In fact, we may be ready, but the chair is not. Hon. Minister, do you only need two persons? Hon. Minister, Permanent Secretary (PS) and team... Part of the team is here now.

Agency: 47 Ministry of Health

Current Expenditure

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration - \$8,387,240,000

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, I am happy to represent close to 50% of this population, as I interrogate the Hon. Minister, Dr. Frank Anthony, and scrutinise *Budget 2024* which has a whopping \$129.8 billion for the transformation of the health sector.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, an observation. You know, when I started in politics, they said once you sit in the National Assembly, because we are national Members of Parliament (MPs), we represent 100% and not 50%.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you for the correction. Line item 6116, Contracted Employees: I notice there is a whopping 43%, having moved from 100 to 143. They are contracted employees. One would have thought that in terms of policy development and for continuity of the programme implementation of your policies, you would want persons on the fixed establishment. Could the Hon. Minister say what is the reason for the increase and could he give the remuneration, designations and the emoluments of the top five persons?

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Hon. Member. Indeed, there is an increase from 100 to 143 under this heading. The top five employees are the Ministerial Advisor, Permanent Secretary, Director General, Senior Manager and the Human Resource Manager.

Dr. Cummings: You omitted the emoluments.

Dr. Anthony: The Ministerial Advisor receives \$923,000; Permanent Secretary, \$799,000; Director General, \$676,000; Senior Manager, \$484,000; and Human Resource Manager, \$454,000.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Minister, do you have adequate staff in light that there was a low percentage in terms of your implementation of the key strategic actions of the National Health Strategy? In 2023, it was 24.6% and then for 2024, you have a target of less than 50%. So, do you have...

3.20 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead. I was interrupting you because if you carry on a conversation with the Minister...

Dr. Cummings: It is an indicator.

Mr. Chairman: No, because you said Hon. Minister and was talking directly to him. I would allow you to...

Dr. Cummings: Through the Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: I will allow you to carry on the gaff, as the Hon. Member Mr. Jermaine Figueira did, and use up the time.

Dr. Cummings: No. Through the Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: I do not have a problem with the time usage but if you want to talk or gaff... Hon. Minister, please proceed.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am not sure why the Hon. Member would say that. We in the Ministry have, under this heading, adequate staff and we have been implementing the programmes that have been assigned under this heading. In the Indicator section, it indicates that for this year we should achieve a percentage, and we are very confident that we would be able to achieve that percentage. It is a target that has been set and we are very confident we will achieve it and even surpass it.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6114 – Clerical and Office Support: I notice the loss of 12 of your staff. Was it due to resignations or would they have become contracted employees?

Dr. Anthony: Under this section 6114, we have 22 persons who joined the Ministry. These are new employments. We had 34 persons that were moved to different headings. Some of them went as contracted employees and we had a few persons who resigned.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: Which building are we talking about? Could you explain? I guess it is preventative maintenance. Which buildings and could you, maybe, disaggregate the sums for each building?

Dr. Anthony: The buildings that we are talking about here is at the head office. We are also doing some repairs at the Quamina Street office. We are also in occupancy of a National Industrial and Commercial and Investments Limited (NICIL) building on Camp and Charlotte Streets. These are the buildings that we will be doing maintenance on. We will be spending \$22 million on the head office and there are several buildings in the compound; \$5 million for the Materials, Management Unit (MMU) and \$1 million for the Food Policy building which is housed at the Camp Street office.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6284 – Other: I notice there is a whopping \$311 million increase there, moving from \$749,313,000 in 2023, the revised sum, and now to \$1 billion. What constitutes Other?

Dr. Anthony: Under this section, there are a number of things that we do here, including spending money to develop our electronic medical health record system. We will be paying for software that the Ministry would normally use, so that comes under the digital section of the Ministry. We will be spending about \$17 million on brokerage, transport, and waste disposal services; \$16 million on a specific software for the MMU; and about \$9 million under the Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) office. This is stipend for the people who are on the Institutional Review Board – to give them a stipend. We will be spending \$1 million for the planning and a section of the Ministry. This is to do things like budget books and so forth. Then another million dollars for binding of reports, some moneys for the Finance Department, the Human Resource (HR) Department and so forth.

Dr. Cummings: A follow-up: Before I give it over to Member of Parliament (MP) Lawrence, as you mentioned electronic records, in terms of our pharmaceuticals, one would like to stay in their office, for instance your office, and know what is happening in the MMU – this is the drug that is short, which is coming down and so forth. Would that record you are planning for and the digitalisation of the records include information on drugs and medical supplies?

Dr. Anthony: Maybe about 25 years ago, we bought a software called Max which was used at the MMU. Of course, it is a bit outdated now. Although we have been, from time to time, trying to get updates for that software, we believe it is time now that we should change the software. Under this heading, we have some moneys to look at that process. In fact, we had a consultant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) who spent the past year with us looking at the system and helping us to decide on what type of software we should acquire. We have set aside some provisions to look at acquiring that software sometime during this year.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, a follow-up on line item 6284. Would the accounting package that you would be buying for the MMU include training in the cost?

Dr. Anthony: Indeed, we would want to make sure that we have the persons there trained.

Ms. Lawrence: I am continuing with the same line item. Minister, last year you indicated that you were buying some new packages from Nortel Networks Corporation (NORTEL) and you were also buying from Delta. I am particularly interested in the one from Delta, that is, the facility management software. Did you purchase that? Is it up and running and is the staff trained? What has been the returns from using such a system?

Dr. Anthony: Our intention was to buy a facilities management software. Unfortunately, we did not go ahead with the procurement because we have – and we can talk about that when we go to the capital section of the budget – an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) programme. Under that IDB programme we have set aside a substantial sum for us to look at the software that we need to use in the Ministry. In fact, we have done a strategic plan for the types of software that we should be using. With that plan in place, this year, you will see us procure a specific software to do several things. I think last year too I probably mentioned we were acquiring

software for the blood bank and that is the Delfin Software. That one we have acquired and that is being used at the blood bank.

Ms. Lawrence: I would like to ask the Minister whether this allocation, if any of it, would go towards his planned increase in telemedicine sites across the country? If the answer is, yes, could he indicate which sites would be targeted this year and how much of this money would be allocated for that intervention?

Dr. Anthony: It is not under this section but, maybe, when we come to that section I will point it out to you. We have an additional 25 sites that we want to look at.

Dr. Cummings: I have just two more questions. Line item 6294, Other: I notice also there was a revised budget of \$1,099,946,000 and now you have increased it by \$4 million to \$5,772,000,000. What is responsible for this large increase? Could you maybe disaggregate the figure?

Dr. Anthony: I must thank the Hon. Member for asking this question. Under this heading, we use this to help patients. As you heard from one of the measures in the budget, we have a special cervical cancer testing programme that we would be launching this year. We have set aside \$2.8 billion for that cervical cancer testing programme and we believe that it would cover about 350,000 persons.

The second expenditure or allocation under this heading would be \$1.8 billion to assist children and the elderly to get the spectacles voucher. Under this allocation, we should be able to help close to 600,000 persons get those vouchers.

Under this heading as well, we have been treating or we have been giving assistance to a number of patients. This year we have set aside close to \$600 million to help persons with coronary heart disease. Just maybe to give you an idea, last year we spent \$577 million helping close to 1,500 patients. I think this is a very worthwhile expenditure.

We would also be helping dialysis patients here. This year we have budgeted close to \$360 million to help patients who need dialysis. We have also set aside a sum of \$212 million to assist persons who might need things like magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) scans and so forth. These are some broad headings that we have here.

Dr. Cummings: Just for clarification, the dialysis we are talking about, is it for the regions or everyone has to come to Georgetown, or do you have in Regions 4, 6 and 10?

Dr. Anthony: We now have several regional dialysis centres. In Region 2, there is one at the Suddie Hospital. In Region 3, we have one at Parika, broadly, and there is another centre at Vreed-en-Hoop. In Region 10, there is one that operates out of the Linden Hospital Complex. In Region 6, we have one at New Amsterdam, and of course, we have those in Region 4. We have been in partnership with many of these private providers. When these facilities are housed for example at Suddie, we would provide the accommodation for the centre, but it is run by a private institution. In the case of Suddie, it is run by 5G Dialysis. We also provide them with the utilities – water, electricity and so forth. In that way we are able to bring down the cost, because for some of those patients they would pay like \$10,000 per session.

3.35 p.m.

This \$630,000 that we give them would last longer. That is one way that we help these patients. The second thing that we have been doing for them is, they require Epogen. We have been providing that for them. If every two weeks they need that, they would be able to receive that from us. The other thing they get is, every three months at least, they need to have laboratory (lab) checks, and we are able to run all of those tests for them free of cost. When they have to get the voucher, the doctors would certify that they have end-stage dialysis. We have a register now, of the patients who have been in the programme, so basically we are able to renew those vouchers.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have one more question under this line.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Dr. Cummings: The last time I asked about the National Commission on Disability (NCD) Presidential Commission under NCD, you said it is on Programme 1. I guess it is still under Programme 1. I have noticed that there is a subsidy there for about \$8 million. Is there any report coming out from this Presidential Commission? What is the status of this Commission?

Dr. Anthony: The Commission is up and running. The Chairman of the Commission is Dr. Leslie Ramsammy. They have been meeting and they have been doing work. We can get a report to you. You can see the report.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I am very happy that the Hon. Minister is continuing the public/private partnerships with regards to the dialysis afforded to our citizens. I trust that we will see more in other areas. My question is on line item 6284. In my budget presentation I had asked that consideration be given, with regard to your programme, for a voucher for cervical, prostate, and breasts checks, and if we could make it a family holistic check. I am quite certain that that would go down well, especially the prostate, where we see our men turning up at very late stages and which is resulting in a high number of deaths. That is one. I would like to turn your attention to line item 6221. Hon. Minister, in this line item there is allocation for materials for the National Reference Laboratory. I would like to know whether the National Reference Laboratory...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, is it line item 6221?

Ms. Lawrence: Yes, Drugs and Medical Supplies. I would like to know whether the...

Mr. Chairman: Just bear with me. I am double-checking. I thought I saw a \$0.

Ms. Lawrence: Where? Sorry, my page turned. Sorry about that.

Mr. Chairman: Programme 471. Your page turned. I wonder why the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson blew your page over?

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, thank you. She is not such a person. May I turn the Hon. Minister's attention to line item 6111. I note that you have a vacancy there. Could you kindly tell us what position is vacant and also, could you do the same for line item 6113? What are the vacant positions?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, going back to, I think, line item 6284, where we spoke about the cervical cancer vouchers, under this section we can also accommodate... We actually do help a lot of other patients who require assistance, especially if they have to do biopsies and further testing and so forth. Under that section, we have been able to help quite a lot of people. It has

grown. In fact, at the close of last year, we actually helped close to 2,468 patients for varying things, not just for cardiac.

In the Ministry, we have started a programme to deal with prostate cancer. We have actually assigned someone who is heading that programme under men's health. Last year, we did buy a number of the machines to deal with the prostate-specific antigen (PSA), to be able to do the testing. This year, we will be rolling out a more aggressive programme. In fact, in collaboration with a non-governmental organization (NGO) working in Guyana, we would be launching a special programme targeting men and trying to get them to come in to do testing. We are also going to be able, if they have an enlarged prostate, one of the challenges we had before is to do biopsies. You would see on Sunday that we are launching a new pathology laboratory where the turnaround time for biopsies would be less than a week. These are improvements that are there. While we can fund a few patients from here, the existing routines programmes of the Ministry would be able to capture quite a number of persons who require these services.

Ms. Lawrence: I am happy to hear that. My only concern would be, how are we going to get this information out there to people. You still meet people and they are at a loss. When you tell them that that is offered in the public service, they say they do not know. We have to get a little aggressive in terms of passing the information on. Thank you. Could we turn to... You did not answer the question.

Dr. Anthony: Yes, I have to answer you. I agree with you that on the PSA we need to do a lot more. It is not just on the PSA but generally on some of these programmes. I think a lot of people do not know that they exist. We want more people to utilise them. I agree with you that we need to be more proactive. For the prostate cancer programme, when we launched it, there are some names of persons, very famous people in Guyana, who are on the posters, who have agreed to be like the ambassadors of the programme. I think, once we start it, because of the names that we are using, and them having agreed to kind of be the ambassadors of the programme, a lot of men would at least pay attention to that. Coming back to the question that you asked before...

Ms. Lawrence: Through you to the Hon. Minister, since you...

Mr. Chairman: You are interrupting the Minister. On a point of order, you can. Please, allow him to finish.

Ms. Lawrence: No, thank you. I wanted him to follow on from what he was saying.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, but he was not finished. He did not say, thank you. Are you finished?

Dr. Anthony: No. I just want to answer the Hon. Member under line item 6111. There was one person who resigned, and that person is the Education and Quality Control person. That is for the Food and Drug laboratory. That is the vacancy that exists, under that heading.

Ms. Lawrence: Could he lay over the positions for line item 6113? My follow-up to the prostate programme was whether the Ministry is going to do any mapping in terms of not just the prostate cancer, but now that you are going to be giving all these vouchers and so, are you going to do mapping for all those cancers?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, under line item 6113, the three vacancies that we have there would be for Pharmacy Logistics Officer, a Systems Support Officer and a Storekeeper. Those are the vacancies there.

May I respond to the mapping? One of the things that we did over the last year is, we have been able to update the cancer registry and we have more up-to-date information now on the types of cancers that we have in Guyana. We have mandated that from every one of the private institutions, if they suspect cancer or they did biopsies, they have to send that information to the cancer registry so that we can keep a record. That is one phase.

The other thing is, knowing age groups and when these persons would likely develop some of these types of conditions, then we can have a more comprehensive programme like the one that we are doing for cervical cancer. The cervical cancer one, we have a preventative component with where we do the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccinations, then we do the screenings. Those screenings are done at age 25 up to 45 years. Similarly, we want to do that for prostate cancer where particular age groups would be used as screening and encouraging men to come in to be screened. Once that happens, then we do not have to wait to catch the cancer when it is already having metastasis and it is quite late. We want to be able to detect these things early. Therefore, we will be able to prevent them from developing complications.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, just a suggestion, following up on my colleague's suggestion, as it relates to sensitisation of our people when it comes to cancer situations in our nation.

Mr. Chairman: I have to be careful. If I allow MPs to make suggestions, then I am opening the door wide. You can still make your suggestion by saying this, these are useful, would you implement under this line item?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I heard the Hon. Minister say that they are going to do widespread public service announcements (PSAs) to get the message out there. I would like to recommend to the Hon. Minister that he could utilise the Post Office, which has a wider reach in all the regions, to get our messaging out so our people can be guided. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, are funds available for this wider outreach?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We actually want every stakeholder that can help us to get the message out. In fact, previously in the Ministry of Health, we have actually used the Post Offices for different programmes, where we were getting mothers to get complimentary feeding slips. They then take those vouchers to their nearby grocery stores that were participating and they traded those in to get milk and other things for their babies. We have quite a lot of experience working with the Post Offices.

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$8,387,240,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 472 – Diseases Control – Communicable Diseases – \$6,554,702,000

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6112 – Senior Technical: There is a decrease of five staff members there. What is the reason for the decrease in the staff members?

3.50 p.m.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. We had some movements here. We had 12 persons, some of whom resigned and others went into like the contracted employee category. So 12 persons were moved or resigned. And then we had an additional seven persons who came on; so the net difference was this minus five.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, line item 6115, Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled: There is a decrease also from 129 to 114, 15 staff members, could you explain?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, here we had 17 persons who were moved, they went to other areas, or we had a few resignations, and then we had two people that came on. So the net difference was minus fifteen.

Dr. Cummings: Whilst you had a decrease in 6112 and 6115, there is a number of 26 staff members increase in the contracted employees. As this programme is communicable disease, we have the neglected tropical diseases like Leishmaniasis, Chagas disease, Filariasis, Leprosy and so on. Do you have sufficient staff to ensure that we eliminate some of these diseases before 2030, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for 2030?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, have we neglected them?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In fact, under this category, we have added 44 new people into this section, so we have quite a number of additional persons. Yes, in terms of the diseases that we are looking to eliminate this year, well not this year but by 2030, Filariasis being one of them, I am happy to report that of our 10 administrative regions we have good results so that in eight of those we are not finding the parasite, and we only have now two regions where we have to place a lot more focus on. In those two regions, which are Region 4 and Region 3, there are specific areas within those regions that we have to put some more focus on. Once we are able to do that this year, and we will be targeting those areas with mass drug administration, then by next year, the international evaluation team that would normally come in to evaluate us, we are very confident that we will get good results. So we would be on that trajectory to eliminate Filariasis from Guyana.

In terms of Leprosy, which falls under this heading as well, we have seen a decline in cases and there has been a substantial decline. We are monitoring the patients individually and for those in the household of those patients, we want to introduce a programme where we can give prophylaxis to those people in the household, so we break the transmission chain. That is a new initiative that would be started this year, and we have made adequate provision for that. There are some other diseases that we have targeted as well, Leishmaniasis being one of them, and Trypanosomiasis; we are looking at worms and all of this. We are confident that the five neglected infections that we have identified, that by 2030 we will be able to eliminate them from Guyana.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships): I noticed there was a revised target in terms of sums of money – \$72,350 million – for 2023 and now the target for 2024 is \$95 million. What type of training, who will be the recipient of this training, the number of persons to be trained, the duration of the training and the category of persons?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, again, we have increased the sums here because we want to do training for the different departments that would be working on the elimination of some of these diseases. The National AIDS Programme Secretariat (NAPS), for example, we have about \$19 million that has been allocated to them for work in terms of control of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). We have set aside \$12 million for Epidemiology training, and this would be done across the board because we want to strengthen our surveillance system. In fact, we will be setting up a new electronic surveillance system during this year to track various infectious diseases across Guyana.

We spoke about Filariasis, and because we are looking to eliminate Filariasis we have set aside \$12.5 million for training persons in the area of Filariasis.

We have set aside another \$11 million to work with miners so that we can train persons who are mining in different parts of Guyana, give them the training so that they can do detection of Malaria, and we will train them how to treat Malaria. This here is a new initiative and, again, because we are using rapid kits, it is much easier for us to train that person. So, we have set aside about \$11 million to do that.

Leprosy, we have set aside about \$7 million to train people, again, in detecting these conditions and making sure that we move closer to elimination. We have about \$6 million identified to train healthcare workers on Dengue, and again this is another area where we want people to be trained so we can have early detection. We have also set aside moneys to do training in Port Health, we have about \$5 million for that.

Another \$5 million assigned to do Entomology because the mosquitoes that we have, we need to understand different species and therefore once we know that, then we will know their habits and we will be able to control them in a better way. These are some of the headings.

Dr. Cummings: What is the role of the National Public Health Reference Laboratory? In terms of all of this putting things together, it is supposed to be an umbrella; these should come under the aegis of the Reference Laboratory, sort of.

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, the National Public Health Reference Laboratory, what we are doing there is to specialise it so that we can do a lot of reference testing at the lab. One of the things that we have been working on there – and this year we are hoping to introduce that – is Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) testing. We have also started at the Reference Lab to be able to work on things like gene sequencing. So, we want to move the lab up a notch to be able to do tests that are not readily available and they would serve as the reference for other regional labs; that is what we are working on right now.

Dr. Cummings: Yes, I will move on to line item 6282, Equipment Maintenance: I have seen there was a revised sum of \$62,087,000 and now it has gone to \$75 million. What type of equipment we are talking about here and for which disease condition?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, of the \$75 million the bulk of this is going to the National Public Health Reference Laboratory. We are going to spend close to \$48 million in terms of maintenance of equipment there. Over the last year, we bought 26 new pieces of equipment, and they have to be serviced at a regular basis. Among the new things that we bought there was a viral load machine, and this was absolutely essential for us to be able to manage our HIV patients because while we have been able to show good progress on the first 95 and even the second 95, where those who know their status are on treatment, the third one was a bit problematic because we did not have a viral load machine and, therefore, we did not know whether or not the treatment was actually working as effectively as we wanted it to work. Now that we have this machine, we would be able to do the viral load testing for these patients. This is one of the new additions at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory, but we have 26 new pieces of equipment that we bought last year, and they will all have to be maintained. In addition to that, the stock that they had from before would include close to 129 pieces and all of these we have to keep maintaining them; so that is where we will be spending the bulk of the money.

In addition to that, there are some moneys that have been allocated to the Tuberculosis (TB) programme to do maintenance in their department, similarly for NAPS, similarly for the Malaria

programme, the Health Emergency Operation Centres (HEOU), for veterinary public health and for the other departments that fall under this programme.

Dr. Cummings: Two quick questions. I can continue in the same vein as we are looking at infectious disease. You spoke about TB, you spoke about HIV, you spoke about Malaria as well. As we know this is a global fund programme and it is under capital, but in the light of cost of living, poverty, do you see there is a resurgence of the gains that you have made in TB, HIV, Malaria in terms of the prevalence? Do you see a rise of Tuberculosis and so on? Do you envisage any rise in these?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for that question. I think up to 2022, if I recall correctly, we had probably about 500 patients that had TB. As of last year, we had less than 400 patients and we had previously seen cases of multiple drug-resistant TB; we have bought second-line treatment for those patients, and we had less than five last year. In fact, what we are seeing is a decline in TB cases and we have mapped where some of these cases are coming from and we have been actively working to treat those patients. And in fact, one of the attractions to this programme is because, as you know, they have to be on treatment for six to nine months. We have noticed that there are some persons who are homeless who have TB and we have been encouraging those persons to come to the TB department where we provide them with hot meals; and for most of those patients who have been coming, we have been able to work with them and we have seen good results. This type of programme is going to continue. But in terms of TB, there has been a decline in the cases.

Dr. Cummings: One more question under this Programme 472. Line item 6292, Dietary: \$261,954 million was the budgeted sum in 2023. There was a revised budget of \$128,529 million so this was a drastic decrease and I notice it has gone down to \$33,501 million. What is the reason for this decrease and what is being done differently?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, previously under this line item is where we provided meals for some of the patients in the Liliendal Hospital. We do have a few patients there but we have turned over the management of the hospital to the Georgetown Public Hospital and so we have removed the expenditure from here, and the Georgetown Hospital, for those patients, would be providing the meals.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Minister, line item 6284, Other: Within this allocation, there is an allocation for the National Public Health Reference Laboratory and hence I would be happy if you could indicate where we are with the strategy for the National Public Health Reference Laboratory and, also, where we are in terms of acquiring accreditation. Thank you.

4.05 p.m.

Dr. Anthony: Under this line item, we actually have some moneys set aside for the hospital at Liliendaal and that is to provide for cleaning services. We have contracted a cleaning service. Normally, we pay from this heading for that hospital. There is \$42 million that has been assigned for cleaning the facilities there. For the other expenditure, it is basically for different programmes here; filaria, Health Emergency Operations Centre (HEOC) and so forth.

That particular question that the Member asked is not funded by this line item. We have engaged the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA). There was a team from CARPHA who came to Guyana last year. They are working with the staff of the National Public Health Reference Laboratory (NPHRL) to do a strategy for NPHRL. In addition to the work that we are doing with CARPHA, we have also engaged the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). It is also helping us. We will have a strategy plan, not just for the National Public Health Reference Laboratory, but all of our laboratories across the country. That is what we are working on. We will have that strategy in place. We have been extending laboratories, not just because we want a top tertiary type of laboratories but we also want all of our hospital laboratories to be at a certain level, then, the district hospital laboratories to be at certain levels and then, at every health centre, they will also be able to provide basic testing. That is the type of strategy we are working on.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control - Communicable Diseases – \$6,554,702,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$3,895,581,000

Dr. Cummings: Once again, line item 6112, Senior Technical, of course, this is a very important area for primary healthcare. This is where the focus should be; first contact with the people in the

community. For senior technical, there is a loss of 11 staff members there. Could the Minister tell us the reasons?

Dr. Anthony: Again, we have 13 persons here, some of whom have been moved to contract and some of whom have resigned. We had an additional two persons who came on to the staff so the net difference is minus 11.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6115 – Contracted Employees: It has moved up from 115 to 126 and a whopping increase of \$37 million. What is the reason for this big increase and who are the persons, maybe the Minister could give me the top three designations and their emoluments?

Dr. Anthony: If it is contracted employees, then it is line item 6116.

Dr. Cummings: It is my mistake.

Mr. Chairman: It is a slip of the tongue.

Dr. Anthony: There are movements here where we added 34 people on to the establishment. The top five persons are the Principal Dental Surgeon who is getting a salary of \$577,000, a Dental Surgeon who is receiving a salary of \$591,000, a Prosthodontist at \$479,000, an Oral Maxillofacial Surgeon at \$479,000 and one Staff Nurse at \$373,000.

Dr. Cummings: What is the location, please? Is the location at the Dr. Cheddi Jagan Dental Centre or is it part of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation; the maxillofacial patient section?

Dr. Anthony: I think all of them are at the Dr. Cheddi Jagan Dental Centre because we have added a section there where there is a theatre where they could do the maxillofacial operations.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you. Line item 6222 – Field Materials and Supplies: There was a revised sum of \$42,089,000. The budgeted sum for 2024 is \$70 million. It is an increase of \$28 million. What is responsible for this whopping increase?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, for that question. As you heard one of the new initiatives that we have in the Ministry is to go into schools. We started last year by looking at nursery schoolchildren and doing these prophylactic check-ups. We want to continue with nursery schools but also

expand that into primary schools. Under this heading, we have set aside at least, \$27.9 million to buy things such as blood pressure cuffs, snells, charts, early childhood development screening kits and a whole host of other things to do screening for the children.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6224 – Print and Non-Print Materials: There it goes again, another increase of \$12 million, moving from \$188,866,000 to \$130 million and that is an increase of \$12 million. What is responsible for this increase in the budgeted sum under print and non-print materials?

[Mr. Chairman left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj assumed the Chair.]

Dr. Anthony: The \$130 million that we have allocated here, we have assigned \$89 million to the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Programme. It will be using this to do things such as perinatal cards, postnatal registers and for the school programme that we talked about, we will need to do school health forms. We have also set aside \$12 million to look at women’s health, looking at posters to make sure that we have flyers and these things relating to women’s health; \$9 million have been set aside to look at adolescent health; \$6 million for men’s health; \$5 million for dental health; \$4.5 million for food policy; \$2 million for environmental health; and \$2 million for elderly health.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6284 – Other: Moved from \$83,627,000 the budgeted sum for 2023 to \$92,950,000. The increase of approximately \$9 million. What constitutes for Other? could the Member disaggregate the sum?

Dr. Anthony: Under this heading, we would normally look at waste management. We have also been using this line item to educate people about the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and immunisation. With this \$92 million that we have, \$22 million will go to the MCH Programme for a Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) communication programme or campaign; \$24 million would be going to promote school health so that we could get more parents involved; \$11 million would be for food policy; \$10 million for environmental health; \$6.5 million for adolescent health; \$6.5 million for dental health; \$6 million for elderly health; \$3.8 million for women’s

health; and \$2.4 million for men's health. All of these are awareness campaigns that we will be running.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): It is moved from \$86,192,000 to \$110 million, which is an increase of \$24 million. Could you tell us about the type of training to be done? How many persons are to be trained? What are the categories of workers? What is the duration of the training?

Dr. Anthony: For training here, again, we have been working with healthcare workers and some of the teachers in the various schools, so we are spending \$25.5 million on school health; another \$17.9 million will be spent on MCH Programme, antenatal/postnatal types of training and effective vaccine management; \$13 million for women's health; \$12.5 million on adolescent health; \$10 million for food policy; \$8.8 million for health promotion; \$6 million on men's health; \$5.6 million on dental health; \$5.5 for environmental health; and \$5 million for elderly health. These are the different types of training that we will be running.

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$3,895,581,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$28,571,138,000

Dr. Cummings: For the chart of account, I am looking at the staffing details from line item 6111, Administrative, to line item 6117, Temporary Employees. There is a modest increase across there. It moved from 2,805 to 2,821 but, when I look at line item 6112, there is a loss of 84 staff members there from 352 to 268. Could the Minister please explain this massive loss?

Dr. Anthony: Under line item 6112, Senior Technical, we had the movement of 84 persons, some of whom resigned and others who were moved to line item 6116, Contracted Employees. That is what accounted for the difference there.

Dr. Cummings: By extension, the Minister is trying to say that for line item 6116 moving from 795 to 1,083 now some of the staff members had come from senior technical and the other areas. There is an increase now of 208 contracted employees, so all could not have come from senior technical. Did they come on? Did you employ them? What is it?

Dr. Anthony: No. Some of them came from this heading.

Dr. Cummings: You did say so but, what about the others?

Dr. Anthony: Basically, there are 26 persons who came from this heading. This is 23 medical officers who have opted for contracts now. They moved from this category into the contracted category. We had a number of resignations so that is what accounted for the difference.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings: It moved from \$50,232,000 to now \$99,802,000. It is an increase of \$49 million. Which buildings are being rented? Could the Minister disaggregate the sum?

4.20 p.m.

Dr. Anthony: There is \$99.8 million there for rental. We have \$23 million that we are spending to house the Cuban doctors who come to Guyana. For those who are in Georgetown, we are renting a place at Duke Street. It is the same arrangement that was there before. There is a million dollars for a residence that we are renting in Campbellville. We are renting another place in Toucan Drive, Linden, for the Chinese doctors and the Cuban doctors who go up there. We are spending \$4.2 million there. We have several rentals in Linden actually. We have about eight or nine of them for different houses in Linden. That is what makes up most of this heading.

Ms. Lawrence: To the Hon. Minister, at the same line item 6241, could you say what new buildings you are going to rent in 2024?

Dr. Anthony: Apart from those that we have already, we have set aside another \$60 million or so because we are expanding the Cuban brigade. We expect, within the first quarter of this year, to have more Cuban doctors, nurses and other technicians coming into Guyana. We have set aside a sum of money to rent additional buildings for them when they come.

Dr. Cummings: At line item 6241 – Maintenance of Buildings, I guess this preventative maintenance. We are looking here at the revised budgeted sum in 2023 moved from \$36,486,000 and to \$50 million in 2024, which is an increase of \$14 million. Which buildings are being maintained?

Dr. Anthony: It is \$13,513,000 to be exact. That \$50 million that we have under that heading, we are spending \$32 million on the Linden Hospital Complex; we will be spending four million on Kwakwani; and \$14 million would go to regional health services to do the maintenance of its facility.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Dr. Cummings, do you have another question?

Dr. Cummings: Yes. At line item 6311, rates and taxes, which building have you not paid rates and taxes for and now you have to pay? Is it in arrears or what?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, under this heading, we have set aside \$925,000 to pay for rates and taxes. We will be paying the Mayor and Town Council of Linden some moneys. We are also paying for the Linden Hospital Complex. We have to pay some taxes to the town council there. We have set aside some moneys for the Regional Health Services (RHS). I think some of the health centres that we have in the city, we have to also cover the taxes which is rather unfortunate because the city is supposed to take care of these health centres and we are managing the health centres for it. We are managing all its health centres.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister, is it \$975,000 or one million dollars?

Dr. Anthony: It is \$925,000.

Ms. Lawrence: We do what we have to do to take care of our people. Mr. Chair, may I take the Hon. Minister to line item 6284 – Other? Minister, could you disaggregate the \$230.5 million?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. We have \$224 million here that we have set aside to work on telemedicine. As I said, we have 25 existing sites and we are going to add or we project to add maybe another 50 sites for this year.

Ms. Lawrence: Did you say five/zero?

Dr. Singh: Yes; five zero. This would include buying the hardware. We also have to do the internet connections. I think the estimates here would cover for the telemedicine sites that we have. There are some licencing fees that we have to pay.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow-up on the same line item: Minister could you kindly indicate whether you have allocated any moneys for the various health centres across the country to fulfil that mandate which you set of them being able to detect at least 216 types of diseases?

Dr. Anthony: It is not 216 types of diseases; it is basically 216 types of interventions that we can do at these facilities. We have that plan that we have developed and we are working to implement that so we are operating all the health centres. We have done quite a lot of work over the last two to three years and we have some additional funds this year to do those type of upgrades. Apart from that, with the equipment that we are buying, we are also upgrading our testing capacity. We have been training more people so that we could expand the range of services that we are able to offer at these centres. In addition to that, with the telemedicine centres that we are establishing, the scope of what we can do would also increase. We are not fully there as yet but we are getting there.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, as you implement these programmes in the various health centres, what mechanism is in place to ensure that they continue to work from opening day? The reason I am asking is because the health centre next to me refers people to Georgetown Hospital to do dental, to have blood tested and almost everything. One has to take the sick person to Georgetown. It is the same thing at David Rose. What is going on at Festival City Health Centre and Sophia Health Centre? The same thing. We go and we establish these new programmes in the health centres but, how are you monitoring to ensure that they continue to provide that service for the citizens?

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, let me take this opportunity also to remind guests that the use of technological devices in the House is prohibited. We have members of the media whose task is to broadcast our Sittings live. That is a gentle reminder to our visitors. Go ahead, Minister.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think you have raised a very valid point. We have set up a hotline in the Ministry. I was asking to get the number of the hotline so that I can share it with you. The reason being is that we have observed that while we have assigned staff to these health centres, let us say there is a doctor at the health centre, he is supposed to be there from 8.00a.m. to 4.30 p.m. A lot of times the Doctor is not there on time which cause a lot

of inconvenience to the patients who go there and have to wait for a long period of time. We want the public to help us identify these errant health centres so that we could take action. The number is 227-4357. If you have problems at any of the health centres, call the number. We have somebody who is there to take these complaints and then we will call the relevant people to make sure they fix it. That is the only way; if we do not monitor and have this sort of feedback, we are not going to change this behaviour that people have where they feel they could come at any time and have the patients being inconvenienced. We want to change this.

Ms. Lawrence: To the Hon. Minister, I would like to take you to line item 6281, Security Services. Minister, I am not questioning the amount here, despite I see a decrease. I am asking specifically about the Sophia Health Centre where there have been several incidents of attack by armed bandits. On a visit there, I wanted to know why I had to wait outside. It was told to me that the Centre screens people coming in. It only allows a certain number of people in at a time because it does not have armed guards there anymore. I am wondering, why has that been taken away? Perhaps, you have put some other type of security in place; I do not know.

Dr. Anthony: For the Sophia Health Centre, we have a security company that is assigned to that health centre. It is castle security services. This is the security service that has been assigned. Now, the last time we had an incident at Sophia Health Centre it was because we had an armed guard there. When the bandits came, they actually came and disarmed the person, took away the firearm. We were advised to not have armed security and since then we have not had an incident. They actually went, disarmed the person and took away the firearm. We have security in place. I would ask the staff to also review the procedures there because the Centre should not be locking people out. We have three doctors who have been assigned to the Sophia Health Centre.

Ms. Lawrence: They are scared the staff are scared.

Dr. Anthony: Not scared, I mean...

Ms. Lawrence: They are scared; the staff are scared, but you can look into it, Minister. Just my last question on this, what is the Ministry doing about the No. 1 Dispensary that services the catchment area of Charlestown, Albouystown, Werk-En-Rust and Stabroek?

Dr. Anthony: I am happy that you asked that question, but it is not under this heading. We are actually going to build a new health centre at No.1 Dispensary. We have it in the budget.

4.35 p.m.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. We have eight more programmes under capital expenditure; we have four more under current; and we just have about 44 minutes more. This is just to give you an idea of our time keeping.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$28,571,138,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$1,630,458,000

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chair, for Health Sciences Education, line item 6112, Senior Technical, there is the loss of three staff members and a tune of \$4 million. There is no significant increase but, what is the reason for the loss of these senior technical members?

Dr. Anthony: For the three persons there, we have three resignations – One is a Senior Nursing Tutor and two are Nursing Tutors 1.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: There is a movement from 19 persons to 26. I noticed that \$42,573,000 was the budgeted sum and now it is \$53,511,000. This is an increase of \$10,938,000. Could you say who are these contracted employees that caused this increase and give the remunerations for maybe the top three?

Dr. Anthony: We have added nine additional persons. Nine additional persons came on under this head and two resigned. In total we have an addition of seven persons. The top four persons there would be the Programme Officer who receives a salary of \$242,000; a Health Education Officer at \$189,000; a Social Worker for \$170,000; and a Nursing Tutor at \$162,000.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chair, this particular programme deals with the training of our nurses. The Minister alluded to – have an increase in the training of nurses, maybe 1000 strong – several times in his budget presentation. What do you think would be the student to tutor ratio? We are talking here not only of the training of students but in the clinical setting. If you are going to have a 1,000, you will have to do practical and be in the wards. For the ratio, you cannot have 20

persons around one ward and so forth. In terms of the supervision and so on, how do you plan to address that?

Dr. Anthony: While we have core set of staff at the various institutions, we have also recruited a number of part time staff. At the hospitals where they will be working, we have also recruited persons from the hospital to assist with training. In addition to that, to help the persons who we are training to enhance their practical skills, by the first quarter of this year, we should have six simulation centres opened. We would have people there to help them with their practical.

Dr. Cummings: This is the last one under this programme. Line item 6294, Other: There is a movement from \$239,000 to \$600,000. What constitutes this \$361,000 increase?

Dr. Anthony: Under this line item, we have \$600,000. We will be using that when we do our graduations and things such as that. That is what we will use that money for.

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$1,630,458,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$2,523,454,000

Dr. Cummings: Minister at line item 6282, Equipment Maintenance, there is movement from \$95,378,000 which is the budgeted sum in 2023 to \$120,000,000. It is an increase of \$25 million. Which equipment are we talking about here?

Dr. Anthony: Under this heading, we have \$120 million. There is \$101 million that will be used for regional support services, where we will be spending \$4.4 million on x-rays and another \$96.9 million on laboratories. For all the regional laboratories that we have, we will be doing the maintenance of them from here. We also have \$12.9 million for the National Blood Transfusion Services. We have to maintain things such as refrigerators, freezers and so forth. We have set aside \$3.9 million for the Government Analyst – Food and Drug Department (GA-FDD) to service its laboratory equipment. We have some other minor expenditure under this heading.

Dr. Cummings: This is my last question for this programme. Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): There is \$35,928,000 which is the budgeted sum in 2023. Now, it has

gone up to \$46 million. It is close to \$10 million. What type of training is being done? What is the number of persons to be trained?

Dr. Anthony: With the \$46 million that we allocated here, under this programme \$16.8 million will be spent to train persons in radiation safety to do point of care testing, especially for antenatal mothers. We have another \$13 million for the Government Analyst – Food and Drug Department which has different types of training that it would normally do. We have also set aside a \$6.5 million to do quality assurance training. We have \$2.4 million for the National Blood Transfusion Services, which is doing different types of training to be able to achieve the American Association of Blood Banks (AABB) certification.

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$2,523,454,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$1,077,528,000

Dr. Cummings: I noticed at one of the indicators, the number of persons who accessed the rehabilitation service for the first time was 21,616 in 2023. There is a target of 12,000 in 2024. How did you arrive at this target? Are you saying there are going to be less persons coming to access? How did you determine who is going to come to access the rehabilitation services?

Dr. Anthony: In fact, we think we will be able to help many more persons. Over the last two to three years, we have established many more centres. In all our regional hospitals, we now have physiotherapy departments and we are actually able to help more people. Maybe, we will exceed the 21,000 that is there.

Dr. Cummings: You have a decreased target here. Through the Chair, Hon. Minister, are you saying that in each of these areas – be in at the district hospitals, level three or four – you going to have Audiologists, specialists and occupational therapists, apart from Physiotherapist? Is it just Physiotherapy alone or are you going to have other specialised areas?

Dr. Anthony: For the new facilities that we are building, we have areas that we set aside to do different types of rehabilitation services – that is one set of things. Even while we are building those, we are expanding the Audiology Department so that we can provide more services to people. Last year, we assisted more than 1,000 persons who needed hearing aids. We have been

providing a lot of services to people who need speech therapy and a whole host of other things. The services are now more expanded and we are recruiting people as well. I think last year eight persons graduated from the University of Guyana and we recruited all of them into the programme. We are also running our own training programme so that we can train people who can go out and offer these services.

Dr. Cummings: I have one more question for this programme. Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: I noticed there is a whopping \$96 million to the National Commission on Disability (NCD). I cannot recall if there is any report that was laid over in this National Assembly. At the Ptolemy Reid Rehabilitation Centre, the subsidy there remains the same at just \$46,928,000 as compared to the \$96 million for the National Commission on Disability.

Dr. Anthony: One of the things that we want to do here – which is why we allocated the resources – is to do a national survey on people with disabilities. the National Commission on Disability would be doing that and out of that survey we will have a comprehensive database. Based on that, we would better be able to provide services for persons with disability.

4.50 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, could I turn the Hon. Member’s attention to line item 6271, Telephone and Internet Charges. I have noted that in comparison to previous years, there has been an increase by probably \$2 million for 2024. Could you explain the reason for the increase?

Dr. Anthony: The increase of \$2.172 million is because we have more staff that are using these telephones to interact with patients – that is the reason. We have a breakdown of which locations we have budgeted that for. In terms of the overall expenditure here, which is \$5.7 million, we have set aside \$2.4 million for the administration of this programme; we have set aside \$800,000 for the Audiology Department; \$700,000 for the National Vocational Training Centre; \$500,000 for the Cheshire Home; and \$468,00 for the physiotherapy services.

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$1,077,528,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 478 – Disease Control - Non-Communicable Diseases – \$1,006,477,000

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, this is a very important programme. We normally call it Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and it takes up about 70% of the budget. We would think that this programme will be well staffed. I have seen just 36 members in this staff, looking at the Chart of Accounts from line items 6111 to 6117. I will ask this Minister, in light of our Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak, the pandemic, where we had to move staff from some non-communicable diseases' clinics to the Infectious Disease Hospital at Liliendaal and so on, in the light of that, do you think you have sufficient or adequate staff? This is because we do not want all of the gains that we are working towards NCD, when these pandemics come, we have to move staff from one area to the next to assist.

Dr. Anthony: The numbers that we have here are basically reflective of those persons who are in the head office. We have 32 persons who are working from the Ministry but because it is chronic non-communicable diseases, all of our doctors and everyone in the system are part of the response staff, so to speak. With all the doctors, they are able to treat non-communicable diseases, nurses and the people that we have at the health centres. This 32 is only reflective of the persons that we have centrally. There are persons in every single region that manages chronic diseases.

Programme: 478 – Disease Control - Non-Communicable Diseases – \$1,006,477,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$239,175,000

Dr. Cummings: Minister, project code 1216200, Ministry of Health – Buildings, the profile page speaks about a total amount for this project being \$831million, \$607,741,000 was spend in 2023. For this 2024, \$205 million to be spent. It speaks to payment of retention. Which building are we talking about? It also speaks to facilities to be upgraded. We want to know who the contractor is, the firm and some more details. Is there a completion date for this project?

Dr. Anthony: This section that the Hon. Member asked on, we have the first building, and we have a retention of \$24 million. This is for the building at the Ministry of Health's Head Office.

The works were completed in 2023 but we have a defects liability period and that is why we have this retention to be paid over this year.

The second one is consultancy services, again, for the same Ministry of Health's building. We have to pay the supervisor for that project \$5.2 million dollars. Once the defects liability period is over, then, they would sign off on the certificate and they can receive their final payment. In the other one, it is a modification of the roofing at the Central Supplies Unit and that is a \$9.5 million roll over and, again, this is the defects liability period which will last for the next six months. Once we are satisfied then we will pay that over.

Dr. Cummings: We have to be very careful because ...

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Dr. Cummings, I do not think the Minister has concluded his answer. Minister, are you finished?

Dr. Anthony: No. I have one more. The other one is the construction of the annex building in the Ministry of Health compound. We have an allocation there of \$144 million. That project has started, and it is expected to be completed this year.

Dr. Cummings: Follow up, just want to make sure that these buildings are completed. I recall in 2023 or 2022, the Minister saying 'We have fixed those problems now we have an allocation of \$259 million to complete this project during this year. We expect that it should be completed by mid-year and there is another \$13 million that has been allocated for the supervising firm to make sure that this project is completed on time'. You have said this. These are your words as I have quoted. Let us make sure that it is completed this year, thank you.

Dr. Anthony: The building is completed, but when you finish a project, the contractors have a year to fix. If there are any defects, they have to fix them. That is why we withheld moneys from them so that once that defects liability period is over, we will make that payment. That goes for both the contractor and the supervising firm. So, the building is completed.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Dr. Cummings, do you have another question on this programme?

Dr. Cummings: Basically, the Land and Water transport to improve Health Service, there is a forklift to the tune of \$14 million. Where would this forklift be located?

Dr. Anthony: This is a forklift that we bought for the Central Supplies Unit which is located at Kingston.

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$239,175,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control - Communicable Diseases – \$758,500,000

Dr. Cummings: Project Code 2508900, Office Furniture and Equipment, \$5 million has been allocated in 2024 for the purchase of furniture and equipment. Could you tell us where these items will be lodged?

Dr. Anthony: They are for various places. Under this line item, we have a desktop computer which will be going to Vector Control Services, we will be buying 10 of them. For Power Supply, we have 10 uninterruptable power supplies (UPSs) and those will be going to the office at Thomas Street. We have a printer for the Brickdam Office. At the Infectious Disease Hospital at Liliendaal, we have a pressure pump that we will be purchasing. We have the instillation of the National Public Health Reference Laboratory; we have an oxygen generator manifold that we have to fix. I went ahead, so the ones that I mentioned there, up to the pump at Liliendaal, that is what we are spending there.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, before you move on, I will have to suspend for a lack of quorum. We will suspend for a few minutes. We will ring the bell. Members who are here, please remain here until we are back to a quorum.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting Suspended at 5.04 p.m.

Sitting Resumed at 5.08 p.m.

Bell rung.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Hon. Members, we are reminded that if there is a quorum, whatever decisions we make here will not be binding so it is important that we maintain a quorum at this crucial stage when we are examining the estimates. When we left off, the Hon. Minister was on the floor. Hon. Minister, please continue.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. I think I would have answered the Hon. Member.

5.09 p.m.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Project code...

Mr. Seeraj: We are on programme 472.

Dr. Cummings: Yes. Project code 4405200, COVID-19 Response Programme. I noticed in the *Legend* there is a provision for COVID-19 response initiative moving from Local \$120 million, there is a specific \$390 million and then there is a total \$510 million. What are some of the response initiatives you envisage to be done?

Dr. Anthony: Is it project code 4405200? This is a programme that is funded by the World Bank. Under this programme, we have \$390 million that has been allocated. We will be spending \$98.5 million for laboratory equipment and reagents. We have \$2.7 million for cold chain supply. We have another \$215 million that would be payment for hospital equipment. We have \$49 million that is for transportation. We have \$10 million for surveillance. And, we have \$5 million for risk communication and an employment cost of \$8.2 million.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control – Communicable Diseases - \$758,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services - \$132,205,000

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services - \$132,205,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Seeraj: I propose the question that the sum stated for agency 47: Ministry of Health, capital expenditure, programme 475 – Health Sciences Education stands part of the estimates.

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, I think you have missed one.

Mr. Seeraj: Sorry, programme 474. Let me do that again.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services - \$51,930,852,000

Ms. Lawrence: To the Hon. Minister, line item 2405600, can the Minister kindly indicate whether any of these ambulances will be going to the Festival City Polyclinic?

Dr. Anthony: The ambulances that we have here, we are buying four of them, but they are assigned to Annai, Sand Creek, Kwebanna, and Yupakari.

Ms. Lawrence: Line item 2509000, could the Hon. Minister kindly indicate where these equipment are going, to which health centres?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, there are quite a lot of equipment here. The first set, which would be for about \$54 million would be going as the basic kit for Telemedicine. So, we would be assigning these to Whitewater, Pakera, Port Kaituma, Kumaka, Mabaruma, Jawalla, Waramadong, Kaikan, Kamarang, Paramakatoi, Kato, Kopinang, Monkey Mountain, Kurukabaru, Shulinab, Surama, Rewa, Karasabai, Aishalton, Wakapoa, Kabakuri, Suddie, Rockstone and Ituni, so that is Telemedicine. Then we have two Laparoscopic Towers, one would be going to Suddie and one would be going to Lethem. We have a number of ophthalmoscopes, those would be going to various regions. We have examination beds for different regions as well. We have bought, under this heading, the Pack Radiology System. This is to allow for the digital X-rays that we have that we can move the images seamlessly. We now have digital x-ray machines in various locations, at Suddie, Diamond, Linden, New Amsterdam, Mibikuri, Port Maurant, West Demerara Hospital, Fort Wellington, Mahaicony, Mabaruma, Bartica, Mahdia, Festival City, Port Kaituma, Kumaka, Oscar Joseph, Lenora, Skeldon, Wismar, Leguan, Aishalton Annai, Sand Creek, and Karasabai. So, they are 24-pack system. What we will do, by the mid of this year, all these places that I call would have digital x-ray machines. We have already started installing a set of them, but these machines now would be connected so that we can send the images to the Georgetown Hospital where the radiologists can look at them. Maybe it might be of interest to some Members that we are using Artificial Intelligence (AI) so that we can do first screening for chest x-rays, and then, after that, if we need to do a second

opinion, then we go to that second opinion. But there are lots of equipment here and they go to different places.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, quickly. I am concerned about Festival City because we are supposed to be taking off that number of persons from South Georgetown going towards the Georgetown Public Hospital. I have not heard you mention allocations set aside to upgrade the hospital to a polyclinic that it should be. So, could you kindly tell me whether anything is in the budget to provide the services at the polyclinic level?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, there is an allocation for Festival City, but you would not find it here because we have given a lump sum set of money to the Georgetown Public Hospital. Festival City falls under the Georgetown Public Hospital, so all the capital works for Georgetown Public Hospital they would be able to look after festivals city and very soon you will have a digital x-ray being installed there as well.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister, for the clarification.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services - \$51,930,852,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education - \$1,446,000,000

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education - \$1,446,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services - \$746,133,000

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services - \$746,133,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services - \$52,000,000

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services - \$52,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 478 – Disease Control – Non-Communicable Diseases - \$1,163,600,000

Programme: 478 – Disease Control – Non-Communicable Diseases - \$1,163,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Thank you all, very much. Let me, on your behalf, Hon. Members, thank the Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Frank Christopher Stanislaus Anthony and his team, his Permanent Secretary, and members of staff, for assisting us in getting through this part of our estimates. The next ministry is the Ministry of Home Affairs. We will not be taking any formal break, but Members bear in mind the need for us to maintain a quorum and we can have our refreshments in small batches. Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, I invite you and your team to take your place. Hon. Minister, you can come over this way.

5.24 p.m.

Agency: 51 Ministry of Home Affairs

Current Expenditure

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,632,180,000

Mr. Ramjattan: I notice that contracted employees...

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, could you pull down the microphone a bit. We...

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you. There has been 40 more contracted employees. Could you just...

Mr. Seeraj: What is the line item please?

Mr. Ramjattan: It is line item 6116.

Mr. Seeraj: What is the question?

Mr. Ramjattan: The question is, could you kindly state what is the general classification? What kinds of contracted employees are they? Are they senior people?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: Mr. Chairman, my name is Mr. Robeson Benn, just to say for the record. I want to thank my now and new shadow and former Minister of Public Security for posing any question.

Mr. Seeraj: For the record, Hon. Minister Robeson Benn, the Hon. Member has posed a question.

Mr. Benn: Yes. I thought he posed it to you, but anyway...

Mr. Seeraj: He posed it through me to you.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Hon. former Minister of Public Security is aware that there were a number of persons who are contracted employees and were told to go on the fixed establishment during his tenure. Our position is, where necessary, and people want to make the choice to either be contracted or in a public service position, that is our policy. Therefore, there are a number of persons who were previously moved or are in new positions and who have opted to come in the contracted situation.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you have the floor. The microphone, please.

Mr. Ramjattan: Under line item 6281, I notice that we had budgeted \$23 million for security services but there was a revision of 10 by a reduction of 13 that was spent last year. Could the Minister indicate why that might have been so?

Mr. Benn: There was a change of movement in the necessity for security for what is called the ministerial advisor.

Mr. Ramjattan: Under Other, line item 6294, I notice there has been a \$10 million increase to \$290 million. I am aware it is for community policing, the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU), the Juvenile Holding Centres and, also, for the New Opportunity Corps (NOC). For those four categories, could the Minister do a disaggregation for me as to how much of the \$290 million would be going to community policing, to SOCU, the Juvenile Holding Centre and the NOC?

Mr. Benn: Sorry. For SOCU, the operational expense is \$18 million; intelligence – \$40 million; Trafficking in Persons (TIP) – \$20.3 million; community policing – \$123 million; and the Juvenile Holding Centre – \$4.3 million. There is some stipend for the Juvenile Justice

Committee. For the Forensic Laboratory, it is \$90,000. These are small administrative expenses which is why they are under the issue of 'Other'.

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Ramjattan: I notice, again, for line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, I think there continues to be \$10 million to the Guyana National Road Safety Council. I understand about the 78% increase in accidents on roads and all of that. Do you not think there is need for that Council to get some more money to help you with the work?

Mr. Benn: This amount was in fact increased over last year. It is indeed true that we are facing difficult circumstances in relation to road accidents. I want to point out to the Committee that, indeed, part of the situation is that since we came out of COVID we have many more vehicles on the roads. The number of vehicles, which are on the roads nowadays, is double to what it was during the former Minister of Public Security's time, so we are challenged. What indeed occurs, while we are holding to this figure, there are other ways in which the Guyana National Road Safety Council gets support from the private sector through our own interventions with international agencies with representation here. We will keep looking at this situation. In the Ministry itself, we are making efforts in terms of supporting the overall work of the Guyana National Road Safety Council. Yes, it is a valid concern, and we have to keep a strong eye on this problem and our interventions.

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,632,180,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$23,696,058,000

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Ramjattan: I notice there is line item 6302, and I am very impressed with the training that is continuing, but there is \$80 million increase in Training and Scholarships. Could the Minister indicate in what areas of the Guyana Police Force we are going to have this kind of thing?

Mr. Benn: The Hon. Member maybe aware that we are rebuilding the Guyana Police Force. The Guyana Police Force, given the challenges both of crime, nationally and transnational organised crime, has to be a modern police force. This requires training at all levels. The Commissioner, Mr. Hicken, is proud to say that there are a number of Doctor of Philosophy (PhDs), Masters and Bachelor of Sciences (BScs) and all those persons are now in the Guyana Police Force. We have to identify that we are establishing properly a police academy. That police academy has had accreditation from the Jamaica National Agency for Accreditation (JANAAC) from Jamaica. There is other work going on for proper education and proper training so that we have a multiskilled and multitalented police force to respond to the issues which we are faced with. I want to point out that the deficit the Hon. Member left us with is part of the problem. A significant gap and the undermining of the forces are what he left us with. We are trying to make up that deficit and those gaps, both in the education and training of police persons and across all the services.

Mr. Ramjattan: For this one, I just wanted to, for my personal information more than anything, line time 6311, Rates and Taxes of \$278 million for last year and, also for this year, was that paid to the Georgetown Mayor and City Council by the Ministry?

Mr. Benn: I think this payment is still pending. It is being processed. This is not for the personal information of the Hon. Member. We are stating it here for the record.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you, very much. When do you propose...

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you have the floor.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, thank you, very much. Well, we budgeted it the last time and we are budgeting it this year. Why has that not been paid to the Georgetown Mayor and City Council?

Mr. Benn: We did not get around to the position given the other exigencies that we were faced with to make...

Mr. Ramjattan: What were the...

Mr. Benn: What is that?

Mr. Ramjattan: What were the exigencies, I ask through the Chairman.

Mr. Benn: The exigencies of having to make up cash flow and expenditure for the challenges of restoring the security architecture to what it should be.

Mr. Ramjattan: Are you saying that you took this money and vired it somewhere else when we did what we did here?

Mr. Benn: I said no such thing.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you, very much. That is alright.

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$23,696,058,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$3,558,023,000

Mr. Ramjattan: Sir, I notice there has been an increase of some \$25 million for line item 6294, Other. I am a bit lost as to what this ‘Other’ means and could you give me why the need for this increase?

Mr. Benn: These are allocations for public awareness – radio and television, revising and implementing the healthcare strategy, acquiring rental service for tents and portable toilets for outreach and other activities and the prison. ‘Other’ deals with what might seemingly be extraneous issues, which again I have to say we inherited.

5.39 p.m.

This is because when we had to deal with inheriting Lusignan Prison with thousands of men out in the cold and in the rain, we had to put in means, not only for the Prison Officers but also for the men to upgrade. We had to get mattresses. We had to build cots. We had to bring an end to the situation of men sleeping on top of each other and below each other and sharing sponges, with all of the bad things which go along with that. So, Other is a catchall for all the efforts we have had to make in relation to moving to a new situation to which we are almost there now, at the present time, at Lusignan.

Mr. Ramjattan: I noticed that at line item 6322, Contributions to International Organisations, we had put up a sum of money for association of prison chiefs, an international organisation. Was that waived? I noticed that in your revised for 2023, you did not spend anything on that.

Mr. Benn: I do not think my Advisors had the formal meetings for the year. I know that they did some virtual meetings, but in terms of going into expenditures, they could not go into it because there was not the ability to do in-person meetings.

Programme: 513 Guyana Prison Service – \$3,558,023,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 515 Guyana Fire Service – \$2,417,563,000

Programme: 515 Guyana Fire Service – \$2,417,563,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 516 General Register Office – \$304,350,000

Mr. Ramjattan: In relation to line item 6284, we had a revised spending of \$33,300,000 and we have gone back to \$42,300,000. Could the Hon. Minister explain for us why the need to go back to \$42,300,000 instead of the \$33,300,000 that was spent in 2023?

Mr. Benn: I can only speak to what is needed at the present time. We have to pay agency fees, registrar fees, do minor repairs to office furniture but particularly, too, there is the recruitment of 25 District Registrars at \$40,000 a month. The is to help improve the rate of adult registration throughout the country. There has been a serious deficit in terms of registering Guyanese. In fact, I once went to Kurupung and was shocked that a man who I have known, from all of the years I was going in the bush, was 60 something years old and did not have a Guyanese birth certificate. We have taken the position that we will employ people throughout all of the regions, and we will go and get them to be registered as citizens of Guyana. We have the challenge on the other side with Venezuela on the west and we cannot have people going out there now without birth certificates and other documents to verify that they are citizens of Guyana. This cannot continue.

Mr. Ramjattan: I noticed in your indicators, as mentioned or hinted as what you are doing there, that you will be doing at least 5,500 more late registration of births, deaths and marriages.

You did 3,049 last year and you will be increasing that to 5,550, which is a good target. Could you tell this Committee and this country how many of the 3,049 were late registration of births? It is on page 235 of Volume 2.

Mr. Benn: The number of late registration of births was 2,361 and of deaths, it was 38.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thanks very much for that information. Could you give me, if you have it or you could lay it over, this 2,361 by region? Which region had what number of births?

Mr. Benn: We will have to lay it over by region for the benefit of the Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramjattan: I noticed, too, in that set of indicators, the number of marriages that you intend to process this year is only 7,000, when you did almost 21,000 last year. Is there any reason you feel that people are not going to get married this year?

Mr. Benn: There was a deficit in the issuance of marriage certificates. Many were not given, uplifted or copies given out. We are talking about marriage certificates.

Mr. Ramjattan: I have no other questions.

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$304,350,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 517 Customs Anti-Narcotics – \$665,197,000

Programme: 517 Customs Anti-Narcotics – \$665,197,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 511 Policy Development and Administration – \$908,520,000

Mr. Ramjattan: Project code 1216600 – Buildings: I noticed that \$570 million is provisioned for buildings. I also checked the Volume and I do not get a grasp of which buildings. Is this the Ministry's building or is it any other building? The project entails the provision of buildings. That is rather scanty. Could you name some of the buildings that this \$570 million will go towards?

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Ramjattan; Hon. Minister.

Mr. Benn: He is an Hon. Member. I am the Minister.

Mr. Seeraj: Correct. It is Hon. former Minister, Mr. Ramjattan, and Hon. current Minister, Mr. Benn.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I am not surprised that the Hon. Member would think anything that we are doing in buildings is scanty. It is \$570 million that we are talking about. There is the reconstruction of the Juvenile Holding Centre. We have to do a lot of work in respect of rehabilitating the juveniles and making them feel loved there, rather than being in disdainful conditions. We are constructing a transitional centre at Cummings Lodge for persons who may come out of prisons or who have issues in terms of trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling. There is a transitional centre at Cummings Lodge for \$82 odd million. We are building a new headquarters building for the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU), an administrative building, in the first instance, for \$220 million. We are remodelling the offices in our new extension. We have added to the Ministry. It is much larger than how you left it. We are also doing some engineering works in respect of that building. The total comes up to \$570 million. That is for the Ministry. We are not talking about the agencies.

Mr. Ramjattan: Project code 2608200 – Office Equipment and Furniture: I noticed \$320 million for the purchase of equipment. Is this where the facial recognition equipment, which the Vice-President has been talking about, will be purchased from?

Mr. Benn: I am not sure what you have been shadowing the Vice-President about. It is not.

Mr. Ramjattan: We are aware that there is going to be some facial recognition video cameras and so on. Is that not coming under your Ministry?

Mr. Benn: No. This is not being done directly through the Ministry. The Ministry will be only operationalising a system, which is intended to provide more security to the country. It is not simply Georgetown, but a safe city operation will move to a safe country operation.

Mr. Ramjattan: Hon. Minister, could you be of any assistance to me as to where this money is going to come from to buy the equipment?

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, are you directing the Minister's attention to a particular project code?

Mr. Ramjattan: It is office equipment.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister.

Mr. Benn: We are not talking about office equipment here. We are referring to office equipment and furniture under this item.

Mr. Ramjattan: It is \$320 million. I just want to know where we are buying that expensive piece of spyware from.

Mr. Benn: I could call out the amounts in relation to what you are talking about under this item.

Mr. Ramjattan: No. I am asking a specific question. If it is not under this item, I am going to ask another question.

5.54 p.m.

Mr. Benn: When we get to that line item, then you could pose the question.

Mr. Ramjattan: Good.

Mr. Benn: I do not know what you are talking about.

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$908,520,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$6,600,000,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. This is the Guyana Police Force and so I will ensure I tread carefully to avoid any after actions. Project code 1216800 – Police Stations and Buildings: Can the Hon. Minister say, from this sum of \$5 billion, if the Wakenaam Police Station is a part of this allocation?

Mr. Benn. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the still Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul. The Sans Souci Police Station at Wakenaam is currently under construction.

Mr. Mahipaul: Can the Hon. Minister tell us the amount of money that was allocated for the construction of the Sans Souci Police Station?

Mr. Benn: It is \$88.1 million, Sir.

Mr. Mahipaul: Out of this \$88.1 million, since I hear the heckling that it is a last year's budget, may I ask how much money you have spent so far on the construction of this police station so that I will be able to know how much is in this sum for this year's completion of the project?

Mr. Benn: We will probably have to lay over something to you. We will have to do measured work to see how far it is at the current time to be able to give you a number.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, has the Ministry paid any money to the contractor so far for the construction of this police station?

Mr. Benn: Naturally. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. I think some \$45 million has been paid for mobilisation and other works thus far without recent...It is ongoing. So, works are going on.

Mr. Mahipaul: Guided by the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA), if \$45 million is paid for mobilisation out of a sum of \$88.1 million, something is not adding up in terms of the amount of money that we are supposed to pay for mobilisation, being guided by the law. I do not know if the Hon. Minister is prepared to lay over the details surrounding how much money was paid as of 31st December, 2023, the percentage of completion of the project thus far and the contractor or the contracting firm that is executing the project.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I think I heard the Minister say mobilisation and other works, but I will give the Hon. Minister a chance to clarify.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to clarify, the total contract sum, because it came over, is \$150 million, hence the amount in mobilisation and works done thus far.

Mr. Seeraj: Mobilisation and works. Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I trust the Hon. Minister will tell us the contracting firm that is executing and the percentage of work completed thus far.

Mr. Seeraj: Well, if you pose the question to the Minister, the Minister will provide an answer. Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mahipaul: I did pose the question.

Mr. Benn: The contractor is A. Nazir & Sons Construction & General Supplies. As I said, regarding the works thus far, we will have to get the latest update on where they are now.

Mr. Mahipaul: I can go further and drill that, but I will let it go and await the information from the Hon. Minister. I will ask if the Hon. Minister can tell us the other police stations that are catered for here, the regional command centres and the living quarters and facilities, their location and which division they will be servicing.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Hon. Member for your interest in this matter. I am sure we all would have seen a tremendous effort being made to change the physical assets of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) in terms of buildings. I have four or five pages of listings, some of which construction started in late 2022. [Mr. Mahipaul: You can lay it over.] I can lay it over, but just for interest, I will start. Construction of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters – \$80 million; reconstruction of the Tactical Service Unit (TSU) headquarters – \$143 million; construction of the information technology (IT) training facility – \$26 million; reconstruction of Baramita Police Station, that was a minor thing of \$2 million; reconstruction of command operations, Region 3 – \$7.3 million; reconstruction of the Den Amstel Police Station, Region 3 - \$24.4 million; construction of Tuschen Police Station – \$4.1 million; construction of a floating ramp for the marine police station – \$10 million; reconstruction of the Special Constabulary headquarters – \$72 million; construction of Mocha Police Station – \$35.6 million; construction of the IT training complex – \$4.7 million; reconstruction of Sparendaaam Police Station, 4C – \$54.2 million; construction of new living quarters, Cove and John – \$6.4 million; and it goes on. I could call the higher numbers. Construction of Lethem Police Station...

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, with your permission, on Point of Order, please.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, a question was posed. Could we allow it, please?

Mr. Mahipaul: I am standing on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40. Sir, I did not ask the Hon. Minister to give me retention sums. So, I would appreciate it if he can lay it over because clearly what he is calling includes retention sums, and I am not asking for retention sums because some of these projects have already been completed. The Den Amstel Police Station has been there for a while now. There are other police stations, which he is calling, for \$4.2 million. The Men on Mission (MOM) is building houses for \$5 million. So, which police station are we building for \$4.2 million? Clearly, it is retention sums. I am not interested in that, and I will appreciate it if the Hon. Minister can lay it over. If he chooses not to, I withdraw my question.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I think your question has to do with the police stations and the sums associated that are catered for in the sum. Hon. Minister.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I was asked about the details of the Capital Estimates as we have them currently running at this time and I was calling those out. I am not speaking about retention sums... [Mr. Mahipaul: New police station (*inaudible*)] If the Hon. Member would stop heckling...Sir, I am prepared to lay over all of these to you. I have no difficulty about it and so there is no need to heckle and be silly here.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister, it is unparliamentary to refer to an Hon. Member in that manner. Hon. Minister, are you complete or are you going to give us the main projects?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, for the record, since we were live, I was going to call out the high numbers for each year, the rollovers and then the full numbers for the current project. The Hon. Member wants it all for himself and for us and so I guess the public would not hear the numbers. For your information the Den Amstel Police Station is incomplete.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you have exhausted your questions. I will move on to the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, this \$5 million in project code – 1216800 – Police Stations and Buildings, does it provide...

Mr. Seeraj: I think that is \$5 billion.

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes, \$5 billion. Right. Is this a sum here that is going to go towards the Brickdam 12-storey building?

Mr. Benn: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I did not hear the question.

Mr. Ramjattan: Please pay attention.

Mr. Seeraj: Of the sum stated under project code 1216800, is there any allocation for the Brickdam Police Station – the new station proposed?

Mr. Ramjattan: The new station that you proposed.

Mr. Seeraj: Did I capture your question there, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan?

Mr. Ramjattan: That is correct. You did excellently.

Mr. Benn: There is indeed an allocation.

Mr. Seeraj: There is an allocation.

Mr. Benn: Yes.

Mr. Ramjattan: Could you kindly state the allocation for me?

Mr. Seeraj: Do you have a follow-up question, Hon. Member?

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes. That is the follow-up question.

Mr. Benn: It is \$1 billion.

Mr. Seeraj: What is it?

Mr. Ramjattan: What is the allocation for that Brickdam twelve-storey building (*Inaudible*)?

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister?

Mr. Benn: I said \$1 billion.

Mr. Ramjattan: It is \$1 billion. Thank you very much.

Mr. Benn: That is the allocation for this (*Inaudible*).

Mr. Ramjattan: That is excellent. For the Guyana Police Force, I noticed that with all that we are spending on capital and all of that and on training and so on, there is an indicator number six which states that the percentage of court cases lost due to poor evidence provided by the police force is 0% and you propose a target of 0%. Is that a misprint?

Mr. Benn: I am not going to get into issues relating to the courts. The courts make the decision. If it is that there is a judgement in the court that, perhaps, there is poor policing or poor information...but we are working on these issues. With the Attorney General's Chambers, we are putting in the means of electronic recording and developing and transmitting information in relation to police records. It is true that, at various times, there are complaints of missing records, incomplete records, and there are other issues of insufficient recall when people go on the stand and so on.

6.09 p.m.

I am not going to go into the realm of what the court decides and whether or not it is, indeed, as a result of poor police representation. However, I would say that we have brought in a number of new police prosecutors. Perhaps, there are about 30 of them. They were recently sworn. We expect there will be improvements in that area.

Mr. Ramjattan: I could appreciate it. I know of the situation as a practising lawyer myself. I just want us to get it right whenever we are doing performance statements. In 2022, there was about 49% which were lost as a result of poor evidence. Last year, it was 19%. That is why I wanted to know if this is a misprint. The percentage of cases lost due to the police force's poor evidence is zero per cent and zero per cent is projected for 2024. Is that a misprint?

Mr. Benn: If in 2022 it was 40%, and last year it was 19% or whatever per cent, it means that there has been a great improvement.

Mr. Ramjattan: I know that.

Mr. Benn: If it is zero now, it means there is the intention to bring it to zero. There is no misprint.

Mr. Ramjattan: For 2023, there is zero here.

Mr. Benn: It is an improvement on the situation you left us.

Mr. Ramjattan: With these statistics, which are obviously faulty, one could not even rely on what you had last year. All right. That is okay for me. Project code 2608300, Equipment – Police: There is \$500 million. Is this the capital sum that will go towards buying the facial recognition cameras that the Vice President talked about?

Mr. Benn: Unlike the Hon. Member on the other side, I am not in a position to speak about what the Vice President has been saying. It is not relevant to the question here. I do not know why the Hon. Member is worried about facial recognition. I am sure he will be recognised anywhere.

Mr. Ramjattan: It is important that we know because there was a statement made by a very important person, who literally manages all of them, which stated that there will be facial recognition. My question is, where is the money coming from? If it not coming from police equipment... It could not have come from the fire service equipment or prison service equipment. This is the \$500 million that is here.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you could ask the question under this project code as to what will comprise this \$500 million. So, if you want to rephrase your question to the Hon. Minister, I will allow that.

Mr. Ramjattan: Minister, you are saying that the provision for equipment for \$500 million does not include the facial recognition... **[Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*** What did you say?

Mr. Benn: I did not say that.

Mr. Ramjattan: What are you saying?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, in summary, under the project code, the breakdown is for the traffic department – \$30 million; police communication – \$145.6 million; presidential guard – \$15 million; Tactical Service Unit – \$105 million; and Mounted Branch – \$9.4 million, totalling some \$500 million.

Mr. Ramjattan: Well, it seems that it does not come from that sum.

Mr. Seeraj: Do you have a follow-up question, Hon. Member?

Mr. Ramjattan: I do not have any other questions to ask here.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, for my clarity, does this sum cater for body cameras for our police officers? As you know, we are basically faced with a set of allegations of bribery and police mishandling of alleged criminals and citizens who are alleged to have committed minor offences – traffic related offences and the like. Will this sum cater for us to have our distinguished police men and women who are serving our country in an excellent way, as far as I am concerned, especially the ones who are dealing with traffic on the East Bank with heavy traffic flow and so on....To mitigate or reduce and basically enrich our police force with greater trust, does this project code cater for body cameras so that we could be able to monitor those allegations better and ensure that they are not true about our police officers?

Mr. Benn: We previously had 500 body cameras and then 200 body cameras. Now, 300 body cameras with communication equipment will be brought in. It was 300 body cameras, then 200 body cameras and now 300 body cameras.

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$6,600,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$2,926,608,000

Mr. Ramjattan: [*Inaudible*] billion dollars being spent here. It is a provision for prisons. Could the Hon. Minister indicate which prison that money will be expended on? I did not get it at all from the legend.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I do not if the Hon. Member is interested in a particular prison.

Mr. Ramjattan: How is the money going to be spent? You said you are spending it on prisons. There are quite a few prisons. What I am asking is how much is going... disaggregate it for me. That is all I am asking.

Mr. Benn: We are, of course, making a great effort to build out and finalise a new prison complex at Lusignan. Cell blocks have been put in place; a new prison headquarters building is being put there; a new vocational school; a school for normal scholastic training; and a new women's prison. Those are some of the works at Lusignan, particularly. I might mention that in

the unfortunate event that any Member of the Parliament on the other side find themselves there, it will be comfortable. **[Mr. Mahipaul: On your side too.]** It is for all sides, but I know who is most at risk. I could continue calling. I know who is most at risk. I will call them out. We will start with Mazaruni Prison, Region 7 – \$68 million and this is phase two; construction of cell blocks at Lusignan Prison, Lot 5 – \$18 million; cell blocks at Lusignan Prison, Lot 6 – \$100 million; again, at Lusignan Prison, Lot 4 – \$132 million; there is a training facility which I referred to earlier; there is layered fencing at Lusignan Prison – \$77 million; the prison headquarters at Lusignan – \$250 million, and here I am just hitting the high notes, cage walkway at Lusignan – \$34 million; a reception building at Lusignan – \$277 million; the solitary block at New Amsterdam, this is work at New Amsterdam – \$254 million and so on. I could lay them over to you.

Ms. Ferguson: A pleasant evening to the staff of the Ministry of Home Affairs. I wish to follow up with the Hon. Member, based on the explanation provided not so long ago. In the provisions being sought, you mentioned that a new prison headquarters will be constructed in the Lusignan area. My question to the Hon. Member is, what plans does the Government have for the existing building, the headquarters of the prison service, on Brickdam?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Hon. lady for her question. The building of the prison headquarters on Brickdam is dilapidated. It is falling apart. It is what we inherited. We are building a new prison headquarters at Lusignan. The faith of that building...It would have to be torn down. It is falling apart naturally by itself at the moment. We are putting our people in a proper ergonomic setting so that they can carry out their functions at maximum efficiency. The fate of the site going forward is another matter for the Government and us, but that is not a question we have settled on at the moment.

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$2,926,608,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$1,956,000,000

Mr. Ramjattan: I do not know if the Hon. Minister could lay this over, but I noticed that in the legend it states the completion of fire stations at certain places and then some new ones at some

other places. For the sum of \$505 million, could there be a disaggregation, Mr. Minister, of how much will be spent at Diamond, Leonora, Parika, Soesdyke, Linden and so on?

6.24 p.m.

Mr. Benn: We are concluding Leonora for a sum of \$24 million. We are reconstructing the Diamond Fire Station at \$69 million. In terms of completely new, we are extending the Timehri Fire Station with barracks; this is the one for the aerodrome for \$40 million. We are rehabilitating the Linden Fire Station for \$50 million; we are constructing a fire station at Charity on the Essequibo Coast for \$85 million. Members may recall a big fire there, last year. We intend to construct a fire station at Wisburg, Linden, for \$70 million. We are constructing a fire station at Parika for \$89 million; we are extending the Rose Hall Fire Station for \$45 million; and we are still considering some issues in relation to the Corentyne Coast, further to the east, depending perhaps on savings and for roll over.

Mr. Ramjattan: The 2608900, Tools and Equipment, I think it is a big sum of \$920 million. At page 251 that is supposed to enlighten me a little more about what is to be bought, the big items. "The project entails provision for tools and equipment." I do not like that kind of scanty thing. What equipment and tools you are talking about here for \$920 million?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I will call out the scanty things for \$920 million that the Hon. Member is speaking of. [Mr. Mahipaul: *Ow, don't gee we ah (inaudible)*] No, the Hon. Member is introducing sexist language into the discussion. I am saying, I will call out the scanty things here now.

Mr. Ramjattan: No, your information is scanty. I want the big items please.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance might not agree with your description of scanty here. Those are substantial numbers, but go ahead, please.

Mr. Benn: I am referring to the description the Hon. Member gave to it. I did not introduce the term. I am calling out now each one of the scanty items because, obviously, the Hon. Member is surprised that at this time we would be spending nearly a billion dollars on scanty things. Let me call them out. Self-contained breathing apparatus, \$23.458 million; portable fire pumps, \$25.3

million; foam making branch, \$450,000; dividing branch, \$1.2 million; jaws of life, \$4.2 million; additional self-contained breathing apparatus for each fire fighter, \$600 million; 60 portable fire pumps, \$182 million; 25 breathing apparatus, compressors, ()\$4.2 million; generators, \$18 million; hooks and ladders, fire extinguishers, reciprocating jaws, angle grinders, extractor fans, ejector pumps; I will lay it over for you to see the scanty things we have to get to fix the fire service now.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, I never meant scanty items. I said the information on the profile page is “project entails provision for equipment.” And I do not know that for \$920 million you are going to put it like that. We have been telling them that they have to give us a little lengthier legend. Thanks for that.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I think the Hon. Minister tried to give you more information. Hon. Minister Mr. Robeson Benn, you may have the floor.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member, by convention of the House, was the former Minister in the sector which I am running now; they called it Public Security. So, the Hon. Member could not be witless when the description is given, and if he is asking for the amount, which we are prepared to give, there is no need to deprecate the way in which the information is shared. I am saying, Sir, that I said, everything I have here and I called out will be laid over. There is no need for the Hon. Member to be snarling and scowling over there to get information from us. [An. Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] No, he is snarling and scowling, and this is why I miss the Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond who was much prettier and whose smile... and I had a good relationship with her going. I miss her dearly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister Mr. Robeson Benn. I now recognise the Hon. Member Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul. No scowling and no scantiness.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, thank you very much, and allow me to register that we on this side also equally miss our colleague dearly, and I know that she is recovering well at home. Sir, the project code 2406100, and in keeping with the line item that my Hon. colleague Khemraj Ramjattan was asking on, our country since 2020 to now has been experiencing a lot of fires, and by my calculation it is really on average a fire every three/four months, which is most unfortunate.

Sir, we have great respect and salutation for our officers within the Guyana Fire Service who, unfortunately, have to put up with all of this. Looking at this project code and seeing the sum, and knowing what is of the reality, perhaps the entire trillion dollars should have been dedicated to the Guyana Fire Service so that they can keep our country safe from fire. May I ask, given all that is happening here, and may I even say with our \$230 billion plus budget, we did not have so many fires. With the \$1.146 trillion budget, this \$500 million is rather small for the Guyana Fire Service, given what is happening. Could I ask the Hon. Minister how many water bowsers will be purchased? How many crash tenders, rescue and fire fighting vehicles will be purchased? Where will they be located? May I ask the Hon. Minister if he can also give an opinion as to whether these equipment is sufficient to assist the Guyana Fire Service in mitigating what seems to be a loose cause around our country with all of these fires?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Hon. Member for his questioning on this matter. I recall the last time myself and the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan engaged on this discussion, where we deprecated calls for Georgetown must *bun* down if the PPP/C is not vote out of power. We and the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan agreed, and stood up with me, in the discussion that he would not side with any discussion which puts out a public discussion and appearance of the questions of arson and malicious setting of fires. The problem we have had is related to the malicious setting of fires and arson other than the issues relating to old buildings and old electrical reticulation and all of those things. If I were to reel out some of the numbers, there have been, in terms of fire calls alone, a 182% increase over last year... over 2022.

We have to pay attention to subliminal political messages which are given at particular times, which related to damage to public property, the burning down of schools and other public buildings along with the damage or the destruction of private property. There is a problem, of course, where we still have a poor total safety awareness, and we have been asking people to put in their smoke alarms and the fire alarms, to have extinguishers, to buy fireballs. The fire service has been going to schools and to particular buildings and institutions to discuss with people their questions of fire awareness. Again, I say, if we look at when the fires have been occurring and when they started – and this is also true for criminal acts – it started in a particular period when we had difficulties in our political situation, and I have to say that. Persons went, some who are in this House here, to New York or New Jersey... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] I

am not imputing, it is recorded. I am saying that persons went there on a public platform and stood there with others shouting: 'Georgetown must burn down if the PPP/C does not come out of power.' I am saying that here.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, on Standing Order 41, the Hon. Member is imputing; he needs to produce that evidence if he is making that claim. I, Sir, I was in New York City... [Mr.

Benn: *Oh, you were there.*] ...and a number of other Members on this side, and I cannot recall anyone saying a statement like that who is sitting in this Honourable House. [Mr.

Benn: *Oh, you cannot recall.*] I am asking the Hon. Member who has a lot of experience, who is an elder in this Committee, who is respected by many Members of this Committee, to withdraw that statement, which is untruthful, or let him produce the evidence.

Mr. Benn: I am not withdrawing the statements. It is those statements which have put us in trouble.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister Mr. Robeson Benn, the Standing Orders are very clear, and I recall the substantive Chairman making a pronouncement in the past about Hon. Members when they have the floor. It is against the Standing Order to impute any ulterior motives of any other Member of the Assembly. I will caution the Hon. Minister

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I said they were present when the statements were made. [An

Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] I do not have (*inaudible*); they said Members, I do not have to call names.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, on the same Standing Order.

Mr. Seeraj: Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: The Hon. Member is claiming that we were present when such statements were made. [Mr. Benn: Certain Members were present.] Not only is he imputing but it is

somewhat a liable statement because it can... [Mr. Benn: Take me to court.] The substantive Chairman rule on when you can easily identify what is being said. Cde. Chairman, the record will reflect something like that, that is very much untruthful. I am again requesting of you for that to be expunged or withdrawn from the Hon. Member.

Mr. Benn: He could expunge it.

6.39 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: This Hon. Member is a distinguished Member of this Committee. He has been here for a number of years.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: He cannot be making those sorts of statements. What sort of example is he setting for the young people of this country?

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister, Mr. Robeson Benn, as I stated earlier, the Chairman has ruled. We are guided by our Standing Orders.

An Hon. Member: If you do not like it you can leave.

Mr. Seeraj: It clearly states that Members should not in any way impute...

An Hon Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Seeraj: ...not only ulterior but motives that are not honourable.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, under the circumstances, and given the fact that apparently for some persons who are complicit in the rigging of elections and being part of the intellectual authors of rigging elections in this country, in full view of the international media and persons here, I will take away the statement. This is where we are now.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister, you can make statements but without calling or in any way...

Ms. Ferguson: ...identifying...

Mr. Seeraj: ...identifying Members of the honourable Committee.

Mr. Benn: All right. I am saying that the Hon. Mr. Ramjattan was not a party; he was not an intellectual author, nor was he complicit in the rigging of elections in Guyana.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Could you proceed with the answering of the question that was posed to you?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman... [Mr. Mahipaul: *[Inaudible]* old Minister *[inaudible]*] I am younger than you.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister, are you finished there?

Mr. Benn: I do not know what question he wants to ask. Could the Hon. Member restate his question?

Mr. Mahipaul: My question was, if the Hon. Member can tell us how many water bowsers, crash tenders and rescue and fire fighting vehicles are going to be purchased and where they will be located? [Dr. Singh: In the process, tell them how many were purchased (*inaudible*)] The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh can do less in terms of disturbing us, Sir.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Hon. Member for having an interest in the enormous expenditure we had to make now to respond to the deadly issues relating to fire in Guyana. I could state some of the activities that we have done. So far, we bought two ambulances. We bought an excavator with a tractor and trailer. We bought 16 water bowsers, and we are awaiting deliveries. These are for carrying water to active scenes to feed fire tenders. We are buying eight new water tenders; those are awaiting delivery. We are buying a new fire bolt now that the activity on the harbour is expanding, particularly Demerara. We are buying new ambulances; there will be another new six ambulances. You might be aware that our Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) services have been very active. They have been of some assistance to Members of this honourable Committee. Those six ambulances awaiting delivery will be located at Georgetown, La Grange, Onverwagt and New Amsterdam. We are buying a new telescopic boom fire fighting vehicle. We are buying a number of smaller fire fighting vehicles for use by the auxiliary firefighters so the firefighting footprint would spread out and be more interspersed in smaller communities. Those vehicles are awaiting delivery. We are buying 40 of those pickups – smaller firefighting vehicles. There are some other issues in relation to this effort. There will be

another two water bowsers for Georgetown and Mahdia. We are buying a rescue and firefighting vehicle for \$88 million, and it will be located on the West Coast of Demerara. We will be buying two new all-terrain firefighting vehicles for remote and rugged communities and areas for our fire response. For our aerodrome, there will be a new crash tender.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I reiterate, that given what is happening in our country with fire, we should be buying more. Perhaps the reason why we did not have it in the APNU/AFC, as I heard my Hon. friend heckling, is that we did not have so many fires. We are having so many fires now that we need more. Let me ask the Hon. Member, are these equipment – vehicles and so on – brand new or reconditioned?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member has not been paying attention. I said they are new.
[Dr. Singh: Brand new.] New.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, if I can turn the Hon. Member's attention to project code 1220400, Buildings – Fire, I must let the Hon. Member know how disappointed I am... [*interruption*]. Yes, Mr. Chair, I am disappointed that there is nothing from this \$1.146 trillion dollar budget for the Alberttown Fire Station. I heard the Hon. Member identify a few locations that will be benefitting from this \$505 million provision. Hon. Member, would it not be wise to put the \$45 million you intend to spend on Rose Hall, which I think is in a better condition than the Alberttown Fire Station...? You said that you are going to extend the Rose Hall Fire Station. Could this \$45 million go towards the Alberttown Fire Station which is in a much more deplorable state? That area now is a high trafficked one. It is now like a commercial area where we have a lot of tourists who traffic the area.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, the Alberttown Fire Station is together with a police station; it is an old building. The designs and so on for a new police and fire station will be advanced for the next round. The footprint that we have now, with the new headquarters and fire station on Homestretch Avenue, the response timings are thought to be adequate enough to handle, to cover issues related to Alberttown at the current time. It is a joint situation there in Alberttown for that fire and police station.

Mr. Figueira: Minister, you made mention of building a fire station at Wismar. Could you state where in Wismar? Additionally, I recognised that there is also going to be an upgrade to the fire

station at Mackenzie. Would the building of a new fire station be the same size as the one at Mackenzie that is going to be featured this upgrade?

Mr. Benn: I think, so far, we have a location at Wisburg, over the bridge – somewhere there. We will get the design and the position for you.

Mr. Figueira: I think that is Wisroc you are referring to, Hon. Minister. For the purchasing of equipment... It is Wisroc.

Mr. Benn: I am sorry; it is Wisroc.

Mr. Figueira: For the purchasing of equipment, I cannot recall if you made mention if any fire hydrants will be purchased. If they are going to be purchased, can you state how many will be placed at...?

Mr. Benn: It is not under this project code. We had installed fire hydrants in Linden and other places. Though it is not the project code, we had installations of 144 in 2023. Particularly for the new housing areas, we are putting in another 52 hydrants just now.

Mr. Figueira: Did you say that 52 more will be installed in the region? How many will there be to facilitate the new station at Wisroc?

Mr. Benn: I cannot tell you that. We will have to have a split down of the numbers. With the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), we have already put down some. These are additional for the new housing areas.

Mr. Duncan: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Minister, is there a greater rethinking of, maybe, the approach we take to firefighting more than just the additional purchase of equipment? Looking at the spread of fire, for instance, since the year started – La Grange, Yarrowkabra, Port Mourant, Meten-Meer-Zorg, Vryheid Lust, Agricola, New Providence, C Field/Sophia, B Field/Sophia, Lenora, Good Hope, Pouderoyen, Timehri, Rose Hall, Health Centre Street/Zeelugt, Linden, Andyville....

Mr. Benn: What project code are we discussing, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Duncan: The spread of fire, is there...? I am just trying to paint a picture of the pervasiveness since the 1st January, under the Minister's tenure, while he was in Guyana. Is there a greater rethinking of the firefighting strategies, in addition to purchasing more equipment?

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member, for your comment which is along a policy line. You have opened a door. Hon. Member, Minister Benn.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, it is obvious that the Hon. Member was not in this dome when I spoke about the issues relating to smoke detectors, fire detectors, smoke bombs, fire balls, the training of people – it is the responsibility of someone who has a building to have these things in place – and the awareness sessions that we are conducting. So, it is either he was asleep, or he was not in the dome when I said this here. It is on the record.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Do you have a follow-up question?

Mr. Duncan: Yes.

Mr. Seeraj: The Minister would like you to direct his attention to the code.

Mr. Duncan: Project code 2608900 – Tools and Equipment – Fire: Again, we have followed the Minister going about and talking to different fire stations and so on. It seems when he makes these trips, there are more fires we are having in the country. Is there a strategic plan? Is there greater reaching out to stakeholders, something new that we have not seen before, or is it more of the Minister?

Mr. Benn: I will not respond to that question.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am dealing with project code 2608900, Tools and Equipment – Fire. Sir, it is in the public's domain – I do have the video if it is required of me to circulate – where the Hon. Minister basically chided the fire officer for his footwear, claiming that it was not proper, not clean and whatever else.

6.54 p.m.

In this sum, does the Minister cater for better footwear and other protective gears to equip our fire officers so that they can better serve this country and perhaps give them better quality firefighting gear?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure what the Hon. Member is referring to. The footwear of firefighters in action is of a particular type. There is another set of footwear and uniform when one is on dress parade or doing other duties. If I chided anyone about the type of footwear at a raging fire scene, it was appropriate.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up. Sir, on the basis of the Minister's comment where if he chided the fire... based on that I am seeing here it looks like the fire Chief. If the fire Chief came to the scene without the right firefighting gears, what action does the Minister intend to take on that basis?

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, I am not sure I am going to... I will allow it. Hon. Minister, go ahead, please.

Mr. Benn: The Hon. Member is mistaken in relation to whom I spoke with. I was speaking to the person who was on sight, the Operational Commander at the fire scene.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. We all know a situation as it relates to fire. Some people who are on the job are prepared, other people will turn up and get prepared on sight. It is an emergency; we all respond in this best way possible that we can. I think we have exhausted the questions for this head.

Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$1,956,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$13,500,000

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$13,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 517– Customs Anti-Narcotics – \$162,220,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I see completion of fence, security hut and storage unit and provision for furniture and equipment. In terms of the completion of fence, security hut and storage unit, could we know the location?

Mr. Benn: This was...

Mr. Mahipaul: I withdraw, I withdraw, I withdraw. Guided by my learned friend, the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, I withdraw.

Programme: 517– Customs Anti-Narcotics – \$162,220,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Members, that brings us to an end of the examination of Agency 51, Ministry of Home Affairs. Allow me, on your behalf, to thank the Hon. Minister and the Members of his team for providing the requisite information that was sought by Members. Thank you very much Hon. Minister, Permanent Secretary (PS) and members of your team. Hon. Members, let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Members, the Assembly has been reconvened. I propose that we take a suspension of 30 minutes, and we will reconvene in 30 minutes.

Sitting suspended at 7.00 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.45 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and Public Service, I would like to invite you and your team from the Ministry of Public Service.

Agency: 14 Ministry of Public Service

Current Expenditure

Programme: 141 – Policy Development and Administration – \$193,723,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good evening to the staff of the Ministry of Public Service and congratulations to the Minister on his new appointment. I think we will get off to a very good start. Let us start with line item 6116. Could the Hon. Minister please state the designations of the new contracted employees under this line item?

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service [Dr. Singh]: Mr. Chairman, let me thank the Hon. Member, and of course a predecessor now of mine in this capacity, for the question she posed. The five new appointees for line item 6116 are occupying the following posts: Administrative Assistant, Accounts Clerk II, Vehicle Driver, Office Assistant, and Typist Clerk.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, line item 6281, Security Services. There has been a constant increase, but a considerable increase this year to a budgetary sum from \$7,487,000 to \$17,059,000. Could the Hon. Member state the buildings that are receiving security under this line item?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. Under this programme, provision is made for the head office, a building which the Hon. Member would be abundantly acquainted with, the residence of the Permanent Secretary and the residence of the Advisor to the Minister.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister state why there is such a huge increase in this particular sum this year?

Dr. Singh: Certainly. Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member would note that we had made a budgetary provision in 2023 that also significantly exceeded the actual expenditure in 2022. We underspent on that allocation, and we are similarly seeking an appropriation that is in excess of what was spent last year. The reason for that is quite a simple one. We provide for one of the residences to which I referred; we made provision for that residence to be secured but the security service has not been taken up at that residence. Obviously, because it involves a residence I prefer not to disclose the details in public, but I would be happy to share them in private with the Hon. Member. The fact of the matter is that we are making provisions, as I

indicated earlier, for two residences, one of which did not take up the security that we had provided for last year, but we still made provision for that particular residence this year.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister say if this security firm is the same security firm that they stated last year? I think it is the Elite or something like that.

Dr. Singh: Yes, Mr. Chairman, it is the same security firm.

Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, I am going to Volume 2, utilising the line item 6111 to 6117, particularly dealing with the policy aspect of this particular programme. Could the Hon. Member state whether the one policy that they indicated and implemented was developed? Could they state what that policy was last year?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I suspect that the Hon. Member would be familiar with some of this work, perhaps all of it, because I imagine that some of it predates our assumption of Office. Certainly, from the questions that have been posed in previous years, the Hon. Member would be pleased to note that work continued in 2023 and will continue in 2024, on at least four major documents which I believe could be fairly classified under the rubric of policy and, like I said, all of which the Hon. Member would be acquainted with. The four are the following: the *Public Service Rules*; the extant rules, of course dating back to 1987 – the Hon. Member would know those rules very well, and anyone who has served in the public service for any number of years would know those rules – work continued on the *Public Service Rules*, updating those rules; work continued on an employee handbook which we anticipate will provide a useful guide to new entrants into the public service; work continued on a training policy; and work continued on a scholarship's policy.

7.54 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chair, it would indeed be remiss of me not to acknowledge the sterling work done by my immediate predecessor. Of course, the Hon. Member is my predecessor one removed. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the sterling work done by my immediate predecessor in advancing these four major pieces of pillars of streams of work and indeed on her distinguished stewardship over and in the Ministry since 2020. Thank you very.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I will continue Volume 2. It also indicates that there were two circulars issued. Could the Committee be informed of what those circulars were?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. The two circulars issued relates primarily, in fact, to emoluments, specifically one to wages and salaries, and the second to allowances.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Final one on policy here, it has come up time and time again in the House. It is the issue with persons knowing that it is not a policy of the Government but a constant of persons being employed and having to take a while before they actually receive their salary. I am just wondering, what is the new Minister now, in both public service and finance, intend to do to try to bridge this gap?

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Member is absolutely correct that there has historically been an issue with the length of time that new recruits take to get their first pay, if I understood correctly. We are firmly of the view that it should not take the inordinate length of time that it takes for people to be paid to receive their first emoluments. I believe we had a robust debate on this matter about six months ago, where a number of mitigating explanations were offered including, in some instances persons being recruited before the necessary approvals were obtained and so on and so forth. I think that was adequate. If I recall correctly, it was in response to a motion that the Hon. Member brought to the House. Let me say clearly and unequivocally that this Government's position is that persons should be paid in the shortest possible time after they are recruited.

Following that debate, in fact, I or one of my Colleagues in Government might have mentioned, that we are currently doing work to revisit the business process surrounding recruitment and addition to the payroll. It is our intention to address that matter definitively early in the current year so the problem is, if not completely eliminated, that the magnitude of the problem is significantly reduced. Sir, I want to assure the Hon. Member, the House, indeed the employees and the potential employees of the Central Government that work we anticipate will be concluded very early this year. Thank you very much.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow-up Sir, through you: I noted the Hon. Minister said that one of the circulars I believe that went out or rather the policy developed speaks to a useful guide being on the new employees in the public sector. Following up Hon. Minister on the timeline persons take to get paid, we would all understand and agree that there are social and economic implications

external to the Ministry when it comes to that, given person's need for their wages and salaries. However, could you say if there are any internal administrative difficulties, challenges or disadvantages that new employees in the Public Service may face if their salaries are delayed for extensive period of time, being for them to get on the payroll, for example, of no fault of their own?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I am endeavouring my best to decipher what exactly the question is. Is it the disadvantages of not being paid early?

Ms. Fernandes: I am asking specifically if there are any administrative disadvantages that public servants may face when not being paid within a specific time period, for example, within a year?

Dr. Singh: If I might, Sir, repeat the question in the hope that my repetition will lend some clarity in my own mind. I understand the Hon. Member to be asking whether there are administrative disadvantages, I think was the term used, that are experienced by new entrants into the public service who are not paid promptly. Well, I can certainly think that a tremendous personal inconvenience is suffered if one is working and not being paid. That is a personal inconvenience that we would like to alleviate as far as possible and it is a personal inconvenience not to be trivialised in any way whatsoever. I rather suspect that everybody who starts working wants to be paid in the first pay cycle. In terms of whether there are any other administrative disadvantages other than the personal inconvenience that one does not receive his pay on time but one incurs all of the costs associated with going to work such as transportation, rent, utilities, *et cetera*. Outside of those, there are no other administrative... I am curious about the words 'administrative disadvantages'. There are now, apart from personal inconvenience. I am not sure that I quite understand what is meant by administrative disadvantages that flow as a consequence of being paid late. I suspect that the path of least resistance would be for me to say there are no other administrative disadvantages and so... very good, Sir. I think I have addressed this matter. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, repeating it to yourself certainly cleared the air.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister state whether there is any intention to increase the salary bands for public servants this year?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, the bands are of course addressed. Every year, as across-the-board salary increases are adjusted the bands are moved up accordingly. Whenever, in 2024, as has always been the practise in the past, an adjustment is made by way of an across the board or other salary increase, the bands will be adjusted upwards as I believe they have been adjusted upwards in the past. If I understood the question correct.

Programme: 141 – Policy Development and Administration – \$193,723,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 142 – Human Resource Development – \$6,142,086,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, I would like to go to line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships). Sir, in Volume 2, the indicator shows quite commendably that 7,752 persons were awarded Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarships in skill sets necessary for national development. First, could the Hon. Member state whether there is a national development plan that is informing the areas that persons are being trained in?

Dr. Singh: I rather suspect, Sir, that most Members would recall that this very issue, in slightly different manifestations, has been ventilated during the course of the Budget Debate. Suffice it to say, we do have an ongoing engagement with both sides of the labour market. That is to say, employers and potential employers, including the private sector – the Government is also, of course, itself an employer – and on the supply side, employees and potential employees, including recent graduates of the schools and tertiary education systems... There are already a number of areas in which we have identified that there are skills gaps, which is to say, we do not have a large enough supply of persons with relevant skills in particular areas and relevant certification in particular areas when one considers the demand in those areas. Armed with this information, as I said, that are gathered through ongoing engagements with various stakeholders in the economy, a number of areas have been identified where training is needed.

In addition, Sir, we do also try to project into the future and anticipate the direction in which the economy is going and indeed the direction in which the world is going. Particularly in areas as the technology driven areas, such as: big data, data science, artificial intelligence, cyber security are all very current and contemporary topics. We anticipate a surge in demand and a surge in opportunity for those sorts of skills going forward. We do have a sufficiently rich set of

information to form the basis for identification and determination of a wider range of training programmes that we have been offering and that we endeavour to offer to potential applicants looking to upskill or expand their skills and their certification.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I would like to thank the Hon. Member for his well-reasoned and rational statement. A follow-up to what the Hon. Member just stated, the issue is not necessarily training because majority of the labour force are under trained, need to be retrained to become skilled. The issue comes when we overtrain and at what stage do we decide to stop in a particular area so that we are not training more people than the market could take. That is where, I think, the national development plan comes into place and the labour market information system comes into place. The question I am asking, is there a plan that allows us to understand that trajectory, so that we are not overtraining persons? Then, we would have people trained and we spent money training them, but they cannot find jobs because we have overtrained. That is my query.

Dr. Singh: The question posed by the Hon. Member, of course, is a perfectly valid one. Needless to say, we would want to avoid the peril the Hon. Member quite rightly identified; that is to say, the peril of training a number of people in any one area that would be surplus to requirements going forward.

8.09 p.m.

I think it is a perfectly valid and legitimate point. In the same breath, I say it is a point that we are not unmindful of. I hesitate to say there is a plan because if the other Member was to ask me to produce a single document that documents across every single sector what the anticipated needs are and what the anticipated training plans are and so on, I would be the first to say, I am not myself aware that such a single document exist. I hesitate a bit. Perhaps, there is one that I am yet to discover. I am not aware there is a single consolidation across all of the sectors, but I will say that in a number of sectors, we have a reasonably good idea of what the needs are. I would not say there is absolutely no instance of the number of persons being trained not exceeding the demand and so on. I think a number of sectors we have a reasonably good idea of what the projected demand will be and therefore what the projected training needs are. It is a valid observation, Sir.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: This is the last question I believe under this line item. There is a difference between the GOAL scholarship and the Government of Guyana Scholarship, in the sense that persons who are under the Government of Guyana scholarship have to serve back their time, whether it is five years or three years depending on the programme they are on. Whereas, with the GOAL scholarship, they may be on the same four-year programme, but they do not have to serve. I am wondering whether or not this is something they should look and maybe determine whether it is fair to the citizens or whether they can review this particular system with how they deal with the different scholarships.

Dr. Singh: I think the Hon. Member would be aware it is not quite the case that recipients of the GOAL scholarships are not required to serve. They are not required to enter a contractual arrangement with the Government to work in the public sector. Whereas the recipients of the Government of Guyana scholarships typically have a contract and a contractual obligation to serve in the public sector. That distinction does exist. I will say, this in fact highlights the advantage of choice and alternatives being available. The availability of a wider choice to our young people – and indeed not so young people – in my mind can only be a good thing. There are some young people who will, with good reason, opt to go for a traditional and formal brick-and-mortar tertiary education. They want to attend the university campus, have the campus experience and interact with their peers. They want a traditional scholarship. They are willing to work in the public sector once they graduate. That option is always available. There are others who, for one reason or another, might not want to do that or might not find it feasible, including the reality there are some people who are not able to relocate. Right now, we have two brick-and-mortar campuses: one at Turkeyen and one at Tain. There are some people who, for a very practical reason, simply cannot relocate from where they live to closer proximity of one of our two brick-and-mortar University of Guyana campuses.

What GOAL does is that it still gives them the option to pursue higher technical and tertiary education, were they so to desire using the online modality of delivery. What GOAL also does is of course offer a wider range of training options. Here again, there are more choices for our young and not so young people, our Guyanese brothers and sisters. The requirement of community service or broader service, if one might call it that, is a slightly more relaxed requirement. I think potentially it reflects how we see the country evolving also. There was a

time when the public sector was the dominant employer in Guyana and it was a very small and miniature private sector. the overwhelming majority of employment opportunities existed in the public sector. That, over time, as we all know has changed. The public sector's share in employment has declined over time. There is a new and emergent private sector and rapidly growing private sector. There are new opportunities are being created in the private sector. We want to create an environment where those who want to explore the full *vista* of opportunities that are emerging now, are able so to do. What GOAL offers is a very important set of alternative options, in terms of disciplines, in terms of courses, in terms of levels, in terms of institutions that one can study, in terms of modality of delivery, in terms of work obligations associate posts, qualification and work obligations that are associated with your scholarship. What it does is, it offers more options to our young Guyanese brothers and sisters. I think that can only be a positive thing. Thank you very much, Sir.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members I did not keep my eye on the clock. We just went pass 8.00 p.m. I invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move the relevant Standing Order so that we can go beyond 8.00 p.m. to complete the business of today.

Suspension of Standing Order 10(1)

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders No. 10(1) be suspended for the Twelfth Parliament to allow the sittings of the National Assembly to proceed during the consideration of the estimates beyond 8.00 p.m. until the business of the day is completed.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we move the Standing Order to conclude the business of the House at this time.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I understand what the Hon. Member is trying to say. My follow-up to that would be the understanding persons have the options. Is it something that can be tweaked to allow persons? The reality is some of the programmes that are given under the Government of Guyana scholarship were not really there under GOAL. Is there a possibility that persons can choose to opt for the Government of Guyana scholarship, but not necessarily have to serve the Government the way that is required of them in this choice you are suggesting we have at this stage?

Dr. Singh: It is very interesting that the Hon. Member should ask this question. In a sense, the question is related to an earlier question the Hon. Member asked about areas where we might potentially have an oversupply in any particular discipline. Right now, the arrangement in relation to the Government of Guyana scholarships is that a contract is executed under which the trainee is required to work with the Government.

I am aware that there have been instances where, if a suitable placement cannot be found, the option to work in the private sector is afforded to the trainee. I know of instances – and I confirmed these in my first engagement with the outgoing Minister and the Permanent Secretary – where in fact this has been done. There have been cases where we could not find a perfect match between the applicant and a public sector employer, so we provided the applicant with the option to pursue private sector employment. All in the calls of national development, if there is a good fit between the skills the applicant has and if there is a clear superior fit between the trainee skills and the private sector and there is an uncomfortable fit between the trainee skills and any potential public sector employment, I will say that, as a Government, we are certainly opened to considering alternatives. Thank you very much, Sir.

Programme: 142 – Human Resource Development – \$6,142,086,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management and Technology – \$68,998,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, let us go to line item 6113, Other Technical and Craft Skilled, could the Hon. Member state what is the designation of the two members in the Other Technical and Craft Skilled?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. There is a Personnel Officer 1 who has been added to 6113. This is an officer who was transferred from another public service post. There is a Systems Development Officer who in fact was simply moved from programme two to programme three.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: There is what looks like an almost 400% increase in the amount budgeted for this allocation. I can be wrong with the number Sir, but you can correct me. I see an increase by two in this particular area. Could the Hon. Member state the designations of these new officers?

Dr. Singh: I am reminded of a comment made by no less a person than the distinguished Leader of the Opposition who took great objection to the fact I said there was a 100% increase in the number of seats we held in Linden. We won in Linden and then we moved from one to two. I see that the Hon. Member recognises the merit in my statistical approach... [Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I learn from you, Sir.] ...and seek here to replicate it by the very grand sounding 400%. The allocation is a most modest \$4 million and it is moving to \$19 million. I will not react in the manner the Leader of the Opposition reacted in relation to that particular matter.

I will say in fact it is a very small allocation. There is in fact a net increase of two in the line. We have lost one person and we have added three. The one who we have lost is a Personnel Officer and the three who we have added are Senior Personnel Officer, a Technical Officer and a Systems Development Officer. Between the three of them, they account for the extremely modest nominal increase in the budgetary allocation provided to this line.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I would like to take us to Volume Two. The indicators are showing one, in 2022, 32 budget agencies were implementing the Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS) and the target for 2023 was 36. Now, I am seeing in this year's budget that the number of budget agencies actually implementing HRMIS is five and the target is 31. Could the Hon. Member explain this disparity?

8.24 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I am advised that the total population of budget agencies whose potential implementation of the HRMIS, which the Ministry of the Public Service enjoys jurisdiction of, the total population numbers 36. I am advised that the number of agencies. I am advised that the target, I think if I understood the Hon. Member correctly, the Hon. Member said that last year the target was 36. Do I understand you, Hon. Member?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Yes.

Dr. Singh: I am advised the target is the entire population. The target is to do all 36. We may very well in 2023 or 2022 or in some previous year had a target of 36 because our objective is to do all. In 2023, again, under the very capable stewardship of my immediate predecessor, we achieved five. We are still aiming to do all. The 31 represents the remainder of the 36 that is still to be done. Obviously, whether or not we will achieve the 31 in 2024 remains to be seen but that is the ultimate objective, which to complete to implement the HRMIS in all 36 of the budget agencies for whom the Ministry of the Public Service has responsibility.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Probably, the Hon. Minister does not have the last year's numbers but it actually showed that the Ministry had reached 32 in 2022. Now, we are down back to five. There is some discrepancy there that could probably be checked out. I move on to number nine which says that the number of new persons employed in the Public Service, either on contract or temporary, is 2,029. I would like the Hon. Minister to disaggregate that. How many are actually on contract and how many are actually temporary?

Dr. Singh: In relation to the first of the two matters raised, the HRMIS, I thank the Hon. Member for drawing my attention to it. It will certainly engage my attention. I do not have the 2022 Estimates with me. On the question of disaggregation of new persons employed in the Public Service that 2029, comprise 1,790 contracted employees and 239 temporary employees.

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management and Technology – \$68,998,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 141 – Policy Development and Administration – \$13,868,000

Programme: 141 – Policy Development and Administration – \$13,868,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 142– Human Resource Development – \$134,900,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Project code 1207300 – Buildings: it states: “provision for buildings”. Could the Hon. Minister please state which building is being provided for here?

Dr. Singh: The entire sum relates to the training division.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Sorry, Hon. Minister. I did not hear exactly what he said.

Dr. Singh: It is for the training division.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Is it that you are getting a new building?

Dr. Singh: No, Hon. Member.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: It has provision for this. I am just ...

Dr. Singh: My apologies, Mr. Chairman, I was endeavouring uncharacteristic brevity. The entire sum, but I see that does not work when I try it so I will revert to my preferred posture. The entire sum of \$14.9 million relates to the training division at its existing location, which I believe is at Vlissingen Road and Durban Street. There are a number of initiatives that we are planning to do, including some electrical work – the rewiring of the building, the converting of the Registry to a training room, retiling of washrooms, upgrading of guard hut, *et cetera*. I would be happy to elaborate even further, if needed, Sir.

Programme: 142– Human Resource Development – \$134,900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management & Technology – \$6,400,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I would like to thank the Hon. Minister for his mature and reasonable responses to the question. It was necessary. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I rather suspect that it now behoves me to now reciprocate those compliments. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. After thanking and behaving, I now once again, put the question.

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management & Technology – \$6,400,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Thank you, Hon. Minister, the Permanent Secretary and staff of the Ministry of the Public Service. Hon. Members, let us invite the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, to now deal with the Ministry of Finance, Agency 03.

Agency: 03 Ministry of Finance

Current Expenditure

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$39,723,098,000

Ms. Fernandes: I would like to turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6141, Other Employment Costs, could the Hon. Minister say which are the unions that were consulted with in regard to salary increases and which union does the Ministry plans to engage or consult with as it relates to salary increases for 2024?

Dr. Singh: I believe it was widely reported that our Government engaged formally. I am going to address the formal consultations first. We had a dedicated period of consultations with a number of trade unions on the budget and on budgetary matters in their broadest interpretations. Right here in this Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC), not in this hallowed Chamber, but in the eastern wing, a number of unions and umbrella labour organisations, which are far too many for me to list today, but I would be happy to list them if the Hon. Member requires me to do or wishes me so to do, had a dedicated session here at which a Government team led by no less a person, the Hon. Prime Minister, including myself and a number of Ministerial Colleagues, met with several labour unions and umbrella labour organisations. Sir, that represented, even if perhaps the most visible, only one of an on-going and regular engagements with all stakeholders

in society. A matter that indeed is the source of considerable pride in our Government, our approach to ensuring that we remain closely engaged with social partners and stakeholders and, in fact, within various sectors.

Consultations, engagements and conversations take place all the time, not necessarily always under the glare of cameras and flashing lights but consultations and engagements continue between I know several Prime Ministerial Colleagues and Trade Unions involved in their respective sectors. I wish to assure the Hon. Member that this position that has consistently been adopted by our Government, and that is to say an open door to engagements with all stakeholders, including the labour unions will remain very firmly going formally. We are opened to meet with any and all stakeholders, certain including with the labour unions and their umbrella organisations. Thank you very much.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow-up: through you, Sir, could the Hon. Minister say... I did hear the response to say that there are consultations doing, and so forth. ...specifically, if these unions were engaged to discuss the salary increase and more so, whether or now there was consensus? That is reason I asked for the Unions to be listed; if that list is available, I would be happy for those unions to be listed here also.

8.39 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Let me assure the Hon. Member that all matters of shared interest were discussed – all matters of shared interest. We will continue to adopt this position devoutly going forward.

Ms. Fernandes: Same line item, different question. Could the Hon. Minister say with regards to the salary increases, specifically when it caters to the retroactive payment of salary increases, for example, if someone is employed in October, 2023, they are not placed on the December payroll, no fault of their own, does that person benefit from the retroactive pay increase?

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a very valid question and I wish to assure the Hon. Member that a new recruit, recruited late in the year or, indeed, at any time in the year, who is not on the payroll at the time that the salary increase is announced, will receive the attractive salary increase going back to the date of their appointment.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow up on that: could the Hon. Minister say if a circular was sent out specifically from the desk of the Finance Secretary advising that persons who did not appear on the December payroll cannot be paid the retroactive salary increase?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I am saying, definitively, that if a person subsequently enters into the payroll, hypothetically, let us say they were employed in September, they were not on the December payroll, but they end up being placed on the payroll in January or February, I wish to say, definitively, that this Government's position is that they will be paid the salary increase.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I am aware of several cases of such. Could the Hon. Minister say what recourse such individuals should take if they are faced with that situation? This is because you are clearly saying it is not a ministry's position, so how should an employee faced with that situation move forward to rectify such?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, if there is an employee who, at the time they eventually receive their first pay is of the impression, if there is such an employee who... Let me repeat that just so that I say it clearly. If there is an employee who receives their first pay, let us say in January or February and they are of the view that they did not benefit from the retroactive salary increase, which is the situation I understand the Hon. Member to be asking about, I would suggest that they bring it to the attention of their respective head of their budget agency, their Permanent Secretary or their head of department, who will in turn bring the matter to the attention of the Ministry of Finance for resolution.

Ms. Ferguson: A pleasant night to the staff of the Ministry of Finance. Mr. Chairman, on the very line item 6141, Other Employment Costs, like my Colleague, I am aware that persons who might have been in the system, worked from January, let us say 2023, but resigned in September of 2023, when the increase was actually paid out, they were denied payments from January to September of 2023. Can the Hon. Member shed some light on that, whether it is a new policy of the Government if you work within the year and you happen to resign or retire, therefore, you have nothing to get?

Mr. Chairman: I just wanted to get a clarification when the Hon. Member said, 'were denied'. That says to me that they asked for something, and it said flatly they cannot get it so that is what you meant. Hon. Minister.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I pride myself on having reasonably decent comprehension capabilities, reasonably decent, not infallible but half-decent capabilities to comprehend basic English language. There are two very different sets of circumstances. There is a set of circumstances that the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, described which are as follows: An employee who was employed during the course of the year, they are still in the employ of the Government at the end of the year, but they have not yet been added to the payroll, they eventually get added to the payroll in the new year. Will they get the salary increase applicable to the period in the previous year up to and including December and indeed up to and including those months of the new year that would have elapsed because they are still in the employ of Government? Will they get the retroactive salary increase going back to the date of their first employment? I answered in the affirmative,

The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, outlined a completely different set of circumstances. An employee who was in the employed during the course of the year but exited Government service before December. That is a completely different set of circumstances. Unless there is something fundamentally wrong with my comprehension, Sir, the two cannot be conflated. In relation to the latter set of circumstances, the historic practice has been for a variety of practical reasons, some of which I might be aware of and some of which I am not, but the historic practice has been, as far as I am aware, that the person must be in the employ of the Government in December or whenever, whichever month the salary increase is announced, the person must be in the employ of the Government in that month to be eligible for the salary increase. I believe the Public Service Ministry (PSM) circular says that and I believe the Ministry of Finance circular says that. If the person would have departed earlier in the year, that is a different set of circumstances, and the practice has been that the salary increase is applicable and payable to persons who are still in the employ of Government in the months in which the salary increase is announced and paid.

Ms. Fernandes: Looking at Volume 2 of the performance statement, Indicator number one says the number of finance circulars issued and I am looking at the same line item, Mr. Chairman, line item 6141 – Other Employment Costs, it says the number of finance circulars issued or to be issued. It says 2023, 26 and the target for 2024 is six. Could the Hon. Minister say what are the circulars that were issued in November and December, 2023?

Dr. Singh: I believe the question asked was in relation to November and December. Sir, the following circulars were issued during the months of November and December. I will read only the subject heading of the circulars. 1 – One-off cash grants. 2 – 2023 Adjustment to salaries and allowances of specified positions within the education sector. 3 – Closing of the country's accounts for 2023. 4 – Retirement of imprest 2023. 5 – Standing board of survey on cash. 6 – Payment of salaries and pensions for the year 2024. 7 – Salary increase for 2023. And, 8 – One-month bonus for members of the disciplined services.

Ms. Fernandes: Just for clarity, Sir, could the Hon. Minister say as it pertains to the 2023 salary adjustment and the salary increase, those two specific circulars, if any of those made reference to the persons' names on the payroll as of December, 2023?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I believe the *Hansard* will reflect that I just said that my recollection is that both the PSM circular and the Ministry of Finance circular do indicate, not necessarily with the following precise language, but I believe I did say that they do indicate that the person should be in the employ of the Government. It may very well not be that specific formulation, but something that approximates that relatively close. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, page 469 allocation to the Statistical Bureau, Sir. I note that there is a substantive decrease in the allocation, as against 2023, for employment costs and wages and salaries to the tune of approximately \$200 million. Can the Minister say whether this is due to resignations or change in programmes?

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me thank my veteran parliamentary Colleague, the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, for her very astute observation regarding the movement in the employment cost at the Bureau of Statistics. The Hon. Member would, of course, be aware that, in 2023, the Bureau of Statistics conducted the main set of activities associated with the national census as a result of which there was a significant increase in particularly temporary employment, including for Enumerators and associated positions. That expenditure is classified within the Wage Bill as Temporary Employment. We do not have the full disaggregation, we do not typically. The classification does not drill down to that level of detail, but there was quite a lot of temporary employment, Sir, associated with the census in

2023. Some of that has spilt over into 2024 because, as the Hon. Member knows, and, indeed, as we ventilated extensively in this House on previous occasions, there are still activities ongoing in relation to the census, so there is some spillover of employment activity connected to the census. The bulk of that employment activity, in fact, has tailed off and so that accounts for substantially the reduction in the employment cost incurred and projected to be incurred by the Bureau of Statistics.

Ms. Lawrence: Following on, same line item, could the Hon. Minister kindly inform the House what percentage we are at, in terms of completion of the census and while he is on his feet, if he can tell us when we can expect a national employment report?

Dr. Singh: I seem to recall, in fact, that we had a written or an oral question on this specific matter, and I had made the point at the time that for me to know what percentage of the population have already been counted, I would need to know two numbers, the numerator, that is to say, the number counted already and the denominator, the total. I do not know the total because the census is still underway, so I cannot calculate the percentage of the total population without knowing what the total population is. But I will say that the census is significantly advanced. There have been some hard-to-reach areas.

8.54 p.m.

In fact, I believe, it was the Hon. Annette Ferguson who asked a few questions in relation to this matter and allowed us an opportunity to ventilate it. I appreciated the opportunity to bring this matter back to the national attention and back the fore. As I said on that occasion, there have been some hard-to-reach areas, not only because of geography, topography and extreme episodic weather incidents but also because there have been some non-responses households that we went to do a repeat call and did not get a response. I believe on that occasion I outlined a number of steps that we were taking to ensure that we capture and count every single household. In fact, I seem to recall that I even sought the support and assistance from my Colleagues on that side of the House in drawing attention to how important the census is and in encouraging every household and individual to avail themselves of this extremely important national exercise. In fact, I saw some Members speaking about the importance of the census, subsequently, which I immensely appreciated.

Notwithstanding my inability to calculate a percentage or a fraction in the absence of its denominator, I thank the Hon. Member for posing the question because it allows me yet another opportunity to draw attention to how important the national census is; how important it is to ensure that every household and every individual is counted so that we know the true and full demography of our country so that we are better able to plan and identify evolving trends and demographic trends and changes in relation to demand for social services, *et cetera*. I thank the Hon. Member for drawing attention to this very important matter. I ask, again, as I did on that occasion for the support of all Members of this honourable House and, indeed, everybody viewing in their living rooms and elsewhere, thanks to the technology available today. I use this opportunity, the opportunity presented to me by this question, to encourage everybody, once again, to ensure that they are counted. I might add that the Bureau of Statistics website and its social media page have a link that one can click on to indicate that he/she has not been counted and to arrange an opportunity to be counted. I encourage everybody who has not been counted.

Thank you, Hon. Member for raising this issue and allowing me an opportunity to use this medium to call on and to encourage all of my Guyanese brothers and sisters who have not yet been counted to ensure that they are. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: The national employment report...

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Dr. Singh: I am not aware that the Bureau of Statistics produces an employment report. I suspect the Hon. Member is referring to the Labour Force Survey. The Hon. Member, of course, has been in this Parliament for many years as...

Ms. Lawrence: It is on its website. There are several reports there too, Hon. Minister, so you may want to check them out.

Dr. Singh: I believe I listened politely and respectfully to the Hon. Member's question.

Ms. Lawrence: I am sorry.

Dr. Singh: I do not believe it is unreasonable for me to ask that courtesy be reciprocated. As I was saying, I am not aware that the Bureau of Statistics produces an employment report. If they

do or have at any time in the past, I would be happy to be corrected. I am aware that they have, historically, been conducting a Labour Force Survey. They have, historically, been publishing statistics that emerged from that survey. Let me just ensure that I get the terminology correct. It is called a Labour Force Survey. They have, historically, been publishing these. The Hon. Member as a veteran of this Parliament and, indeed, as a former Minister herself would perhaps be aware that, in census years, the survey staff are redeployed to the task of the survey which does result, regrettably, in an interregnum in the conducting of the Labour Force Survey which is exactly what happened. The entire survey team was redirected as they, historically, have been, to the task of conducting the survey which is what resulted in the interregnum. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: To the Hon. Minister, for the same line item, I would now like to turn your attention to page 658, the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). Minister, could you tell the House whether this substantive increase of \$1 billion will see the Petroleum Cost Recovery unit of this agency being fully staffed with all the technical people who are required?

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Member correctly identifies and highlights our ongoing efforts to strengthen capabilities, not just at the GRA, but across all institutions of State involved in regulating, overseeing or otherwise interacting with the petroleum sector. The Guyana Revenue Authority, of course, is an important agency amongst the Government agencies performing those functions. The Hon. Member would be pleased to know that amongst the units that have been identified for strengthening, during the course of 2024, not only with additional recruitment, but also with training and other capacity building efforts is, in fact, the petroleum unit. There are, of course, other units, including audit, customs and so on where we will, similarly, be making efforts to strengthen institutional capacity. I want to assure the Hon. Member that the petroleum unit is certainly amongst the units that have been identified as high priority for continued institutional strengthening in capacity building.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister indicate whether between the timeline of finding the necessary personnel for this unit, if any audits that should take place by this agency are being outsourced, given that they do not have the staff? Are they outsourcing any part of their audits?

Dr. Singh: I think the matter of the performance of audits that are required in the sector has benefited from abundant public ventilation and, indeed, debate and discussion in this House. What I will say is that the functions that are required to be carried out are being carried out whether with the use of internal resources or, indeed, with resources purchased through the outsourcing modality. I want to assure the Hon. Member that we are performing all of the functions that we are required to perform using either, and in some instances, both of those modalities – the deployment of internal resources and outsourcing of services where the inhouse capabilities could be augmented.

Ms. Lawrence: Like so many Guyanese, one reads so many things on this whole oil sector and he/she is so confused, he/she does not know what to believe sometimes. Could the Hon. Minister confirm that the GRA is presently conducting, not only the petroleum audits, whether outsourcing or from internal use, but they are also doing data analysis, monitoring of the floating ships and, also, monitoring the storage and offloading of the floating production, storage and offloading (FPSO) vessels?

Dr. Singh: I would say that the GRA and other agencies involved in regulating and overseeing the oil and gas sector, are all taken in total, and are all performing the functions they are required to perform. That notwithstanding, of course, the task of building and strengthening their capacity continues apace. Thank you, very much.

Ms. Lawrence: May I take the Minister to line item 6281 – Security Services, I note an increase of approximately \$10 million. Could the Minister indicate how many new sites will be covered and whether any amount from here is going to private internal security?

Dr. Singh: In fact, this entire sum is utilised to meet costs associated with the Special Constabulary of the Guyana Police Force. There are a number of locations covered. What might in the first instance appear to be an under-expenditure relative to our budget in 2023, the Hon. Member would note, in fact, that we spent, significantly, less in our budget in 2023. It reflects the fact that there were instances where our locations were manned by a complement slightly less than the optical complement which is a matter we have raised with the Guyana Police Force. We are anticipating a deployment of the full complement which, in fact, is what accounts for a reversion to an amount that approximates more closely the sum that was budgeted last year.

Ms. Lawrence: I am happy to hear that we are using our Special Constabulary. Line item 6272 – Electricity Charges, I think it was the last budget I had asked the Minister about arrears. I note that this line item has increased by \$2 million. Are we still paying arrears?

Dr. Singh: Yes. We are, in fact, still paying arrears. Indeed, there are some Government agencies for whom we have been providing assistance to meet their electricity cost on their behalf. Perhaps, the most significant example that comes to my mind is the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI). We have taken a policy decision that, notwithstanding the increase in fuel charges, we will not pass that on through higher electricity tariffs or higher water charges. We have remained faithful to that stated objective and that has necessitated us providing some support to the GWI in meeting the cost of its electricity bill. That is perhaps the most prominent example that comes to my mind most immediately but, yes, we are still resolving the matter of an inherited stock of arrears. In particular, we are providing support to some Government agencies in relation to their electricity bill to avoid the increase in fuel cost, which could be transmitted through increased electricity charges and be transmitted, ultimately, into increased charges, say for water and other goods and services provided by Government. We do provide some support under this line item.

9.09 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: If I am to take our attention to line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. I can turn your attention to pages 468 and 469, however, with regards to the Bureau of Statistics, I would like to ask the Hon. Member whether we are on track to have the preliminary report of the 2022 census tabled in the second quarter as you promised?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, let me say definitively that I fervently hope so. The very capable and professional staff of the Bureau of Statistics have been applying themselves feverishly to this task. They share our sense of urgency to complete the census, I do not want necessarily to proffer what might understandably be seen as excuses, but if it has any mitigating value, I will mention the fact that a number of the censuses across the Caribbean are similarly delayed. In fact, I believe I shared some of that information when we had the debate on the motion for a variety of reasons. I want to assure the Hon. Member that the very capable and professional team at the Bureau of Statistics led by the Chief Statistician, the Deputy Chief Statistician and the Head of

Survey have been applying themselves diligently to this task. They appreciate and understand the sense of urgency. We all want this to be completed.

They are mindful of the challenges they have been facing, including, like I said, the challenging geography that does not allow, particularly in certain areas, repeat visits every day. If you go and you do not find people, our geography does not necessarily allow you to go back every day indefinitely. They have been endeavouring their very best. They have assured me...In fact, I am joined by the Chief Statistician and my team today. They have assured me that they are sparing no effort in completing the work that would be necessary for us to meet to that deadline that we had set ourselves. Having said that, I know that they also want to be thorough in their coverage and I suspect that they will constantly keep under review the progress that they make in addressing the hard to reach or unreached areas and I do not only mean because of terrain. They do have a sense of households where they have left a call back slip, they have made multiple repeat visits, they have not gotten a response. At some point in time, they will make a judgement in relation to those areas that have presented us with challenges in relation to access and bring this to conclusion. A balance has to be struck between, as is always the case, timeliness and forwardness. We want the most thorough and comprehensive job to be done but we want it to be done in the most timely manner possible and a balance between the two would inevitably have to be struck. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$39,723,098,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services - \$8,348,673,000

Ms. Fernandes: Turning the Minister's attention to Volume 2, Indicator number six which says, 'the number of internal audits', 'routine and follow up completed or and to be completed'. The number there is stated for 2023 as 35 and the target for 2024 is also 35. Could the Minister say how many of the 35 have been completed and how many are left to be completed?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I am advised that the 35 indicated under 2023 represents completed audits and we are targeting an additional 35 for 2024. This is the advice that I am currently in possession of. Thank you, very much.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow up to the response, could the Hon. Minister say why is it that the Ministry is sticking to the target of 35 for 2024? Is there a constraint on the staffing complement in the other department within the Ministry? Is there any plan to expand so that more audits can be done on a yearly basis?

Dr. Singh: If I can maybe work my way in reverse. On the question of whether there is a staffing constraint, I do not believe it is a secret, Sir, that most of our agencies face very finite staffing resources and we try to optimise on the use of those staffing resources. The Ministry of Finance is no different in this regard. We have finite resources, and we try to make the best of the resources that we have. With that regard, I think we are exactly in the same situation as everybody else, Comrade.

Let me secondly say that an audit is not a standard homogenous unit. What constitutes an audit will depend on the scales, scope and complexity of what is being audited. It is perfectly conceivable, in fact, for the number of audits to decline but the scales, scope and complexity of the work to increase. But, of course, it is challenging to capture this in a metric that is easily communicable and so we count audits. I want to assure the Member that 35, in this instance... I know the Hon. Member is associated with Colleagues who grapple with 33 not being bigger than 32, I want to say that, in this instance, 35 audits next year in terms of volume and complexity of effort does not necessarily equal exactly 35 audits done last year. This is because the audits may vary in their scale, in their scope and their complexity. Obviously, as I am sure the Hon. Member would agree, capturing that in a metric is extreme. We have not perfected a metric that will capture the scale, scope and complexity of the audits that we do.

For the time being, we are working with the metric that is available to us and that is a numerical count of the audit, but I would not necessarily conclude that 35 audits in 2024 means an exactly identical level of effort as 35 audits in 2022. It could mean more; it could mean less. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Programme: 032 - Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$8,348,673,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Estimates

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$56,096,734,000

Ms. Hasting-Williams: Project Code, 3401000, could the Hon. Minister tell this Committee how many communities or areas are earmarked for the following: (1) Demarcation, (2) Extension, (3) Titling, and (4) Conflict resolution of lands in that order and what cost is associated with each activity?

Dr. Singh: Once again, Mr. Chairman, I will answer in reverse chronological order. The sum allocated for Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) is \$800 million in 2024. We anticipate conducting 24 investigations, 15 absolute grants or the issuance of 15 absolute grants, and completion of cadastral surveys and demarcation of granted lands – 50. This, of course, represents, as I am sure the Hon. Member would recognise and acknowledge, a very significant scaling up of the work that is being done on Amerindian Land Titling, which we have treated as amongst our highest priority since our return to Office.

Hon. Members would recall, in fact, that the Amerindian Land Titling project received the benefit of funding under the original Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) though the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund mechanism popularly called the GRIF. Hon. Members would no doubt be aware that, notwithstanding that resources were secured and notwithstanding that an international partner was engaged as the counterpart international agency through and with whom we will implement this Amerindian Land Titling project, Colleagues would recall that our predecessors in Office, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) ground this project literally to a halt and conducted virtually no Amerindian Land Titling activities, notwithstanding that the resources were available. We promised the resumption of that work and we have already delivered a significant effort to advance the Amerindian Land Titling effort in this country. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you for the answer, Mr. Minister. On the same Project Code, 3401000, Internet Connectivity Access (ICE), could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell this

Committee when the residents of the Upper Mazaruni villages like Kamarang, Jawalla, Chinowieng, Imbaimadai, Arau, Kaikan, can expect their communities to have access to internet connection seeing that the buildings are already identified for over two years now? Some have also been solar powered and solar systems have been installed in many of the buildings and so, they are anxiously awaiting to hear when, if it is catered for in this budget.

9.24 p.m.

Two, also for the other regions that are not connected, could he give us by region when they could expect their connections? Thank you.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I find it particularly interesting that the Hon. Member would choose to ask this question, because this is yet another example of a project for which the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government of the pre-2015 term secured resources, designed a project, entered an implementing agreement with an international agency for the implementation of this project and initiated the implementation activities. Then, of course, we demitted office in 2015. I believe it was no less a person than the Hon. Prime Minister – and he will no doubt signal me if I am incorrect in my recollection – who, when we assumed Office, visited a bond/warehouse/room in Diamond where the components that were procured were tightly padlocked. Not a single component had been distributed to any Amerindian community in this country. In fact, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), during the entirety of the five years they were in Office – notwithstanding at least two of those years they were illegally so – failed to make provision for the civil works that were necessary for the deployment of these resources. It was only when democracy was safeguarded and the People's Progressive Party/Civic assumed Office in August, 2020 that those rapidly decaying components were salvaged.

An assessment had to be done at these locations. The civil works had to be initiated and executed to lay the foundation for deployment of these Information and Communication Technology (ICT) hubs. I am happy that the Hon. Member presented me with an opportunity to remind our Guyanese brothers and sisters, in particular our Amerindian and hinterland brothers and sisters, of this tragic episode – the tragic experience and the wasted and lost years of 2015 to 2020 when they benefitted from no Amerindian land titling and when they did not benefit from the ICT

project. Thankfully, they judged the APNU/AFC correctly and confined them indefinitely to the Opposition's benches. The projects have now resumed implementation and will be delivered, including in the communities that the Hon. Member inquired about. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, there are two things. First of all, I want to say that it sounds quite impressive, and we are very happy to see the \$800 million allocation to Amerindian land titling. However, I am moving along to project code 4503100, Contribution to Local Organisation. We have the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN) and a capital contribution of \$50 million stated here. I believe, if I am correct, this makes my third year asking the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service why is it that the board has not been constituted. In the first year, 2022, the Minister said that it would have been done forthwith. In 2023, he assured us that he was working diligently to get this done. So, for all the good and stalwart leadership that the Minister proposed that his Ministry is doing, what is the reason that the Linden Enterprise Network has not benefitted, over the last years, from this \$50 million allocation?

Sir, I want to also say that I hope the Amerindian land titling is not in the same position in which moneys are being catered for in the budget and is just there to prop up the sum, but the works are not being carried out and the moneys are not being distributed.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, let me say, first of all, that in relation to the Amerindian land titling project, which clearly is a sore subject because the Members on that side of the Committee are embarrassed by their dismal track record, that since we have returned to Office, we have already done, not counting those that we will be doing in 2024, 43 investigations, eight absolute grants and eight demarcations. Our work continues. It is far more than they did in five years.

In relation to the LEN, the Hon. Member would be pleased to know that I will be faithful to the... [interruption] The APNU/AFC is clearly embarrassed by the fact that it denied our Amerindian brothers and sisters the benefit of land titling throughout its dismal, failed five years in office. Clearly, this is a matter that is quite sore and sensitive for them because they are embarrassed by the manner in which they abandoned our Amerindian and our hinterland brothers and sisters. In relation to LEN, I wish to assure the Hon. Member that we remain firmly committed to addressing this matter – exactly as I said last year – forthwith. Having said that, the

Hon. Member would know that LEN and the fund it administered was intended to be a revolving fund. The Hon. Member would be well aware that we have also been granting a large number of grants to small entrepreneurs in Linden and in Region 10 across a wide range of sectors. That has continued and it will continue in 2024. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, through you, I have a follow-up on that response. Could the Hon. Minister say specifically what is the challenge regarding constituting the LEN board? It is beyond my comprehension how the Ministry of Finance cannot constitute a board, after being in office over three years of. Also, without the board, could the Hon. Minister say whether this \$50 million can be disbursed?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, it is beyond my capability to pronounce on what falls within the boundaries of the Hon. Member's comprehension and what falls outside of those boundaries. We have been, we are, and we continue to examine and study all options available for providing support to small entrepreneurs in Linden. This is something that the APNU/AFC failed to do for the whole of the five years that it was in Government.

Ms. Fernandes: Just one final follow-up from me on this matter of the LEN. This is being televised. Could the Hon. Minister say to this Committee of Supply and more so to the people of Linden, when will the LEN board will be constituted? This is my final question. Thank you, Sir.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, if you will permit me a little bit of repetition from multiple previous sittings, what I wish to say, through you to the Hon. Member, and what I can certainly say is that, despite the Members of the APNU/AFC's preferred posture of pretence that they love the people of Linden, for five entire years they delivered not one significant infrastructure project. For five years they delivered not one significant private investment. For five years they failed to create a single significant job. For five years they succeeded only in miniaturising the bauxite industry by chasing away the investors in the Berbice River which resulted in the loss of more than 1000 jobs, including that of several Lindeners and persons from around Region 10 and elsewhere, including New Amsterdam. They chased away the investor at the call centre, which resulted in the closure of the call centre and the loss of more than 100 jobs. They like to say that the Mackenzie/Wismar Bridge was their project. They were planning but they did not deliver it. They like to claim that the Linden to Mabura road was their project; they were planning it but

failed to deliver it. They like to say that the Linden to Soesdyke project was their project; they were planning it but failed to deliver it. This People's Progressive Party/Civic Government will deliver to the people of Linden all of those and more.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: I cannot dictate how the Minister should answer my question or anybody else's question. I am not satisfied with the answer because it was a simple question. I asked the Hon. Minister a specific question: when could the residents of the Upper Mazaruni expect connectivity since there are already buildings identified and equipped? Some of them have computers and solar systems installed. I did not get my answer.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member is expecting a specific month and date, let me say that we are not in the business of making promises that we cannot keep. The *Hansard* will reflect that I said, very clearly, that all of those communities are included where we are planning to deliver. We have, in fact, a list of 80 communities for which we anticipate completion and delivery of the hubs within 2024. Thank you very much.

Ms Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, with all of the political grandstanding we just heard regarding the LEN, the board is still not constituted. The Hon. Member claimed that the Coalition Government do not like the people of Linden and gave many examples, but the board was in place. Without oil money, the people were getting their moneys. Now, you are claiming that you can do better. You love the people of Linden. You made inroads in Linden. Why not constitute the board and let the \$50 million be disbursed? The simple question we are asking you, Dr. Singh, is when will the LEN board be constituted? There are many ordinary Guyanese in Linden who are waiting to access moneys to start up their little businesses. So, please, Sir, answer the question that was put to you tonight.

9.39 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I believe that I have addressed this matter exhaustively. Sir, I am glad that the Hon. Member is persisting with this line of question because it illustrates abundantly the APNU/AFC's preoccupation with small things and trivialities. The Hon. Member is completely obsessed with the appointment of a board. Sir, they spent five years doing just that – appointing boards, appointing commissioners, doing Commissions of Inquiry (COIs) and conducting investigations. The Hon. Member is preoccupied with the appointment of a board instead of

being preoccupied with the delivery of real development results for the people of Linden, the creation of real jobs for the people of Linden and the creation of real business opportunities for the people of Linden. All those things are not important to the Hon. Member. Typical. Having spent 23 years in Opposition, they came into Government and all they were preoccupied with was appointment of COIs, appointment of board, conducting of study and preparation of plans. Sir, ask the people of Linden what real result was delivered to them in five years. Not a road, not a business, not an investment could be pointed out, and not even a bicycle bridge, as I pointed out earlier, Sir. They were busy appointing commissions and boards because it was that with which they were preoccupied. We, in the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government are concerned with delivering real development results to the people of Linden, and we remain committed to do so and we will deliver those results to the people of Linden.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if I may follow- up, since the Hon. Member is saying that they will deliver to the people of Linden, I am challenging the Hon. Member to deliver the LEN board to the people of Linden by Monday, God spare life.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, there was a comment and I have to give you a chance to comment on the comment.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, my final contribution to this matter is to quote my distinguished colleague, the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, who on a political platform...I believe it was a People's Progressive Party/Civic rally in Kitty where the Hon. Member, now Minister Gail Teixeira – I believe this was during the 2015-2020 period – described the APNU/AFC as the gods of small things, invoking the name of a Booker Prize winning novel by a distinguished Indian Novelist by the name of Arundhati Roy, who wrote a book called, *The God of Small Things* and won the Booker Prize for Literature for it. What we saw here is yet another display of why they were very appropriately called “the gods of small things”. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: A very small thing for us here is that there are five minutes remaining on the time saved and the total time for the estimates.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I believe that it was a very important revelation made by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service as

it pertains to the size of the allocation being given to LEN. Sir, it is my opinion that when we have a budget that has been increased significantly over the years, particularly this year, the budget being \$1.146 trillion, indeed, the allocation to LEN is a small thing. I am asking the Hon. Minister what considerations were made by himself as the Minister with the responsibility for Finance whilst he was putting these numbers together for the LEN programme and why is it that he made sure he had that sum remain very small and he did not increase that sum so that the persons in Linden could benefit from a large salary increase? Since the Government is thinking large, why is that sum so small?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, once again, the question illustrates the warped mindset of the APNU/AFC. The Hon. Members are preoccupied with this particular item and conveniently elect to ignore the fact that we, the People's Progressive Party/ Civic Government, are building the Linden to Mabura Highway; we are building the Linden to Soesdyke Highway; we are building the Wismar Bridge. [Mr. Ramson: Two stadiums.] We are building two stadiums. This is just to give a few examples. We have restarted the call centre. We have given hundreds of part time jobs in Linden, employing people and providing an opportunity for them to enter the world of work as a first step. Sir, they have conveniently chosen to ignore all of that.

Mr. Chairman, every road that is being build represents a business opportunity or an employment opportunity for Lindeners. They have conveniently opted to ignore the fact that we have facilitated an investment of US\$120 million in the first new kiln constructed in Linden, Kiln 15, since the 1970s. They have conveniently chosen to forget that the Maz project will create another 1000 jobs by the first half of 2025. It is 1000 new jobs, 500 in 2024 and another 500 in the first half of 2025, for Lindeners when, in fact, they took away jobs from the people of Linden. They have conveniently chosen to ignore some of those facts. Sir, the people of Linden are wiser. That is why we were able to garner in 2023 six times as many votes as we did in 2018 in the Local Government Election, and we will be expanding and growing that tremendously come 2025. Sir, that is why they are shivering in fear. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, we have now exhausted all of the time.

Programme: 031 - Policy and Administration - \$56,096,734,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 032 - Public Financial Management Polices and Services - \$63,150,000

Programme: 032 - Public Financial Management Polices and Services - \$63,150,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this completes the consideration of this Estimates of the Expenditure for the year 2024 by the Committee of Supply.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Let me thank the Hon. Minister and the staff of the Ministry of Finance for taking us through his agency.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, I think we are really, really at the place where no further extension can be given for the provision of a list that brought and could continue to bring into disrepute the teachers...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I want to interrupt. I was trying to ensure that the Hon. Member is here before I put the particular matter. If she is not here, then, we will have to make our decisions because it is serious.

Ms. Manickchand: It is very serious.

Mr. Speaker: It is very serious. It is one that could even end up at the Privileges Committee. No one can accuse us of being drastic or impatient.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, also serious is that every day, we get...

Mr. Speaker: Please, let us wait and give the Hon... Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, if you need a five-minute suspension, I could give you.

Dr. Singh: No, Mr. Speaker. I am perfectly happy to continue.

Mr. Speaker: I need you right now. Hon. Members, we are back in Assembly.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Sir. Before I submit the formal report, permit me to thank all of my technical staff at the Public Service Ministry and the Ministry of Finance for their continued, tireless effort and support and commitment to serving the people of Guyana in an exemplary fashion. Similarly, I offer similar compliments in relation to the various technical teams who supported us throughout the course of the consideration of these estimates.

Sir, permit me to also thank our colleagues on that side of the House who, through their questions, provided what we consider, on this side of the House, the valuable opportunity to expand, elaborate and more fully articulate the various incredibly exciting plans, programmes and projects that we are implementing in the national interest and in the interest of improving the wellbeing of all Guyanese people. Their questions afforded us such an opportunity and my colleagues in Cabinet, of course, availed themselves. Of course, my colleagues on this side of the House, as always, acquitted themselves with remarkable distinction.

Finally, the staff of the Parliament Office and your good self who have facilitated the consideration of these estimates, in particular, the Clerk of the National Assembly and his very able team who endured this process with their customary dignity and aplomb. Permit me, against that background, to report that the Committee of Supply considered the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2024 and approved of them as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I will now put the motion.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

9.54 p.m.

Hon. Members, we now have to deal with the Appropriation Bill. I call on the Hon. Prime Minister to move the suspension of Standing Orders No. 13 (n) and 54 so that we can deal with the stages of the Bill.

Suspension of Standing Orders No. 13 (n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders No. 13 (n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Appropriation Bill 2024, Bill No. 1 of 2024 to be introduced at this stage.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr Speaker, with your leave, I move that Standing Orders No. 13 (n) and No. 54 be suspended to enable the Appropriation Bill 2024, Bill No. 1 of 2024 to be introduced at this stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In accordance with paragraph (2) of article 171, of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Appropriation Bill 2024, Bill No.1 of 2024 for consideration by the National Assembly. I now present the Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time.

Appropriation Bill 2024 – Bill No. 1 of 2024

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2024, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the

appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in the conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read the first time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Appropriation Bill 2024, Bill No. 1 of 2024 be read a second time.

Bills – Second and Third Readings

Appropriation Bill 2024 – Bill No. 1 of 2024

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2024, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in the conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Appropriation Bill 2024, Bill No. 1 of 2024 be read a third time.

Appropriation Bill 2024 – Bill No. 1 of 2024

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2024, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in the conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read a third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Members. We may now proceed to the next item on the agenda and that is the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill, Bill No. 2 of 2024.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Excuse me. I am panting for breath, but I just had to run over to the Opposition’s lounge. Sir, earlier this evening, while we were considering the Estimates for the Ministry of Finance, while we were live streaming, we received several calls from outside of the chamber indicating that the audio from the Opposition’s lounge was being live streamed at the same time. Sir, essentially, the sanctity of the Opposition’s lounge has been breached. The Leader of the Opposition is heard in that audio as well as several other Opposition Members’ conversations, and we will provide you with the audio. As a result of that, Sir, the Opposition will have no further part of this debate or this conversation this evening. We will provide you with the information, Sir. A press statement will be released along with the audio. When the Minister of Finance is on the floor here, you are hearing the Leader of the Opposition in the MP’s lounge at the same time.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Chief Whip for the Opposition, thank you for bringing that to my attention. It is the second time. We met earlier and we asked that the cameras be shut down. We did. So, I am very concerned that you have presented that. If this was the case and it was not shut down. Certainly, we will have to deal with this condignly.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman. Colleagues, we will take our leave. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, can we take a 10-minute break? Please, a 10-minute break.

Sitting suspended at 10.00 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 10.15 p.m.

Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2024 – Bill No. 2 of 2022

A Bill intituled:

“An ACT to amend the Income Tax Act, the Value-Added Tax Act, the Customs Act, the Natural Resource Fund Act, the External Loans Act and the Public Loan Act.”

*[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with
Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service.]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please be seated. Hon. Members, we now will proceed with the second reading of the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2024, Bill No. 2 of 2024, published on 26th January, 2024. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, proceed.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The privilege, this evening, Sir, is mine to rise to move that the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2024, Bill No. 2 of 2024, which, Sir, as you indicated, was published on 26th January, 2024, be read a second time.

The matters contained in this Bill are indeed relatively simple and have been abundantly and exhaustively debated during the course of the consideration of *Budget 2024*. There are, essentially, three main aspects to this Bill. The first, Sir, is to enact the tax measures that we announced in the budget, including the increase in the income tax threshold to an amount of \$100,000 per month which, as we indicated, will deliver relief to all payers of income tax and will remove thousands of taxpayers from the tax net. Those tax measures include, also, relief

granted in relation to the taxes payable on importation of basic cell phone accessories, to facilitate easier and more affordable connectivity, and essential sporting equipment.

There was also an amendment intended to increase the amount of tax relief that is to be granted for insurance premiums payable on the life and medical insurance and all of those provisions are contained in this Bill. It would be recalled that I elected to devote a specific section in the Budget Speech, which I presented on 15th January, to what I described as optimising the financing mix. And in doing so, I indicated that we, this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, which I have the privilege of serving in its Cabinet, led by His Excellency, the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, have committed to delivering improvement to the well-being of all Guyanese, and in a rapidly accelerated fashion and at a rapidly accelerated pace. As was ventilated during the course of this debate, whether it is the rapid build out of physical and economic infrastructure, such as our transport and energy infrastructure, of our social infrastructure, such as our public healthcare facilities and our educational facilities, or the strengthening of the capability of our security sector agencies, including the police and the fire service with the deployment of additional assets and the deployment of high technology, or the improvement of our social services or the build out of our housing and water infrastructure or indeed any other sector, we, this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, are in a hurry to improve the lives of every single Guyanese family and every single Guyanese individual. We are equally in a hurry to create opportunities. I spoke and all of my colleagues on this side of the House spoke about the emergence of new opportunities at a scale and at a pace that has never previously been seen in our country's history. Whether it is employment opportunities or entrepreneurial opportunities, these are emerging in every single sector of economic endeavour and sectoral activity.

Mr. Speaker, the achievement of this rapid and accelerated delivery of development results to all of the people of Guyana requires sound and astute fiscal and economic management, including careful attention to how we finance this accelerated delivery of development. In this regard, the Budget Speech spoke of revisions to the withdrawal rule contained in the Natural Resource Fund and to the statutory ceilings that are applicable to both domestic and external debt. This Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill now seeks to implement the said amendments. As it would be recalled we did in December, 2021, we introduced, for the first time, a transparent and easily understandable withdrawal rule as part of a comprehensive suite of strengthening the legal

framework for management of the oil and gas sector and, in particular, the revenues earned from that sector. On that very evening, we also considered the Local Content Act, which was passed. And in considering the Natural Resource Fund Act we witnessed perhaps the most shameful episode of parliamentary lawlessness when our colleagues on that side of the House invaded the circle. There is a word that you use to describe this – the well. They invaded the well, ultimately seized the Mace, damaged the Mace in the process, physically assaulted staff of the Parliament Office and insulted them using language, Sir, that I would never dare to repeat. [An. Hon. Member: But I can. (*inaudible*) called him a house slave and that was allowed in this... Despicable.] Small wonders, then, Sir,...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I was going to cite the rule about interrupting Members.

10.23 p.m.

Dr. Singh: It should come as no surprise that the APNU/AFC, just as we were about to consider this Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill, chose to leave the House in the manner they did. They have a long, well established and well documented track record of obstructing, frustrating, and derailing progress. Their history in this House, in relation to several major developmental objectives and aspirations such as the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, stands out for the notoriety with which they derailed that particular project. Had they not derailed it, it would today have been supplying our national grid with 156 megawatts of very affordable, clean, and renewable energy. It should come as no surprise to the nation that a Bill that seeks to optimise the financing mix and to lay the foundation for withdrawals to be increased from the Natural Resource Fund (NRF), while at the same time preserving the objective of striking an optimal balance between how much we withdraw in the near term *versus* how much we save in the medium and long term, and I hasten to add that the new formula will see us saving 90% of revenues earned in the preceding year in excess of US\$5 billion, therefore, in the outer years, saving the lion's share of the revenues earned from the oil and gas sector, while at the same time ensuring that we are able today to deliver the roads, the schools, the hospitals and the housing areas that the people of Guyana very validly, appropriately, and legitimately desire and aspire to see realised, it is perhaps not surprising that the APNU/AFC chose to walk out.

Let me also say that in relation to the debt ceiling, while the ceilings are being raised, we have remained consistent within the statutory ceiling. The ceilings that we are now prescribed are by no means to be interpreted as the level of debt we will be incurring either today, tomorrow, or indeed next month or next year. In fact, here again, it is the APNU/AFC, during their notorious dictatorial and oppressive rule of 2015 to 2020, that incurred an overdraft at the Bank of Guyana, concealed it, refused to report it and disclose it, refused to securitize it in the manner that would lawfully be required because, were they so to do, they would have been found to have exceeded the debt ceiling that prevailed at that time, and they would have had to come to this National Assembly and transparently account for their excess above the debt ceiling and seek the approval of this National Assembly to increase the ceiling. So, in exactly the same manner as they hid the \$18 million signing bonus, pretending it did not exist, they also concealed their borrowing... **[Bishop Edghill: By hiding it.]** ...by hiding it in order to avoid coming to this National Assembly in a transparent manner to adjust the debt ceiling upwards to accommodate the level of borrowing that they were incurring.

This People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, we pride ourselves on being different from the APNU/AFC. We have come today to adjust the debt ceiling both for external and domestic debt and to create the room that would be necessary to allow a dynamic management of our multiple financing options, in order to ensure that we utilise an optimal combination of financing, while at the same time executing this accelerated development programme. As we look around today, there is a reason why the People's Progressive Party/Civic Members of Parliament are all here doing the people's business and prepared to articulate why this Bill is so important, because we are committed to serving the people of Guyana. In the same breath, if the cameras were to pan the Opposition benches, they are stark in their emptiness. The Hon. Attorney General attaches to them the phrase 'missing in action'. I must say that often times, even when they are in the benches, I wonder whether they are not still 'missing in action'. On a serious note, if the cameras would pan the Opposition benches there is a reason why they are not here. The financing that will be mobilised under the auspices of this Bill will deliver accelerated improvement to the lives of the Guyanese people. In their customary fashion, the APNU/AFC will do everything that they possibly can to frustrate the delivery of these benefits to the Guyanese people. That is why they are not here today.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you said the Opposition. The Deputy Speaker is still here.

Dr. Singh: The Deputy Speaker excepted, of course. Mr. Speaker, the respective presence tonight illustrates those who are standing on the side of the Guyanese people and those who are opposed to the Guyanese people, and will only ever act in a manner inimical to the interest of the Guyanese people. In the latter regard, I mean, of course, and I refer of course, needless to say, to the APNU/AFC. There is much more that can be said on this Bill. It has been a long two weeks, arduous in moments. but thoroughly enjoyable throughout, of course. I do not wish to detain this House unduly. I believe the merits of the Bill are evident. I know that all of the Members in this House have already spoken in their various contributions on aspects related to why this accelerated development agenda is being rolled out and how.

So, as we conclude consideration of *Budget 2024*, it is my privilege to commend this Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2024, which contains critical elements, critical legislative and statutory elements contained in *Budget 2024*. It also establishes the legal framework to ensure sustainable and optimal financing of the accelerated agenda that we in the People's Progressive Party/Civic will be delivering to the Guyanese people in the near, immediate, and long term. With those uncharacteristically few words, the privilege is mine to move that the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2024 be read the second time. Thank you very much, Sir.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, you have the floor.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: I decline, Sir. I could not have expressed it with greater precision and brevity as my distinguished and articulate colleague has done. So, I decline Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, AG.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, the privilege now is mine to rise on behalf of this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government and on behalf of all of the Guyanese people to report that the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2024, Bill No. 2/2024, was considered in Committee clause by clause and was passed without amendments. I now move that the Bill be read a third time and be passed as printed.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today and for the Budget. I take this opportunity in thanking all the Members for their contributions, the Clerk and his staff for being with us and serving us so well during the past two weeks, the staff of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Manager of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre, our caterers, the security people, our drivers and all the support services that we have had during the consideration of this Budget and these Estimates. I wish you a safe voyage home. Hon. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

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

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I join you in commending, first, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service and the staff of the Ministry of Finance in putting together and delivering this Budget to us. I would also like to commend all of the Members of Parliament for participating in the debates and the examination of the Estimates. Finally, I would like to commend you, Mr. Speaker, for the manner in which you led us through this activity over the last two weeks. I extend similar sentiments to the Clerk of the National Assembly and the Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly, all of the staff of the Parliament Office and all of the support staff at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre, the

caterers, and everyone who led to this final position that we are all in now. At this stage, I ask that we adjourn the House to a date and time to be fixed.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.39 p.m.