

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2012) OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

2ND Sitting

Friday, 10TH February, 2012

Assembly convened at 2.01 p.m.

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

OATH OF A NEW MEMBER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been informed that the President has appointed Mr. Joseph Linden Hamilton to be a Parliamentary Secretary. Mr. Hamilton is a non-elected Member of the National Assembly by virtue of holding the office of Parliamentary Secretary. He has become a Member of the Assembly in accordance with Article 105 of the Constitution. He cannot vote in the Assembly. Before Mr. Hamilton can take part in the proceedings of the Assembly, he will have to make and subscribe the oath of office as required by Article 167 of the Constitution.

As Mr. Hamilton is present, he can now make and subscribe the oath, which will be administered to him by the Clerk. Will the Clerk please administer the oath to Mr. Hamilton?

The oath of office was administered to, and made and subscribed by the following Member:

Mr. Joseph Linden Hamilton, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary

Welcome to New Member

Mr. Speaker: We welcome Mr. Hamilton, a former Member of this Assembly. I believe as a Member of the Eight Parliament, now coming as a Parliamentary Secretary he will now formally take his seat. [Applause]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

(i) Portraits of Former Presidents

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, sometime ago the Clerk of the National Assembly was instructed, by way of a resolution of this House, to have full sized portraits of each of the former Presidents of Guyana prepared and displayed in the Parliament Chamber. At that time there were two portraits which were not erected, and in accordance with those instructions, the Clerk has since ensured that the Portraits of Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte, Senior Counsel and Mrs. Janet Jagan, O.E. both former Presidents of Guyana, have been placed on the eastern wall of the Chamber. There they are, as you can see. I did hear the news on N.C.N. (National Communications Network) this morning saying that the portrait of our most recent and immediate past President Mr. Bharat Jagdeo will be erected at some time. I daresay that when his party indicates and the Assembly instructs, the Clerk will faithfully carry out that instruction. Thank you very much.

(ii) Additional Responsibilities of Minister Ali

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been informed that the Hon. Member Mohamed IrfaanAli, Minister of Housing and Water, has been assigned additional responsibilities for the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce until such time that a person is appointed Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce.

(iii) Chief Whips

Mr. Speaker: I have also been informed that Ms. Gail Teixeira has been appointed Government's Chief Whip and Ms. Amna Ally has been appointed the Opposition's Chief Whip.

So Hon. Members, I would like to on behalf of all of us to congratulate our newly appointed Whips, Ms. Gail Teixeira and Ms. Amna Ally, respectively, and of course our newly joining Member of the House, as a Member of Parliament, Mr. Joseph Linden Hamilton.

I just have been informed that the President is on his way. I wish to make an announcement, which I will defer to the moment when we resume our business in the afternoon. Consequent on the death of four former Members of the House Mrs. Shelia Valarie Agnes Holder, Mr. Everall Nkrumah Franklin, Dr. Motilall and of course former Member of the House Mr. Robert Williams, who was also at the time of his death, Deputy Mayor of Georgetown. Hon

Members please let us stand and observe one minute of silence as a mark of respect for the late Mrs. Shelia Valarie Agnes Holder, Mr. Everall Nkrumah Franklin, Dr. Motilall and Mr. Robert Williams.

One minute of silence observed.

Assembly suspended at 2.09 p.m.

Assembly resumes 2.25 p.m.

The Hon. Speaker accompanied His Excellency, the President to the Chamber.

Thank You to His Excellency, the President

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated. Your Excellency, Mr. President, it is with a deep sense of honor that I welcome you on behalf of the Members of Parliament, Members of the Judiciary, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and our distinguish guest all, to this ceremonial opening of the Tenth Parliament.

I am particularly honoured to welcome you Mr. President, not only because you are an immediate past member of this House, but more so because of the historical importance of this uniquely and interestingly configured Parliament. By the People's mandate, we have been presented with a precious opportunity for unprecedented cooperation among Government and Opposition; one that I pray we do not squander or leave untapped.

Your presence here today, apart from being what I hope is a first of several State of the Nation addresses, that you will present before the Tenth Parliament is dissolved, signifies and reinforces the intricate and interconnected relationships between the three branches of State that we know to be the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. Separate and yet equal; powerful but not over powering of each other. The uniqueness both of this Assembly, with an Opposition majority and of this event with you, your Excellency, standing here as head of the Executive branch, therefore cannot be underscored. As we gather now in this August and ornate setting to receive your vision, so that it may be paired with ours, to create the basis of a new realigned, transformed and better Guyana.

It is written that, "From whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." There is much work to be done to address

today's growing national and global maladies. To paraphrase Martin Carter, Mr. President, the print of hunger and of crime, social and moral deprivation, racial distrust and general discontent wonders in the land. Let us rise to the occasion of the challenge issued by the people, together, not separately and demonstrate that though diverse through our strains we can unveil Guyana's potential as a blessed, united, free and prosperous democratic State.

Mr. President my vision is for us to realise a modern and truly representative National Assembly. One in which the people, the Parliament Office staff, Members of Parliament and the Government work to promote a truly participatory and inclusionary democracy. This I respectfully submit to you can be achieved by:

Firstly, opening the Assembly to the People, establishing it as a place of honour and national pride

Secondly, by improving inter-parliamentary party relations

Thirdly, by striking a respectful and harmonious balance between the executive and legislative branches of the State, and;

Fourthly, enhancing the training and exploiting opportunities for development, improving the conditions of service and remuneration for staff and Members of Parliament alike.

I am committed, and will be following my role, as Speaker, in fostering the right attitude and approach expected of us, and I speak unequivocally for all Members of this Assembly, when I say that we will give homage and dedicate our service to the accomplishment of the People's mandate each day that we are privileged to be here.

Your Excellency, filled with immense pride and boundless pleasure, I once again welcome and invite you to address the Assembly. Thank you.

Address by His Excellency, the President, Mr. Ramotar

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, Clerk of the National Assembly, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Members of Parliament, invited guests and friends all. I was honoured to have been a Member of Parliament for almost twenty years. Serving as a Parliamentarian has been one of the greatest privileges of my life. Within this Chamber, policies were rigorously scrutinised, ideas robustly discussed and laws tabled and debated. I will certainly miss the cut and thrust of the

debates in this August body. The exposure I gained here deepened my political experience and fortified my faith in the inestimable value of Parliamentary democracy and the importance of this institution in our national life.

In the years that I have worked here, I built enduring friendships, not only among my own colleagues, but also across the aisle. I value those relationships. Today I see that many of those who sat with me in the Assembly have returned to this Tenth Parliament. I am happy to welcome you back. There are of course some who have not returned for one reason or the other. I thank them for their service to the Ninth Parliament and to their country.

I would especially like to pay tribute to the outgoing Speaker, Mr. Ralph Ramkarran, for his outstanding, dedicated and fair-minded service to the National Assembly. He exemplified the dignity and professionalism of the esteemed office of Speaker of the House. Under his tenure the Parliament was greatly enhanced in many important areas.

To you Mr. Speaker, I extend my sincere congratulations on your election to this office, one of the highest in our land. In our conversation since your elevation to this Office, I want to share with you, your desire to ensure the smooth operations of this Tenth Parliament of Guyana.

I also extend sincere congratulations to the new Deputy Speaker, the Hon. Deborah Backer. I wish you well in this new office.

To the new Members of the House, I express my congratulations and bring you greetings. It is your responsibility to give expression to aspirations of our people. I encourage you to work dedicatedly to represent all our people. I wish to suggest that you study the rules of the Parliamentary Procedures so that your stint here can also be recorded as one which would enhance this institution as the most representative in our land. The decisions you make here will affect the lives of all Guyanese. I wish you well in your work on behalf of our people.

This Tenth Parliament is beginning its work in a very challenging period in our country's history. For the first time we are faced with a situation in which no party has an absolute majority. It is a new situation to us, but one that has been experienced in some other countries of the world. The results of the work of such Parliaments have been very mixed. In some cases they were successful, in others they have not been so fruitful, and in some, downright failures. Therefore, we do not have a unified model we can follow.

The question is: how will our Parliament perform? Will ours add to the list of failures or will it be able to serve as an example of a successful Parliament? Will other countries, finding themselves in similar situations in the future, turn to us to see how well we did, and seek to learn from our experience? The answers to these questions lie ahead of us, they are also within us and a lot will depend on what attitude we take at this time.

Yes, we have our differences. This is perfectly natural; we will continue to have varying views on many issues. The important thing is how we move forward in resolving our positions. To move forward will call for maturity if we are to avoid gridlock and inertia political cooperation in the interest of the development of Guyana must exist. This is the reality that we face we must avoid gridlock.

At this time given the significant development under the PPP/Civic Administration, my administration would be loath to accept gridlock that can stymie Guyana's development. I am convinced that we have the capacity to rise to this challenge. I am satisfied that we are capable of demonstrating to the Guyanese nation that while political competition and diversity are essential in a democracy, they should not foreclose on the possibilities for compromise and consensus in the way we do business.

Indeed, the makeup of this new Parliament dictates that we seek consensus and compromise and should resist the temptation to believe that any party can ride the rough shod over another. Any such attempt may see us missing the historical opportunities that this new composition offers. I urge that we put the interest of our people first. I urge that we work assiduously to find common ground, within and outside of this hallowed Chamber. Within my administration there exist the political will to do so. My Government has already committed to regular engagement with the Parliamentary Parties. Through these engagements, I hope that we can continue to nurture political trust and create an enabling climate for consensus building.

It was disappointing that we did not find consensus in the elections of the Speaker of the Assembly. However, I am still optimistic that seeking agreements by dialogue is still the best way forward. I also believe that working in this Parliament can contribute in building trust that is so important for our political culture.

As willing however as my Government is to exercise patience, forbearance and reasonableness in the interest of all of our people, my administration will not be held ransom

to intractable postures. I therefore hope that we can work together so that history will record that we succeeded at this time when we were put to the test.

International Situation

The need to forge united and strong national positions is important for another reason. We are living in an international environment that is very complicated and also very difficult. As you all are aware, international socio-economic and political development impact heavily on us. Many of the problems we often have to confront are not made by us, but often originate in different parts of the world, sometimes in countries very far from our own shores. This is one of those times when we have to keep focused on international events due to the potential impact on our country.

As you are aware, the traditional drivers of the world's economy have all been experiencing grave economic and political problems. The United States, the European Union and Japan are all going through a very difficult phase. Many experienced commentators have said it is the worst crisis since the Great Depression of 1929-1933. The fact is that the weight of those countries in the world affairs is so great that the effects cannot be contained within their own borders. The inter-connections of the world economy have ensured that all are affected to one degree or the other. The crisis has exacerbated the problems caused one year ago, by a huge cut in the price for sugar that we sold to Europe.

Our Region too is going through tough times because of the fall of tourist arrival in the Caribbean and the ever-rising price for energy. These effects are also closely connected to the financial and political situation internationally.

You may be aware that in the early and mid 1990s the price of oil was some US\$7 per barrel, today it has gone above US\$100 per barrel. Much of this is due to the very unstable situation in the Middle East, which produces most of the world's fossil fuel. The political problems in that area have their geneses within the Region and also in the interest of other powers in the world.

Fortunately, over the last few decades we have seen other countries emerging as influential players on the world stage. Brazil, Russia, India and China have made great contributions to keep the world economy on the move and they have prevented it from going in total recession. This is good news since the world's economy is resting on broader and more shoulders.

In these new and changing circumstances our foreign policies becomes very important. This policy must be conducted to fundamentally protect us from the negative impact of the global crisis and to give us an opportunity to grow.

We must continue to build and consolidate our relations with our traditional partners, while at the same time broadening those relations with others, particularly those emerging economies with whom we have had long-standing, friendly and fruitful ties.

Expanding our relations will open new markets for our products and services and make us less susceptible to the economic shocks that originate from outside of our own borders.

At the Regional level we have to continue to work for greater integration of our economies. I know I am only repeating what was said so often in the past, when I declare that integration of the Region has far greater benefits than going separately. I am convinced that we in Guyana have a central role to play in a much broader integration, which I envisage is possible. We can become a bridge between the Caribbean and South America. After all, I am sure that our CARICOM partners must have observed the great possibilities that can be had in the South. It will certainly be in CARICOM's interest to broaden its relations.

Mr. Speaker, even though we are a small country, we have made a huge impact on the international arena. Through our work, Guyana is recognised as one of the champions in the struggle to protect the world's environment and to stop what could be catastrophic climate change. We have crafted a strategy that limits the production of dangerous greenhouse gases while at the same time taking advantage of the opportunities to offer to the world environmental services. The role we have played is shown by the several international recognitions that have been given to my predecessor, Cde. Bharat Jagdeo.

The Economy

It is in this international context that we have to manage our economy. It calls for prudence and good management.

Without doubt our economy and country have come a far way, from the time our country was forced to enter into an IMF agreement in 1989.

2.46 p.m.

At that time our country was a heavily indebted and poor; almost nothing worked. We have grown the economy from a \$317 million US Dollars economy in 1991 to a \$2.3 billion economy in 2010. Our per capita income has moved from \$304 to \$2,533 in the same period.

All the economic indicators tell us of the great progress we have made. Commercial bank assets have risen from \$25 billion in 1992 to \$296 billion in 2010. In the same period, loans to the private sector increased from \$7 billion to \$110 billion while interest rates tumbled from the high of 35% to within the range of 5-11%, now.

We also succeeded in slashing the external debt of our country from \$2.1 billion to just over \$1 billion today. We have grown our external reserves from \$123 million US Dollars to the highest it has ever been, today, at \$780 million US Dollars.

Also important; we have slowed inflation sharply to single digits for more than a decade. Economically, Guyana is now poised for a rapid takeoff. Though, for this to be realised we have to tackle issues that exist which can slow us down.

In my view, the acquisition of cheap and clean power is very important. This is the new infrastructure that would see us developing rapidly. Cheaper, cleaner and more reliable energy sources will encourage a stronger and more modern economy that will allow for greater manufacturing, agro-processing and value added to our minerals. In the process we will create many well-paying jobs. It would also slash our fuel import bill and thereby release significant resources to enhance the efficiency of our productive sectors.

Our Traditional Sectors

We have to maintain and improve the traditional sectors – sugar, rice and bauxite. Agriculture, in my view, has a very important role to play in the future development of Guyana. The United Nations has declared that the world's population is growing rapidly. Already the world has more than 7 billion mouths to feed. We are told that before the end of the first half of this century we will have another billion people on earth. Clearly, with the pressure on lands, food prices will rise. This is already happening. We are very well placed to take advantage of this because we have land and abundant fresh water; both of which are indispensable to the expansion and diversification of agriculture. Mining too will be extremely important to our rapid economic development. The two bauxite companies operating here now are expected to increase production, beginning this year. This will create new jobs for our workers in the bauxite belt as well as in the transportation sector. Another

bauxite mine is expected to be constructed shortly. We are also witnessing increased investments in gold mining, which is employing growing numbers of workers, but while we reform and modernise these sectors we will also be diversifying into new high income and high yielding pools.

Petroleum

There is high optimism that we are on the verge of discovering petroleum. We have been listed by some experts as having the potential of becoming a major player in this sector, in the world. We have to prepare for this eventuality and carefully plan to prevent possibly serious negative effects on the traditional sectors. We must learn from the experiences of other countries which have passed through this stage already.

If our goods and services are going to be globally competitive we must reduce transport cost and improve market access for our exports; that is why a deepwater harbour, road and bridge link to Brazil and Suriname, respectively, are very important projects. These projects will allow us to become a major hub for the movement of goods between South America, North America and the Caribbean while reducing transport cost and providing easier and free access to larger markets for our produce; in the process, increase services and more employment can be created.

We must support those sectors, industries and firms with potential to produce globally competitive goods and services. In this regard we must not rule out any form of organisation of production of goods and services. We will embrace large and small companies, public and privately owned firms; all have advantages. Small businesses are known to sustain growth and many of our large firms possess the managerial expertise, skilled work force and access to resources with which to venture deeper into regional and global markets. We must equally embrace new technologies that are driving growth, inventiveness and innovation. Integrating us with that larger economic space that is spawned by globalization and allowing us to develop new services and do things better, faster and cheaper while creating thousands of much needed jobs for our people.

Sustaining the growth of our economy requires that we continue to court investments, both local and foreign, and catalyzing entrepreneurship and new innovative endeavors. Only through such measures can we create a modern competitive economy that produces world-class goods and services.

Education and Development

Integral to the success of this trust towards the creation of a new economy is the availability of a highly educated and skilled workforce, especially in science and technology. Without this our development will be stymied. As such, we have to ensure that our educational system is geared towards producing graduates with employable skills and in sufficient numbers. Our educational system is the nursery for the development of these skills and there is much to be proud of in our educational system. Guyanese have distinguished themselves academically all over the world. This speaks volumes to the foundational education they received here in Guyana. Our teachers are also widely respected and this too says that we have quality minds guiding our children within the classrooms, just as we have ‘top-class’ nurses, military personnel, police officers and other professionals.

We have strong ‘pull-factors’ and, admittedly, there are ‘push-factors’ that result too in the migration of the skills that we so critically need. I believe that we have to be resourceful and find ways to retain our skilled personnel. We must develop a strong diaspora policy to minimise the effect of migrating skills. We have to continue to improve the skills of our workers to keep up with the changing times and technologies.

My entire political career was shaped within a political party that has always been grounded within the working class and I would do all that is possible to enhance the skills and capacity of the working people of this country so that they will be able to enhance their earning power. I intend to ensure that workers in Guyana are not left on the sidelines of development.

I am one of those persons who strongly believe that the most important factor for development is people. Clearly, therefore, to reach the goals that we have set ourselves we must have the human capital capable to advance our country. It is for this reason that we have been spending heavily on the social sector; mainly education, health, housing and water. It is these areas that will make the most impact in the building of our people’s capacity. We have taken investment in the social sector from 8% of our Budget in 1991 to 30% of a much bigger and larger allocation today. In education spending has grown sharply. We see our expenditure here really as an investment in our future and we are already having better results. More of our students are ‘topping’ the Caribbean at CXC Examinations. Moreover, by expanding educational facilities in the hinterland we have moved much closer to our objective of equal opportunity for all.

Our one laptop per family is also intended to ensure that all of our people must have access to this very important tool regardless of their socio-economic circumstances. Information Communication Technology is playing a central role in development. It is creating new opportunities for people globally. Our people must not be left behind. I am convinced that developing our capacity in this sector will definitely put us in an advantageous position to tackle the challenges of the future. In addition, it will certainly help to improve efficiency in Government and all sectors of our society. It will open the possibility to open more services; including educational services to people in every part of Guyana including the most remote areas. A successful implementation of our programme in this sector will see us as being one of the more computer literate nations in the world.

We can see also the great changes that have occurred in the provision and delivery of health services in Guyana. We have invested heavily in this area and have constructed new or completely renovated hospitals in every region. Health services can now be found in some of the most remote regions of Guyana. Today we are doing complicated heart surgeries. We are also performing kidney transplants and providing dialysis treatment to patients who need them. We have improved services to cancer patients, as well as to burn victims. Our people deserve better and we are determined to see that they enjoy steady and continuous benefits of a growing economy. We intend to further expand our services in the health sector. Already, we are investing in a new and modern hospital in Guyana. This will give us the ability to deliver certain services at a fraction of the cost elsewhere in the region and further afield. We hope to have this modern facility within the next five years.

Our achievements in housing and the delivery of water are outstanding. Tens of thousands of our people are experiencing the thrill of owning their own home. Our landscape has changed by the many new communities that have developed in almost every region in Guyana. In the next five years we hope to give another 30,000 families the possibility of owning their own homes.

We are investing heavily in providing potable water throughout our country. It is a big challenge but one that we are prepared to tackle head on and succeed in.

Security

A factor that has grown in importance to the whole developmental thrust is security. As you are aware one of the new global challenges is that of fighting crime, particularly those

connected to the narco-trade. This is so because of the huge amount of money that is involved in that illegal business. The narco-trade spawns other crimes due to the amount of illegal weapons it is capable of putting on our streets. We have been investing quite a lot of our resources in equipping and building human capacity by training of our security forces. However, since this is a global problem we have to promote and develop international cooperation to deal with this issue. In this regard we are ready to work with our traditional partners, the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada to deal with this issue. We are ready to promote closer relations with other security forces and their counterparts in the Caribbean. We will also seek to deepen these relations with our neighbours to ensure that criminals would not have a safe haven anywhere. This is important in fighting the attacks on our fisher folk which seems to have increased in recent times. We are determined that our people must enjoy a high quality of life which must include improving on National Security.

We will continue to press ahead in working along with our indigenous peoples to ensure their continued advancement. Considerable progress has been made in this regard. My administration will continue to engage with our indigenous people to secure their future and give them a greater say in national development.

National Development

We will intensify work for the empowerment of our women and youths. They must be accorded a greater say in our national development. Their problems must become our concerns and must be addressed in a systematic way. We intend also to work with our women and youth activists to ensure the success of the programmes aimed at their empowerment. We will exert more efforts for the betterment of the vulnerable within our society, the differently able, the abused, the elderly and the poor. We have to create a more caring country where we are all the keepers of our brothers and sisters; where those who are faced with difficult circumstances can find succor, support and more importantly, dignity.

All of these things we are committed to in an environment characterized by respect for the rule of law, adheres to internationally acceptable human and social rights, including respect for independence of the media and respect and confidence in the functioning of public institutions, including this National Assembly.

History of Guyana

Our country has traveled a long road since its independence in 1966. It was not an easy path by any means. Sometimes we seemed to be on the highway and at other times we navigated a narrow and twisting path. Today we are on another open path. I believe that we are at the threshold of our rapid development that can take us to greater heights. I urge that we must not miss this opportunity and allow our country to traverse a narrow and difficult road again. This 10th Parliament can go down in history as being the one that can see us firmly on the highway to peace, progress and prosperity.

I thank you very much for your attention.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. President. Hon. Members, distinguished guests, this afternoon I propose to break with tradition for a number of very good reasons, which I will not adumbrate, by inviting the Hon. Prime Minister to give very brief complementary remarks to His Excellency, The President. Thereafter I would invite the Hon. Member, Brig. Ret. David Granger, Leader of the Opposition, to do likewise and also Leader of the Alliance for Change's Delegation, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. Thank you.

Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Samuel Hinds]: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, Members of the Judiciary and of the Diplomatic Corps, distinguished guests, today is indeed an historic day for Guyana. We have heard the Address of our President. I want to extend thanks and appreciation to you, Mr. President, for journeying to this National Assembly to present your Address and to be a part of this Ceremonial Opening of the Tenth Parliament. I want to assure you that we on this side will support your programme and I want to assure you of our confidence that we, in Guyana, can take this opportunity to lead our nation onto better times and to realise what you have called for – that we take our country and people, on a highway to peace and progress. I thank you very much, Mr. President.

Leader of the Opposition [Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the majority of this Hon. House to express our appreciation for this Address by His Excellency, the President. In other jurisdictions this may be called a throne speech but in Guyana there is no throne and we are not a monarchy and no longer an autocracy but a democracy. As you have said, Mr. Speaker, and as His Excellency has said, the Tenth Parliament represents a new configuration, it represents a new dispensation and perhaps we should take this opportunity to look at new methods of managing our Parliament.

It is written in our Constitution, Article 67, that the President may at any time attend and address the National Assembly, as he is doing today, but in the past the appearances of our President within these hallowed walls have been rare. We now need, Mr. Speaker, to propose a change and on behalf of the majority of this House I would like to suggest that we change convention and accept what the Constitution has ordained. With your permission or perhaps by your leave, this Hon. House should invite His Excellency, the President, not only to come to ceremonial functions as we have today, with the trumpets and parades, but to more functional appearances; not every five years but every year. As we do not follow the monarchical tradition we can follow the republican tradition in which our Head of State and head of Government is required to report on the state of the nation every year before we debate the Budget and I ask you to invite His Excellency so to do in this Tenth Parliament.

Our nation, as His Excellency has said, is faced with many challenges and we need regular reviews and regular revision of our plans and we would like to see our Head of State and Head of Government make more use of Article 67 of our Constitution. Do not wait to be asked, invite yourself; the Constitution allows you to do so. This Parliament cannot exist without the President. Our Constitution describes the Parliament as the President and the National Assembly together. Without you we are just the National Assembly, so do come. We look forward, Mr. President, to your regular visits, not occasional ceremonial appearances but to discuss policies which would make Guyana a better place and we ask you, Mr. Speaker, to so ensure that the will of the majority of this House is respected.

Leader of Alliance for Change [Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members. Your Excellency, I am going to miss your heckling but I must say that during the course of our companionship across this divide – and it was genuinely a companionship here – we have made, notwithstanding the disagreements, much progress. I want to state that what was done just now largely reflects, more or less, a report card of some of those successes but again we have to also acknowledge that there have been negatives. We are going to try to correct those negatives with the governing party in the coming years.

We had wanted to have here a legislative agenda but I rather suspect that we can go on to do that at the tripartite level. I had also wanted to see some formula for national unity; though none came I am certain at least we could work towards that. I want to assure this Hon. House, Your Excellency that we intend to work along with your Government to ensure the greater happiness and a fuller peace for all Guyanese.

We must appreciate that on 28th November, 2011, brought a new dispensation – the people won and the people are sovereign and as representative of the people we must make sure that they bear the fruits of that winning.

I urge that we all put Guyana first; the executive branch, the legislative branch, the judicial branch and all the components and persona within those branches. We can make Guyana greater still. It is the dream of all of us. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Ramjattan. Your Excellency, Hon. Members, I now wish to personally thank His Excellency again but before concluding my remarks of thanks. I would like to thank the workers, without whom we would not have had this splendid array of paintings and architecture, for preparing the precincts and the Chamber. I would like to thank the parliamentary staff for working above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that all of us are present and accounted for and taken care of, the Disciplined Forces, thru' their Heads who are hear this afternoon, for the splendid Guard of Honour and the parade that was put out in honour of His Excellency and all of you who have graced us with your attendance. Mr. President, it is indeed an honour to have received you. As I had indicated in my opening remarks, we hope that this is not the first and only time that you will grace us with your presence. The Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Member Granger, has also expressed his view and the majority's view that we would like to see much more of you and interact with you on matters not only of ceremony but on matters of substance that affect the people of Guyana. With those words I wish to thank you and your beautiful wife for coming. The Assembly is now suspended, Hon. Members.

Assembly suspended at 3.19 p.m.

Assembly resumed at 4.21 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting has resumed. Please take your seats.

Just before we suspended the sitting to await the arrival of His Excellency the President, Mr. Ramotar, I had begun to mention that we were going to observe a moment of silence in memory of four former Members of Parliament and I would expect that at sometime in the not too distant future we could entertain some motions to honour them. But, with your permission, I would like to say that we are all aware of the death of Mrs. Sheila Valerie Agnes Holder, a former Member of Parliament, who died on Sunday, 20th November, 2011 in New York, United States of America, after a brief illness. Mrs. Holder was a former

parliamentarian for both the Alliance For Change (AFC) and the Working People's Alliance (WPA). Following the General and Regional Elections which were held on 19th March, 2001, Mrs. Holder entered the National Assembly as a Member of Parliament for the Guyana Action Party/Working People's Alliance (GAP/WPA). She was a member of the Parliamentary Management Committee, the Committee for the Appointment of members to the constitutional commissions, the Standing Orders Committee, the Special Select Committee on the Impact of Global Food Prices Increases, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Special Select Committee on Allied Health Professions Bill and the Special Select Committee on Political Parties Campaign Financing, just prior to the dissolution of Parliament.

Also, Hon. Members would also be aware of the death of Mr. Everall Nkrumah Franklin, a former Member of Parliament, who died on 30th November, 2011 at the St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital. Mr. Franklin first became a parliamentarian on 6th September, 2006, following the General and Regional Elections which were held on 28th August, 2006. Mr. Franklin was a member of the Parliamentary Management Committee, the Special Select Committee on Guyana Fiduciary Oversight Project and the Special Select Committee on the Criminal Responsibility of HIV Infected Individuals. Mr. Franklin served in the Ninth Parliament until it was dissolved on 27th September, 2011.

Thirdly, there was the death of Dr. Moti Lall. Members, it was with deep regret that we learnt of the passing of Dr. Moti Lall, a former Member of Parliament, who died on 10th January, 2012 at his residence, Republic Park Phase Two, East Bank Demerara, after a brief illness. Dr. Lall first became a parliamentarian on 24th November, 1992, following the General and Regional Elections which were held on 5th October, 1992. Dr. Lall continued to serve as a Member of Parliament until he ceased to be a legislator with effect from 15th February, 2001. He was also a member of his party's Central Committee.

Then, finally, there was the death of Mr. Robert Williams. Mr. Robert E. Williams, a former Minister of Fisheries in the Ministry of Agriculture, died on Monday, 30th January, 2012 at the Georgetown Public Hospital's Caribbean Heart Institute. Mr. Williams, who was a Deputy Mayor of Georgetown at the time of his death, was in charge of several committees at City Hall, including Market and Public Health, City Works and the Finance Committee. He was also a member of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). He was also the Mayor

of Georgetown from 1987 to 1989 and Deputy Mayor of Georgetown from 1994 up until the time of his death.

Hon. Members, as I indicated, I trust that members of their respective parties and their erstwhile colleagues will bring motions to honour them accordingly.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Report were laid:

- (1) Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana and the Accounts of Ministries, Departments and Regions for the fiscal year ended 31st December, 2010. *[Mr. Greenidge]*
- (2) (i) Financial Paper No. 7/2011 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$2,240,901,071 – Advances made from the Contingencies Fund for the period 25th October, 2011 to 31st December, 2011.

(ii) Financial Paper No. 8/2011 – Supplementary Estimate (Capital) totalling \$3,471,047,823 for the period ended 31st December, 2011

[Minister of Finance]

The Minister named Thursday, 16th February, 2012 as the day for the consideration of the Financial Papers in Committee of Supply.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

1. LOCAL AUTHORITIES (ELECTIONS)(AMENDMENT) BILL 2012 – Bill No. 2/2012

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Local Authorities (Elections) Act to provide for the postponement of elections of councillors of local democratic organs.” *[Minister of Local Government and Regional Development]*

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

NOMINATION OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

“The Assembly to nominate the Members to comprise the Committee of Selection.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will now, as required by Standing Order No. 81, nominate members to comprise the Committee of Selection and I invite nominations accordingly. But before the Hon. Prime Minister rises, I am aware that this issue may be contentious to some extent. I know that the parties representing the Government and Opposition have been meeting and discussing possible solutions and configurations to proceed. I think we all heard His Excellency the President, Mr. Ramotar, asking us not to find ourselves in gridlock, and so I was going to propose that, rather than invite the nominations first, perhaps a member considers moving a motion to address the issue of configuration; thereafter, we could address the issue of persons to be nominated to that Committee. That is a proposal which I am hoping that both sides can find favour with.

Mr. Hinds: Thank you Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. Mr. Speaker, you have stated a position as it is. As it is, there are Committees made up of not less than six and not more than ten members and it is for this House or the Committee of Selection, at a later time, to determine the number of persons who should be members of any particular committee. We would like to propose that there be ten members on the Committee of Selection, and we make this proposal mindful of our tradition. I think that for all of the Parliaments that I have been in, the Committee of Selection has been made up of ten members.

There is also the tradition of observing our Standing Orders of having the members from the individual parties be, as much as possible, representative of, or reflective of, the make-up in this National Assembly. We propose that there be ten members and that they must be distributed according to mathematically calculated proportions which give an outcome of five members nominated by the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C), four nominated by A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and one nominated by the Alliance For Change (AFC). Mr. Speaker, this is our proposal.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Is there any other proposal?

Ms. Ally: I rise to table an amendment to what is being proposed by the Government. It is categorically clear that this Tenth Parliament is one of difference and it must so reflect it. The reality is that the Government of the day is a minority Government. The Committee of Selection is a very important committee since it is this committee that is responsible for the composition of all other committees. If we go with the Government's proposal of five - five – five members for the Government and five members for the Opposition - it will be a recipe for gridlock and impasse, hence this amendment, from ten members to nine members.

In the spirit of good governance, we want unity. We believe in consensus, and, as far as practicable, we will be pleased to enjoy the luxury of good governance. But the reality of this is that we cannot be optimistic that with the PPP/C good governance will prevail. It is not only for the Committee of Selection, but there are other committees with a ten-member composition, such as the Parliamentary Management Committee, the Committee on Appointments, the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Oversight of the Security Sector. Yes Mr. Speaker. The people in this country voted for a change, and change we must have. **[Mr. Neendkumar:** They will vote again.] We welcome that. We cannot continue with this type of governance. A recent example, Sir, is the arbitrary way in which the Government specifically...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please speak to the motion of the issue of the configuration. Let us resolve the configuration.

Ms. Ally: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I wish to just indicate that I am giving a reference of an example. I wish to continue, that a recent example is the arbitrary way in which the Government, specifically the Local Government Ministry, is dictating and overriding... **[Mr. Nandlall:** You are ignoring the...*inaudible*]. You did not listen to me....the authority of the local democratic organs, whereby the Minister, arbitrarily, is transferring overseers for the PPP gains.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Ally, I think the point is that we are dealing with the size of the committee – ten or nine members. I have no doubt that there are sterling examples and anecdotes that can be cited by both sides of the House, but could we deal with the precise matter of whether or not we maintain tradition of ten members or whether or not we have an alternative of having nine members on that committee? Thank you.

Ms. Ally: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Despite the issue of consensus, despite the issue of unity, we have a right to fulfil the mandate of the electorate. Therefore we would like to ask that the Committee of Selection, and reference to Standing Order 85 (2), to be amended from ten members to nine members and, further, that the committees which I listed before be changed from ten members to nine members. I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Is there a seconder for that amendment?

Deputy Speaker [Mrs. Backer]: I second the amendment.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that I do not incur the wrath of the House, but I would like to invite one member from each side to speak to the presentations made, those by the Hon. Prime Minister and, of course, by Hon. Member, Ms. Ally. Is there anyone from the Government side who wishes to speak?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you for the opportunity. The issue we are dealing with, today, is the size of the Committee of Selection. It is not any other committee, but the mother committee of all committees and that is the Committee of Selection. The Prime Minister laid the motion in relation to the Government's proposal of ten members – five for the Government, four for APNU and one for the AFC. Therefore it would be five on each side of the House. Mr. Speaker, the point has been made by the speaker before me, Chief Whip, Ms. Amna Ally, about a minority Government, but in the National Assembly the issue that we are dealing with is to ensure that in all of the committees, and the Committee of Selection, there is a balance of the parties' strength in it. It does not deal with the strength of the Opposition and the strength of the Government. And I refer you to Standing Order 94 (1): "Every Select Committee..." This is used as the reference to all of the other Committees. "...shall be so constituted as to ensure as far as possible, that the balance of parties in the Assembly is reflected in the Committee."

The Clerk presented and shared with the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the House and the two Chief Whips a number of mathematical formulae based on the strength of each party. Whether there is a combined Opposition or not, it is of no relevance right now. The issue is that of the strength of each party and there is not a minority party on the Government side. We have thirty-two seats and no other party in this House has thirty-two seats.

Secondly, mathematical formula of ten is probably... If you look at the Standing Orders, it states not less than six, not more than ten. When the mathematical formula is done for six

members, which is the lowest amount, it shows three for the Government, two for APNU and one for the AFC. When using the highest number, which is ten - and this is the mathematical formula that really needs to be stated in this House - that with the PPP/C's thirty-two seats it is equivalent to forty-nine per cent which is 4.9 persons. There cannot be a point ninth of a person and, therefore, the number is upped to five. APNU, that is, A-P-N-U - I beg your pardon. It is just election time. I like calling APNU, but I will behave in the House and call it A-P-N-U - has twenty-six seats out of the sixty-five, forty per cent of the votes, mathematical extrapolation, meaning that APNU gets four members. The AFC with 10.67 per cent of the votes has 1.076, which means it is one member. Mr. Speaker, this is the fairest mathematical proportionality of the representation of the parties in this National Assembly.

If you look at nine, which was also formulated, it is incongruous to think that a party which got 49.230 per cent of the votes having the same number of seats in a committee – four - as a party that got forty per cent of the votes, and, therefore, one has to deal with balance and fairness. I heard a number of speeches in this House after the President spoke and we, again, do what we are doing, and that is, again, no compromise. Mr. Speaker, you are not a member of the inter-parliamentary party talks, but with this issue - just to let you know - there was an attempt at the meeting, on Tuesday, to try to negotiate and deal with this issue prior to it coming to this House, to try to make sure it was not contentious. Regrettably, the two sides – I am now putting APNU and the AFC in the same closet - were of the same view and the Government was of the view that ten seats - five for the Government, four for APNU and one for AFC - is a fair representation.

In fact, the only thing different in the formula with nine is...because APNU's vote does not change; it remains four; AFC's vote remains one, but the Government's vote is reduced by one which is a disproportionality because forty-nine per cent of the votes is not the same as forty per cent of the votes. Cut it, slice it, divide it, try your mathematics, it *ain't* right. I call on people like Mr. Greenidge and Dr. Ashni Singh, who know about mathematics, to say if I am wrong in my deductions. [Ms. Ally: We do not know your maths. We know the right maths].

Mr. Speaker: Allow the Hon. Member to conclude, please.

Ms. Teixeira: These are not Gail Teixeira's mathematics. These were done by the Clerk and shared with the two Leaders of the House – Opposition and Government – and the two Chief Whips over two weeks ago so that we could try to resolve this.

I am appealing to APNU and AFC, combined and separately, that in the interest of this House we use the same mathematical formula that is stated in the paper for five, four and one. In this way, the Parliamentary Management Committee's model would then be implemented in terms of this Committee of Selection of this National Assembly of the Tenth Parliament. Whatever happens in the next Parliament, that Parliament will determine that.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity of allowing me to speak.

Mr. Speaker: Would anyone wish to speak on the Opposition side?

Mr. Ramjattan: I do not know mathematics but I know who wants to have control, and we also know the concept of *control freakism*.

We have to have a Committee of Selection that is reflective of what we have in the National Assembly here, and this National Assembly has as a majority - the members of the Opposition. We have made the commitment, in the spirit of compromise, to do that which is right. So, if you come with good names and good objectives, we are going to support them in all of the committees. There is no need to be afraid of a four-four-one scenario.

The President spoke here about the avoidance of a gridlock government. Do you know what will happen, especially in the context of the history, if it is going to be a five-five composition? We are not going to, anyway, move. I feel that with a four-four-one composition we are going to make decisions. Determinations are going to be made based on the argument and not the strength of each party here, and we are going to move forward.

When it is convenient to Ms. Teixeira to talk mathematics, she talks mathematics; when it is convenient for her to speak on politics, she will talk on politics. She forgets sometimes the interest that motivates her. We know that the interest here...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, please refer to the member as "Hon. Member" and not as "she".

Mr. Ramjattan: Hon. Member, Sir. It is important now, Mr. Speaker...and I second what was said earlier by the Hon. Member for the APNU, that, indeed, it will be a nine-person team with four from the governing party and five from the majority opposition parties here – with four to APNU and one to the AFC.

Mr. Speaker: We have heard the positions quite well elucidated by both sides of the Assembly. Positions which were taken, from what I have been advised, earlier in the week, but as I said, I think both sides have plainly set out their positions. We have before us a motion moved by the Hon. Prime Minister and an amendment. Ms. Ally, you do have a copy of that amendment.

Ms. Ally: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Very well. I propose that we put the question as to the amendment first.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, if I could crave your indulgence. “**Amendment to Motions**”, Standing Order 37 (3):“An amendment shall not be moved which has merely the effect of a negative vote.”

The amendment totally distorts the original motion. It changes it completely. I am not sure if that is permitted.

Mr. Speaker: It is the practice in this House, if there is an amendment moved to a motion, to deal with the amendment. If it is voted down, it is voted down; if it is carried, it is carried, and then we move on to the substantive motion. So, I do not recognise what I believe would have been a Point of Order. In fact, amendments do alter motions and that is why they are put, and so there is an amendment that the configuration is to be of nine members and not ten. I now wish to put the question.

Question put.

Mr. Speaker: Has a division been called? Is there a formal request for a division?

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: There is a formal request, Sir. My understanding is that once we said it that would be it. Mr. Speaker, there is a formal request for a division.

Mr. Speaker: I did hear the word “division” mumbled but I could not identify who it was. It is expected that there be a formal call. A call has been made for a division.

4. 51 p.m.

Assembly divided: Ayes 33, Noes 31, as follows:

Ayes

Noes

Mr. T. Williams

Mrs. Marcello

Dr. Ramayya

Mrs. Garrido-Lowe

Mrs. Hughes

Mr. Nagamootoo

Mr. Ramjattan

Ms. Ferguson

Mr. Morian

Mr. Allen

Mr. Jones

Mr. Adams

Ms. Baveghems

Mr. Sharma

Mr. Bulkan

Mr. Bond

Ms. Kissoon

Mr. Trotman

Ms. Selman

Mr. Allicock

Ms. Wade

Mr. Felix

Ms. Hastings

Mr. Jaffarally

Mr. Damon

Dr. Persaud

Rev. Dr. Gilbert

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Seeraj

Mr. Neendkumar

Mr. Lumumba

Ms. Shadick

Mrs. Chandarpal

Mr. Nadir

Ms. Teixeira

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Whittaker

Mr. Baksh

Mrs. Sukhai

Ms. Webster

Ms. Manickchand

Mr. G. Persaud

Mr. Benn

Dr. Anthony

Mr. Ali

Dr. Ramsaran

Mr. Scott

Dr. Westford

Mr. Harmon

Mr. R. Persaud

Mr. Greenidge

Dr. Singh

Mrs. Backer

Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett

Dr. Norton

Mr. Nandlall

Mrs. Lawrence

Dr. Ramsammy

Mr. B. Williams

Mr. Rohee

Ms. Ally

Mr. Hinds

Dr. Roopnarine

Brigadier (ret'd) Granger

Amendment carried.

Motion was amended.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, in that sense, the motion moved by you stands as amended. That is, the Committee of Selection shall comprise nine members. I now invite nominations to that Committee.

Mr. Hinds: I rise to nominate, for the People's Progressive Party/Civic, the Hon. Prime Minister, myself, our Chief Whip, Ms. Gail Teixeira, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy and Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Prime Minister.

Ms. Ally: I would like to name the following persons for the Committee of Selection on behalf of the Opposition: Amna Ally, Joseph Harmon, Volda Lawrence, George Norton and Khemraj Ramjattan.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. I am advised, in error, that nominations have to be seconded. Is there a seconder for the nominees proposed by the Hon. Prime Minister? And likewise, could we have a seconder for the nominations...?

Ms. Teixeira: The Prime Minister does not need to be seconded.

Mr. Speaker: Well, the Clerk, who gives good advice,...Out of abundance of caution, and for the correctors of the record, I would ask that we have a seconder, even if it is superfluous. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: I wish to second the Prime Minister's nominations.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Nagamootoo: If it pleases you, your Honour, I wish to second the nominations of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, that was my understanding too, in so far as a Minister moving a motion, but I would be guided by the Clerk.

Hon. Members, I wish to correct a mistake on my part. Mistakes will happen. When the Report of the Auditor General was presented I believe the Constitution requires that it is to be done by the Speaker, article 223 of the Constitution. I wish to thank Mr. Greenidge. I believe that Mr. Greenidge will, in due course, emerge to be the primary person on that Public Accounts Committee, but at this time I would like to formally present to the Assembly, and to Hon. Members, the Auditor General's Report for the year ending 31st December 2010.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, that bringing an end to our business for today, the Assembly now stands adjourned to Thursday, 16th February, 2012 or as advised by the Hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Hinds: Yes Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the House will be adjourned until next Thursday, 16th February, 2012.

Adjourned accordingly at 4.58 p.m.