



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
(2020-2022) 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*

48TH Sitting

Thursday, 21ST July, 2022

Assembly convened at 10.23 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Condolences on the Passing of the husband of Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, in between the last sitting and today's sitting, we had the sad passing of the husband of the Hon Member, Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis. Her husband was a person who was well known to many of us here and a lot of our people of this country, having made valuable contributions. On your behalf and on my own behalf, we want to register our condolences and sincerest sympathies to the Hon. Member.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

- (1) The Value-Added Tax (Amendment of Schedule I) (No. 2) Order 2022 – No. 10 of 2022.
- (2) The Value-Added Tax (Amendment of Schedule I) (No. 3) Order 2022 – No. 23 of 2022.
- (3) Government Notice No. 2 2002, regarding Notification Receipts of all petroleum revenues paid into the Natural Resources Fund during the period 1st April, 2022 to 30th June, 2022.
- (4) Export Finance Facility Agreement (No. CIE/BC-DL/ Guyana/ 0020014380) dated 14th June, 2022 between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the United Kingdom (UK) Export Finance for an amount of EUR161,016,949.15.
- (5) Deferred Payment Agreement, Lot One (1) to Lot Six (6), dated 12th July, 2022 between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the China CAMC Engineering Company Limited for a total amount of EUR136,132,800.

- (6) Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030
- (7) Financial Paper No. 1/2022 - Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$44,794,011,175 for the period ending 31st December, 2022.

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

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance named the next Sitting as the date for the consideration of the Financial Paper.

- (8) Labour (National Minimum Wage) Order 2022 - No. 20 of 2022.

[Minister of Labour]

- (9) Report of the Ethnic Relations Commission for the years 2009 to 2017 and 2021

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip]

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following Reports were laid:

- (1) Minutes of Proceedings of the 8th Meeting of the Committee of Selection held on Tuesday, 17th May, 2022.
- (2) Minutes of Proceedings of the 9th Meeting of the Committee of Selection held on Wednesday, 8th June, 2022
- (3) Minutes of Proceedings of the 10th Meeting of the Committee of Selection held on Tuesday, 14th June, 2022
- (4) Report of the Parliamentary Sessional Select Committee of Privileges on the Privilege Motion referred to the Committee on 24th January, 2022.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, could I be allowed to make a point of order on this one?

Mr. Speaker: I am just laying these reports.

Mr. Ramjattan: I did not want to [*inaudible*].

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I am just laying the reports. We have the report as a substantive item on the agenda.

[Speaker of the National Assembly]

- (5) Eighth Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social services for the period 28th December, 2020 to 20th May, 2022.

[Minister of Human Services and Social Security – Chairperson]

- (6) Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Public Accounts of Guyana for the year 2016.

[Mr. Jermaine Figueira – Chairman]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

For Written Replies

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are 11 questions on today's Order Paper – Questions Nos. one to nine are for written replies and questions 10 and 11 are for oral replies. For written replies, questions one to five are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, and they are for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Questions Nos. six, seven, eight and nine are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, and they are for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. The answers to these questions have been received and have, therefore, in accordance with our Standing Orders, been circulated.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am referring to Notice Paper No. 187. In response, there is a spreadsheet to be attached and it has not been included in the package.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you for bringing that to the House's attention. We will have the staff check. Those who have not received the spreadsheet, we will circulate it. My apologies to those Members who are not in receipt of the spreadsheet.

- 1. Ruling on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on The Matter of Isseneru Village – Region 7**

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Hon. Minister lay over in the National Assembly, a copy of the Report of the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights on the matter of the application brought by the Village of Isseneru and Amerindian People's Association?

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]: This matter is still before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and is governed by a confidentiality clause. The IACHR confirmed in a letter to the Government of Guyana, dated 11th May, 2022 that the "IACHR's Merits Report is to remain confidential until the IACHR decides to make it public. The Minister is therefore not at liberty to accede to the request of the Hon. Member to "lay over in the National Assembly, a copy of the report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on the matter of the application brought by the village of Isseneru and the Amerindian Peoples' Association.

2. Allowance For Employment Costs of Persons Employed at The Guyana Consulate in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Hon. Minister advise whether allowance for employment costs were made in Budget 2022 and, if so, under which line item for persons employed/engaged on contract by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation at the Consulate in Port-of-Spain?

Mr. Todd: The Ministry in its 2022 budget made the requisite provision for the payment of employment costs for all members of staff at the Consulate in Trinidad and Tobago. Line items used to persons employed/engaged on contract are as follows:

- 6111 - Administrative
- 6114 - Clerical and Office Support
- 6115 = Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled
- 6116 - Contracted Employees
- 6133 - Benefits and Allowances
- 6134 - National Insurance.

3. Persons Employed at the Guyana Consulate in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Ms. Walton-Desir:

1. Could the Hon. Minister provide the designation of each person employed/engaged on contract by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Guyana Consulate in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago since August 2, 2020?
2. Can the Hon. Minister provide the emoluments (salary and benefits) for each of the persons employed/engaged on contract by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Guyana Consulate in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago since August 2, 2020?

Mr. Todd:

1. The designation of each person employed/engaged by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation at the Guyana Consulate General in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago since 2nd August, 2020 are:
 - (i) Director of Trade, Investment and Agriculture
 - (ii) Executive Secretary
 - (iii) Diaspora Officer
 - (iv) Chauffeur.
2. Emoluments (salary and benefits paid to each person employed/contracted since 2nd August, 2020 are included in the spreadsheet attached:

Staffing Details for the Guyana Consulate General – Trinidad and Tobago

List of Persons Employed Since August, 2020

Chart of Account	Designation	Monthly Salary and Other Benefits G\$	Remarks	Date of Appointment
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6114	Clerical and Office Support	Diaspora Officer	371,657		02/05/22
		Executive Secretary	232,286		01/03/22
6115	Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled	Chauffeur	323,286		16/02/22
6116	Contracted Employees	Director of Trade, Investment and Agriculture	938,250		01/06/21
			938,250	Housing and Utilities	
			208,500	Annual Medical Insurance	

4. Positions Filled at the Guyana Consulate in Port-of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Hon. Minister advise whether the positions filled at the Guyana Consulate in Port-of-Spain since August 2, 2020, were publicly or internally advertised and if so, provide a copy of the advertisement?

Mr. Todd:

1. Internal recruitment process employed for the filling of some vacancies
2. Additionally, applicants seeking to fill available posts at the Consulate General are interviewed and shortlisted before approval is sought from Headquarters.

5. Guyana Consulate in New York, United States of America

Ms. Walton-Desir:

1. Could the Hon. Minister provide the designation of each person employed/engaged on contract by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Guyana Consulate in New York, United States of America, since 2nd August, 2020?
2. Could the Hon. Minister provide the emoluments (salary and benefits) for each of the persons employed/engaged on contract by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Guyana Consulate in New York, United States of America, since August 2, 2020?

Mr. Todd:

1. The designations of persons employed/engaged on contract by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation at the Guyana Consulate in New York since 2nd August, 2020 are:
 - (i) Executive Officer III
 - (ii) Advisor on Diaspora, Trade and Investment
 - (iii) Executive Officer II
 - (v) Driver.

2. Emoluments (salary and benefits paid to each person employed/engaged on contract by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation at the Guyana Consulate in New York since 2nd August, 2020 are included in the spreadsheet attached.

**Staffing Details for the Guyana Consulate General – New York List Of Persons
Employed Since August, 2020**

Chart of Account		Designation	Monthly Salary and Other Benefits G\$	Remarks	Date of Appointment
6113	Other Technical and Craft Skilled	Executive Officer III	919,485		1/10/2022
		Executive Officer II	635,366		3/6/22
6115	Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled	Driver	551,691		1/1/22

6133	Benefits and Allowances	Executive Officer III	1,894,494	Social Security Contribution and End of Contract Benefit	
		Driver	637,022	Social Security Contribution and End of Contract Benefit	
6284		Advisor on Diaspora, Trade and Investment	281,944	Medical Insurance	
6284	Other	Advisor on Diaspora, Trade and Investment	1,876,500		1/2/2021

6. Work Permits Requested

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Minister please state how many work permits have been requested between August, 2020 to March, 2022?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: The number of Work Permits requested for the period August, 2020 to May, 2022 is nine thousand, two hundred and seventy.

7. Work Permits Granted

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Minister please state how many work permits were granted between August, 2020 to March 2022?

Mr. Benn: The number of Work Permits granted for the period August, 2020 to May, 2022 is four thousand, eight hundred and forty-seven.

8. Nationalities of the Non-Nationals That Were Granted Work Permits

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Minister state the Nationalities of the non-nationals who were granted work permits, their particular skill set and the number of years each work permit was granted for between August, 2020 to March, 2022?

Mr. Benn:

The nationalities of the non- nationals who were granted Work Permits for the period August, 2020 to March, 2022 are:

1. American
2. Barbadian
3. Bangladeshi
4. Brazilian
5. British
6. Belgium
7. Canadian
8. Chile
9. Chinese

10. Colombian
11. Cuban
12. Czech Republic
13. Dominican
14. Dutch
15. Ecuadorian
16. Estonian
17. Ethiopian
18. France
19. Finnish
20. Filipino
21. German
22. Haitian
23. Hellenic
24. Indian
25. Jamaican
26. Liberian
27. Mexicana
28. Nigerian
29. Netherlands
30. Peru

31. Russian
32. Romanian
33. Surinamese
34. Trinidadian
35. Turkish
36. Malaysian
37. Jordanian
38. Japanese
39. Nepalese
40. Portuguese
41. Pakistani
42. Saint Lucian
43. Singaporean
44. Syrian
45. Senegalese
46. South African
47. United Nations
48. Venezuelan
49. Vietnamese
50. Vincentian
51. Zambian

52. Zimbabwean.

On requests, businesses will be granted two years extension of Stay/Permit. The skillsets for those non-nationals are as follows:

1. Teacher
2. Doctor
3. Engineer
4. Contractor
5. Pilot
6. Nurse
7. Field Technician
8. Materials Engineer
9. Foreman
10. Crane Supervisor
11. Glazier
12. Security Guard
13. Electrician
14. Iron Maker
15. Safety Director
16. Site Manager
17. Chef
18. Construction Engineer

19. Heavy-duty Operator

20. Building Inspector

21. Surveyor

22. Pipe Fitter

23. Gardener

24. Boiler.

9. Companies Requested and Were Eligible to Request Work Permits

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Minister indicate the names of the companies that have requested and were eligible to request work permits between August, 2020 to March, 2022?

Mr. Benn: There are five hundred and sixty-six companies that have requested and were eligible for Work Permits during the period August, 2020 to March, 2022.

Of that amount, sixty-five are Stores, fifty-two are Supermarkets, thirty-two are restaurants, seven are Security firms, six are Universities/schools, nine are Construction companies, seven are Embassies, three are Engineering companies, seventeen are Hospitals/Pharmacies, nine are churches and twenty-nine are Companies involved in Trading.

Mr. Speaker: For oral replies, we have question No. 10.

Oral Replies

10 Reconstruction of the North Ruimveldt Secondary School

Ms. Singh-Lewis: On 19th June, 2021, the nation witnessed the destruction of the North Ruimveldt Secondary School by fire. It was reported through an address to the media – Kaieteur News 20th June, 2021 by the Minister of Education that the school will be repaired. Further, the Minister of Finance in his Budget Speech 2022, page 52, paragraph 4.134, stated that the said school is listed for reconstruction in 2022.

1. Can the Minister indicate when would the reconstruction of the North Ruimveldt

Secondary School commence?

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The advertisement for inviting all the world to bid for the construction of the school was in the newspapers. That process closed on 23rd June. It is currently being evaluated by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) in accordance with the procurement laws of the country. As soon as that is done, the expected next step would be for whoever wins the award to enter into a contract with the Government of Guyana and then commence reconstruction of the school.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Singh-Lewis.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Sir. On 19th June, 2021, the nation witnessed the destruction of the North Ruimveldt Secondary School by fire. We have just completed a year and time is important for us.

2. Can the Minister indicate what efforts are being made to replace the smart classroom, the school's information technology room, the school's library, the technical drawing and architecture room all of which were destroyed by the fire?

Ms. Manickchand: I am very glad that the Hon. Member asked. The first smart classroom this country ever saw was at the North Ruimveldt Multilateral School in 2014. Thereafter, this House knows, on the record, that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) had said that they had built and installed 11 smart rooms/classrooms in the country. We have since shown, both by evidence of the schools being without, as well as headteachers, parents and students saying none of these were ever installed. Sadly, when we left, we left one smart classroom in the country at the North Ruimveldt Multilateral School. The APNU/AFC was unable to add to that. It will now be onto.... the Leonora Secondary School received the smart classroom in 2021.

10.38 a.m.

The first of its kind in Region 3 under the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C). The Second one will be at the West Demerara Secondary School. I would be happy to outline for the Members of this house when each region received their smart classroom. Region 6, at Skeldon Line Path Secondary, in 2021, received its first smart classroom under the People's Progressive Party Civic. We would be happy to replace the smart classroom. The building that will be going up will take

into consideration the replacement of, and an addition to, all the facilities – all that were mentioned by the Hon. Member – in that new building. Additionally, even as we speak, to be able to cater for the students who are being educated in the premises which have not been destroyed, libraries and computer labs are up and working.

11. Enmore Packaging Plant

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Can the Minister state how much money has been utilised from successive budgets between 2020-2022 to restart the Enmore Packaging Plant and on what was the moneys spent?

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: First of all, I would like to say that, in 2020, the plant restarted in October of that year after being closed by the A Partnership for National Unity and the Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. The sum of \$4.59 million was expended in that year and the breakdown was: the employment cost for 42 workers who were placed on the breadline and who were dismissed by the APNU/AFC – we rehired them in October 2020 – was \$1.56 million; and the material cost was \$3.03 million. This gives a total of \$4.59 million from October to December 2020.

For the full year 2021, \$47.99 million was allocated to employment cost, and material cost amounted to \$46.9 million. This gave a total of \$94.95 million.

From January to April, 2022, \$15.8 million was allocated to the employment cost, \$0.39 million was allocated to material cost and outside services amounted to \$0.01 million. This gave us a total \$16.28 million for the period requested by the Hon. Member.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Can the Minister state how much money has been budgeted this year to aid in the transfer of the Packaging Plant? Further, can the Minister state the new location of the Plant?

Mr. Mustapha: In this year Budget, \$400 million has been allocated to commence the movement of the plant. It is public knowledge that the plant would be moved to Albion Estate, and we will have a bigger and much modernised plant at Albion Estate to cater for more production in Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCO).

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Can the Minister state what is the projected cost to complete the Packaging Plant at the new location?

Mr. Mustapha: The estimated cost is approximately \$1.9 billion for this plant at Albion Estate. As I said, this would be a modernised plant where it will be producing and packaging more sugar because what we found is that the packet sugar is in demand in our country.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, can you permit me to ask a follow-up question?

Mr. Speaker: Normally, you are allowed two follow-up questions. I think we may have breach that limit, but go ahead.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Okay Sir, based on what the Minister just highlighted, I am trying to get an understanding of whether or not the Ministry, in 2020 and 2021, did not anticipate that it would have sold and would have had to move the Packaging Plant in 2022. Instead of spending all of that money in the Packaging Plant in 2020 to 2021, would it not have been better for them to project that and to put all of the money into where they are planning to do it now in Albion Estate?

Mr. Mustapha: Project like these are multi-years projects. A project like this cannot be done in one year and put all the money in one year's budget. It is a multi-year budget, and this programme will rollover into the other year to continue to get the project to finality.

Mr. Speaker: This will be the final follow-up. Thank you.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, it is just for me to clarify because I do not think he understood what I was asking. What I am asking the Minister is based on his numbers that he gave me. A lot of moneys was spent between 2020 and 2022 on the Packaging Plant at Enmore Estate. What you are saying now is that it would cost \$1.9 billion to have it established in Albion Estate. Because you are saying that it is usually a multi-year project and you are projecting and all of that, the question is: Would it not have been better for the Ministry of Agriculture to recognise that in 2020 instead of injecting moneys, in 2020 and 2021, into Enmore Estate to then breakdown and carry it to Albion? That is what I am asking.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Speaker, probably the Hon. Member did not comprehend what I said. I said that money was not used to enhance and expand the plant at Enmore Estate. The money was used for two things: for the materials and employment cost. In the planning and restructuring of GuySuCo, we have decided to move the plant from Enmore Estate to Albion Estate because Albion Estate is the premiere estate in this country, and it has been earmarked to produce more sugar or the largest amount of sugar in our country. That is the reason we are moving the plant from Enmore Estate to Albion Estate. As I said, we have not used a cent to do enhancement work or expansion work on the plant, Thank you.

REQUESTS FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, yesterday evening I received a request from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to move a motion under this heading, I will first ask the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to state that request and then I will pronounce on the request. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor?

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, many Guyanese are concerned about the exposures in the Vice News documentary. It is in that context, Mr. Speaker, and the fact that corruption is rampant in this society that I rise to request an adjournment on definite matters of urgent importance so that this House can entertain the motion which is attached so that we can proceed to discuss it and to put in place an international investigative team that can investigate and arrive at a conclusion based on law. It is in that context it is made. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[Interruption]

Should I suspend so both sides can defuse themselves by expressing, more vociferously, the exchange? Hon. Members, I have considered the request by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and, as I have said on many occasions before right here, the matter has to be of definite urgency and public importance. The other consideration I had to look at is the basis for the request and the basis for that request are media allegations of corruption. I have seen in the media many such allegations of corruption against many current Members of this Assembly. If we have to take every

allegation in the press on any issue, then, as a matter of urgent public importance, we are going to have, in my view, a Parliament that will be considerably debased. In applying the two basic principles of urgency and public importance, I do not see the urgency in this. While the issue of corruption is important to all of us, the urgency of the particular allegation I cannot accept, and so I deny this request.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bills were introduced and read the first time:

Suicide Prevention Bill 2022 – No. 11/2022

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to make provision for the prevention of suicide, for the establishment of a National Suicide Prevention Commission, the functions of which shall include the preparation of a National Suicide Prevention Plan consisting of policies and measures to be implemented for the prevention of suicide, for the provision of Suicide Prevention Centres to provide support services including counselling services to suicide survivors and persons contemplating suicide, and for related matters.”

Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2022 – No. 12/2022

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Medical Practitioners Act.”

[Minister of Health]

Restorative Justice Bill – Bill No. 13/2022

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the use of restorative justice in the criminal justice system for victims, offenders and the community, the establishment of the Advisory Council on Restorative Justice and for related matters.”

10.53 a.m.

Bail Bill 2022 – Bill No. 14/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the grant and refusal of bail in criminal proceedings and for related matters.”

Anti-Money Laundering And Countering The Financing Of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill 2022 – No. 15/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act.”

[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]

Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2022 – Bill No. 16/2022

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Tax Act, the Income Tax Act and the Value-Added Tax Act.”

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

PUBLIC BUSINESS

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Motions

Payment of first Salary to Public Servants in one (1) month

WHEREAS there have been consistent reports from new public servants that they were informed they must wait three months before they received their first salary.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly advises the Government of Guyana to ensure that public servants receive their first paycheck no more than one (1) month after the commencement of their employment in the public sector.

[*Ms. Sarabo-Halley*]

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, good morning. I had my microphone on. I wish to stand on a Point of Order in the context of Standing Order 38. I am standing to seek some clarification from this honourable House and, particularly you, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to a correspondence that I, as a Member of the National Assembly, received yesterday evening which states:

“After further review, the Hon. Speaker has found that the motion published on Notice Paper No. 178 (increase in the Cost of Living for Guyanese) dated 1st June, 2022, contravenes the Standing Orders.

In view of the above, Notice Paper No. 178 is hereby withdrawn.”

For the avoidance of doubt, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the House that this motion was approved and placed on the Order Paper. It was moved by the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson in which it noted:

“WHEREAS Guyana, and countries around the world, continue to experience a tremendous ...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Ms. Walton-Desir: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: We are now at the motion which is the:

“Payment of first Salary to Public Servants in one (1) month.”

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am aware of where we are, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: That is where we are.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am also aware...

Mr. Speaker: I will ask you to speak to your motion.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am standing on the fact that the Standing Orders states at Standing Order 38 that:

“(1) A Member desiring to speak shall rise in his or her place and if called upon shall address his or her observations to the Speaker...”

Mr. Speaker, you have allowed me to speak, I am on my feet and, as a Member of this National Assembly, I am asking for clarification. I am aware, Sir, that the motion you had struck out ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have before me the Point of Order being a motion, by you, for the payment of first salary to public servants in one (1) month.

Mr. Ramjattan: It is not by her; it is by Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, the motion is by Ms. Sarabo-Halley. You stood, because I got a glimpse of the light on your microphone, to make an intervention on another motion which was on the Order Paper and was removed. I have to call on Ms. Tabita Sarabo-Halley to move her motion.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, I am fully aware of what you are saying, and I understand. I think we are in agreement. What I am saying is that the Standing Orders permits me as a Member of this honourable House to stand and to make an observation. The Standing Order states:

“A Member desiring to speak shall rise in his or her place and if called upon shall address his or her observations to the Speaker...”

Mr. Speaker, you have [*inaudible*] standing and, as a Member of this National Assembly, I am trying to [*inaudible*]Sir, to get some clarification from you.

Mr. Speaker: I am asking the technician to please silence the Hon. Member's microphone. I am asking you to please take your seat. While there is a Standing Order as you have quote, you have to read all of it. The Point of Order [*inaudible*]

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker [*inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are at the motion for the payment of first salary to public servants in one (1) month. I call on the Hon. Member to move her motion. Hon. Member, try your microphone. I think I just cut you off.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, am I clear?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I raise to move the motion in my name which speaks to the abolishment of the three-month wait for public servants to receive their first salary. As the mover of this motion which states:

“WHEREAS there have been consistent reports from new public servants that they were informed they must wait three months before they received their first salary.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly advises the Government of Guyana to ensure that public servants receive their first paycheck no more than one (1) month after the commencement of their employment in the public sector.”

As I rise to open the debate on this motion, I would like to first thank you for rethinking your original decision to disallow this motion as I believe that this motion, once agreed to by all, could have a significant impact on all future public servants as we work to finally bring an end to an unconscionable practice in the public service. It is my sincere hope that this issue is not seen as a partisan one which requires political grandstanding from any side. Yes, the motion is coming from a Member of this side of this House, but I stand here hoping that the request of the motion, which is that the National Assembly advises the Government of Guyana to ensure that public servants receive their first pay cheque no more than one month after the commencement of their employment in the public sector, could be accepted by all.

This issue of new public servants waiting in excess of three months to receive their first pay cheque spans all governments in this country. The reason for this motion is strictly due to the recognition that public servants and, by extension, their families, their friends and their associates should not have to bear the burden of working for this State for months without a pay cheque.

There are too many instances of persons complaining of being told that it would take, at least, three months to get them on the payroll to receive their salaries. The unethical premise on which this practice stands must no longer find bearings after this debate today. The million-dollar question that no one seems able to answer is why. Why would anyone in any Human Resources (HR) department or any Permanent Secretary (PS) in any State institution agree to and accept this as normal, common, or ethical? How could anyone comfortably inform new staff that the delinquent nature of the system would be retained and that the new staff would have to bear the severe burden of this delinquent system? What is even more striking about all of this is that the decision to perpetuate this is not buttressed by any written policy in the public service. There is simply nothing in the Public Service Commission rules and regulations that suggests that the HR officer or personnel or any Permanent Secretary is required to tell a new employee that he/she must wait three months for his/her first salary.

Further, while the public service may have a history of unmasked firing of public servants, and does not have a history of unmasked hiring of public servants which had resulted in a severe backlog of new employees who had, probably, initiated this practice of the hiring process, probably, lasting three months... Again, the fundamental question which has so far not been answered is: Why is this three-month wait necessary? I became aware of this matter in 2019 and held discussions with the former Finance Secretary (FS), the former Chairman of the Public Service Commission and, I believe, the former Principal Personnel Officer (PPO) of the Ministry of the Public Service along with its Permanent Secretary which left everyone at that meeting simply puzzled as no one could point to any systemic reason why it would take three months. These are the senior personnel in those Ministries. How and when this became a practice, and why it was allowed to continue unabated for long, is troubling.

Now that it has reached the National Assembly, may this be the beginning of the end of such a practice. What is even more appalling is that the timeline of three months is not the maximum amount of time that persons have had to wait to receive their first salary. In fact, there have been many cases of employees going to work for over a year without any salary. Everyone expects an employee to show up at work daily, but no one questions how he/she is finding the necessary resources to get to work and return home, or to feed himself/herself and family. Someone has to be and should be concerned about an employee's ability to sustain himself/herself during this wait that

could take three months to one year. There seems to be an unperturbed nonchalant attitude to the grave injustice and inhumanity of this approach to the hiring of staff in the public service. It must be seen as an injustice because it is unfair, it is cruel, and it borders on exploitation. The International Labour Organization (ILO) gives a number of indicators for labour exploitation. Firstly, the withholding of money which means that:

“Coercion, at the point of recruitment... can also involve the partial or complete withholding of money from the individual. Left without any money, the individual often has no choice but to accept the conditions imposed by the recruiter.”

The second indicator for labour exploitation is economic reasons. This is where:

“Economic reasons that may render an individual vulnerable at the point of recruitment include being poor... having debts, being responsible for dependents... or lack of employment opportunities...”

Then, we turn to a third indicator, low or no salary.

“Low or no salary is an indicator of form of exploitation. No salary relates to cases where the individual is completely denied his/her salary.”

“Low salary refers to cases where the individual received less than they agreed upon salary...”

While in our case, the points I highlighted such as the withholding of salary, economic reasons and low or no salary may not be the intention of the personnel department or the Permanent Secretary, the reality is that moneys are being withheld for works done for three months and more and may very well being seem as labour exploitation if the ILO were to be asked to take a look at this matter.

11.07 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, permit me the opportunity to read to this august House just how this practice impacts the people who are affected by it. Two persons have been kind enough to express their unique experiences when entering the public service which I would like to share with the National

Assembly, for security reasons their names and dates of employment have been redacted.
Gentleman one:

“Working yet unemployed or how to work for thanks in six months, a guide.

I was beyond thrilled when I received a call confirming my employment within the Public Service. I’ve always wanted to work directly for the good of my country. Peace filled my mind when I realized that not only will my work directly benefit my country but I’ll be escaping my financial burden or as my grandparents put it “Living hand to mouth.” but boy was I ignorant.

During the interview, I was told that there’s a three months period [where] each public servant has to wait in order to be paid. I asked why and I was told, ‘it is a standard procedure and we all had to go through it.’ Granted that was not an answer, I took it upon myself to look into why it is such a standard procedure. Multiple persons were asked and the answer varied not too far from the original response of how standard the procedure was... but my question was why. After 3 months of investigation, I learned that the processing of one’s employment, the paperwork, the approvals take about three months.

But wait it gets better. In the third month, I contacted personnel and was told that my documentation is still being processed and I have to await a response from PSM. PSM was contacted and [I] was told that it is still being processed... mind you, from the first month of my employment to then my documents were still being processed.

In the fourth month, I contacted both parties and was promised that I would be paid on the upcoming pay date. On that day I went into the bank looking for my money and unfortunately my money was looking for me as well. I contacted personnel and PSM and both parties blamed the other. At no point in time did anyone say they were sorry for any inconvenience caused. Nevertheless, I was promised that I will definitely be paid in the fifth month, the fifth month came and yes you guessed it: I still was not paid. I called once to inquire and persons seemed more annoyed than I was that I kept asking for my money and the fault always seemed to be with some other department.

In the sixth month, I was paid. I saw it fit to inform the persons involved but they were all disinterested, it is obvious that the Government thinks that persons have next of kin to support them during the apparent “three months” period to get paid, since, they continue to encourage this outrageous practice since the dawn of the Public Service Ministry, I do not.

Furthermore, during this time I was BEGGING for money to work, BORROWING money to go to work for six months straight. I was expected to show up for work EVERY working day and perform to the best of my ability. It reached the point where persons asked back for their money, I was promising the next month as the ministry was promising me.... When I was paid 95% of my salaries went to paying bills and repaying the money I borrowed, UNACCEPTABLE. but the best part is I’ve learned that this standard procedure is not even constitutional. Then what was even more interesting is that in the private sector there is no such thing as an apparent “three months ‘waiting period’”.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight a number of issues raised by this public servant. The gentleman stated that he was told when he was being interviewed that he would have to wait three months. He was told and I am sure by a Senior Personnel Officer (SPO) that they too had to endure the same three months wait and was given the excuse that the paperwork required would take three months to be processed. This alone is worrying. Even if one were to accept that, Mr. Speaker, if one were to accept the three months, the gentleman had to wait six months for his pay cheque. This with no proper explanation nor apology from the persons who he would have contacted to check on when his salary would be ready. This cannot be seen as acceptable any longer. I now move on to the testimony of a second individual, and it reads as follows:

“I joined the public service and remained a public servant for 4 years. Financially, the first three months were the hardest given the unwritten policy of a three months wait time for your first salary in the public service. I had a panel interview to land the job. I was informed of the amount we are paid but no one told me I would have to wait 3 months for it.

I walked into the Ministry with exuberance on my first day. I met with the personnel officer who told me what documents I needed to submit in order to get on the next pay cycle. To delay those documents meant to delay your salary. I had worked before, in the private

sector so I had the documents requested, bank account, NIS, TIN. Though those were turned in my first week on the job, I received my first salary three months later. I am of the view that personnel officers are nonchalant in ensuring new staff get their salaries. There were many days where I had to ask my parents for passage to get to work or my boyfriend for lunch money. Without support I can't think of any way I would have been able to keep that job for the first couple of months.

The personnel in this case ensured that the three months was upheld and that the staff did not have to wait more than three months but this should not and cannot be seen as acceptable or normal”

Mr. Speaker, in 2019, upon assuming office as Minister of the Public Service, I was informed of the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service that was then initiated by then President David Arthur Granger and the many recommendations made by the Commission. Recommendations No. 83, 86, 87 reads as follow:

“We recognise that there is need for the E-Government Unit to stress the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) in the Guyana Public Service towards the improvement of service delivery.”

Recommendation No. 86 states:

“That the Department of the Public Service collaborate with the various Ministries/Departments/Regions to develop a service-wide information system that will serve to enhance service delivery across the Regions. In addition, the E-Government Unit should provide general oversight and guidance in this activity.”

Recommendation No. 87 states:

“That the Department of the Public Service strengthen its HRMIS database system by connectivity with the Ministry of Finance payroll system. This will allow for on-line access to update HR information from HRMIS available to all Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Departments and Human Resources Offices.”

A number of initiatives began under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Government. As you have recognised, information technology could cut processing time in half thus reducing, significantly, the length of time it will take for a number of the services provided by the public service including the on-time payment of salaries. I also note the statements by the Advisor to the Minister of the Public Service, Hon. Member Dr. Westford, who highlighted, on March, 2022, that it was the intention of the Peoples Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) to overhaul and modernise its public service in order to ensure the systems no longer frustrate the population.

“‘...The services that we offer must be modern and easily accessible. Our systems must no longer frustrate our people but alleviate their daily worries and challenges,’ Westford noted.”

Well, Hon. Member Dr. Westford, the new staff of the public service are frustrated. They are being frustrated by the system that is currently in place and, if the Ministry of the Public Service does not see it fit and urgent to look after the system that is frustrating their own staff then, how could anyone believe that systems will be out in place to help the rest of the population? I decided to check with other countries in this hemisphere to see whether public servants are facing the same challenges. I have had conversations with former Permanent Secretaries from St. Vincent and the Grenadines and senior public servants from Jamaica and St. Lucia. Every time the question arose, each individual was shocked just at the thought of anyone being made to wait three months without their salary. The individual from Jamaica said that no one from Jamaica would accept that policy; it simply would not fly. Mr. Speaker, I simply cannot find a country that would require their employees to wait three months for a salary. It is simply unheard of – well, in any country except Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, during my short period, again, as Minister of the Public Service, I realised that when things become a habit and forms part of the culture of an organisation it is not always easy to shift. It is not always easy to recognise that the old order can no longer work in this new dispensation and that changes have to be made. This issue has outlived whatever usefulness it was able to fulfil when the idea and concept of a three-month wait was started.

Mr. Speaker, I have read the proposed amendments by the current Minister of the Public Service. The Minister is requesting that the word 'advise' be substituted with 'encourages' and that the phrase 'no more than one month after the commencement of their employment in public sector' be replaced with the word 'within a reasonable time on receipt of a letter of appointment or a signed contract'. Is it that the word 'advise' is too strong? Please let the record show that 'encourages' means to persuade someone to do or continue to do something by giving support or advice. So, while the word 'encourages' seems more palatable to those on the other side, it also allows for advice to be given and, thus, there is no need for the word to be changed. I hope, however, that the Hon. Member would be willing to respond to the following question when she takes the floor in relation to her second proposed amendment. What is reasonable? Who will determine what is reasonable? Is three months reasonable? Is six months or a year reasonable? Who or what will ensure that this reasonable time is adhered to? What systems will be put in place to ensure that the letter of appointment or contract is prepared in a timely manner?

Mr. Speaker, there are so many things wrong with these amendments. I am aware of a public servant who had to wait for over five months for Government Order so that he/she could be put on the payroll and receive a pay cheque. What that public servant initially wanted was to be on the fixed establishment, that is the public service fixed establishment, where one gets pension once one retires. The individual changed his/her mind after a couple months had passed and there was no Government Order and was on a month-to-month contract awaiting that Government order. The person decided, instead, requested to become a contracted employee. For some reason, Mr. Speaker, that public servant went back to being without a salary for another four months while awaiting their contract. I cannot, in any way, understand why that person had to go through that process for another four months when all of the information was already in the system.

This amendment to replace a definite time of 'one month' to an indefinite time of 'reasonable' is nothing short, I believe, of despicable, and it suggests that those in charge of the Ministry are not sufficiently concerned about our public servants to recognise that there needs to be some drastic changes in the current structure that exists throughout the public service. Imagine, the Ministry of Health should have the information of all persons who are training to become nurses. The Ministry of Health would be very quickly informed of who has passed their exams and will soon be added to the staff complement. Yet, these nurses are expected to wait six months or sometimes one year

before receiving their first pay cheque. Guyana is not the only country in the world with a public service and employees who work for the State. However, Guyana may be the only country that consistently has it, as an unwritten policy, that public servant must learn to live with waiting months for a pay cheque.

In the 2022 Budget, \$8,319,000 was allocated to the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD) and \$849,000 to the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM). The State has access to the necessary resources required to figure out best practices that exists in other countries to better what we have here as a country.

As I conclude at this particular point, I would like us, as the debate begins, to not think of this as a political issue, but as the recognition that public servants require more, deserve more and should get more from the State and from us in this National Assembly, I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member Mr. Jermaine Figueira to make his contribution.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the life of this Parliament is solely about money and more money. It is not about the people nor the issues that affect the well-being of the average Guyanese citizen. This Parliament... and at times it could be said that your very own action, Sir, smacks at what should be the embodiment of democracy on display in this House.

11.23 a.m.

I reiterate Sir, that this House is a poor demonstration of democracy, where the matters and the issues that affect the people are not addressed, and the best decisions to the benefit of them, at the end result of robust parliamentary debate, ceases to exist in this House, Mr. Speaker. Sir, the very proposal by the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, is one which I believe should not find any political divide on an issue of such importance.

If one is to ask the average Guyanese citizen out there – be they from the public or private sector – if one has provided labour, should one have to wait three, four or six months or even a year for one's salary, as she has provided as examples to this House... The Hon. Minister who is known to be very obnoxious at times in this House, Mr. McCoy, had gotten paid the very next month after

he had attempted to provide some level of service to the Guyanese people. All the Members in this House, including Members of the Opposition, have benefitted from a fraudulent system. It is a system that needs fixing. We are entrusted to serve the Guyanese people, and in giving our service, after one month of just coming into this House, we got our salaries. Why, then, do the public servants, the people of Guyana who keep the engine of Government running, have to wait? Why is it that they have to wait three months before they can be compensated? That is not a just position. I want to believe that they are conscious people on the other side of the House who would support or should give support to the Hon. Member's position, which is that Guyanese are frustrated in a system that is flawed and it should be fixed. I believe that is a role of Government. That is the role of this House. It is the role of the Parliament to make representation that benefits the people of Guyana. I believe the Hon. Member's position is one that is of good common sense. It is a common-sense approach that should be adopted, unanimously, by all Members in this House. Fix the flawed system in the public service; I believe this is a step in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is timely. It is timely because the world over is being affected by extremely high cost of living. Right here in Guyana, this is our daily reality. It is our daily reality. People are *catching hell* in this country and the Government is not doing anything to address this situation. I say, fixing the issue in the public sector will help to address, in some little regard, the hardships people are facing. People cannot afford a pound of sugar and we have the Minister who said that the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) is now producing packaged sugar. We want access to all types of sugar – loose sugar which the average Guyanese usually buys. They are not being afforded the salaries of Ministers to buy packaged sugar, so they have to buy loose sugar and they cannot even afford that. Now, you are saying to them, if they gave their labour, they have to wait three months to get their money. It is unconscionable; fix the system that is flawed. You are installed right now for the time being. Once you are installed right now, fix the system. It is a rigged system and it must be fixed, Mr. Speaker.

This Government talks about development. If it is serious about development, fixing this particular issue in the public sector aids in that process. Development should be about the people. People's lives should reflect a developed society. If the country or the Government is serious about development, people should know that when they provide their labour, they would be paid in good time. I believe the Hon. Member's proposal is in good time – one month. So, accept this position.

When a person works and has to wait three months in this climate where the cost of living is so high – the issue that this Government does not want to address, that it is of national importance to both sides of the political divide – our supporters are being affected gravely, and your supporters are being affected gravely. I find it rather worrisome that this Government, that claims to care about the people of this country, does not want to address the issue that is affecting the masses of Guyanese. The high cost of living is affecting every citizen in this country and the Government must put measures in place to address it.

I hear the Minister, Mr. McCoy, who is very distracting, and I wish the Speaker would protect me. I am saying that the Government has indicated that it has put some measures in place. I heard them, but did these measures have a trickle-down effect to the benefit of the people? With all the taxes they said they have removed, how are the average citizens benefitting when they go to the stores, when they go to the stalls, and when they go to the little shops in the communities? How is this so-called trickle-down effect benefitting the average citizen? It is not, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, the Government has to look at other measures so the people of Guyana would be the ultimate beneficiaries of the relief that the Government claims is a relief programme for the average Guyanese who are being affected.

I say those measures are good. But are they having a ripple effect to the benefit of the people? I say to you, no. The people who are benefitting from your measures are those in the private sector. This salary is right now affecting people who have provided their labour. They are trying other ways to cushion the reality of the times of the high cost of living while waiting to get their salaries. Do you know what some of them are doing? They are setting up kitchen gardens, Mr. Speaker. Those who have lands are farming them, but they need more assistance. They need assistance. The Government has indicated that it has given relief to farmers. That is so, but we have a list of hundreds of Guyanese farmers who were discriminated against. I have a list of farmers in Region 10 who have real farms, who have been affected, and have not benefitted from the relief the Government said it has given to farmers. The Government needs to stop this discriminatory approach when it comes to distributing Guyanese resources to Guyanese citizens.

Mr. Speaker, we would like this Government to help our farmers. Give our farmers more access to land. Give our farmers access to land. The President has come to this nation and has told us that he has given Guyanese lands to Barbadians, when Guyanese have thousands of applications at the

Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC) and cannot have access to their own resources. I am saying, if this Government is serious, give Guyanese lands. We will soon be debating the Industrial Hemp Bill. If we are going to make the Industrial Hemp Bill a budding new industry in this country, people need land. I say to this Government, give Guyanese access to lands before any other. No foreigner should have lands in this country above Guyanese. [**Mr. McCoy:** You do not have to tell us that. We have a proud record.] Do you have a proud record? Your record is tainted. It is tainted because it is not helping the Guyanese people in this country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Member, just give me one moment to call on the Members from the Government's side, who are shouting across the Assembly, to tone down their volumes. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your protection. Not everyone can handle the truth. It is the truth that they are hearing, and it is affecting them. The Guyanese people must never be denied hearing the truth. As representatives on this side of the House, we will always bring the truth to the Guyanese people, no matter how disruptive you are, Member Mr. McCoy.

We are saying, if the Government cannot, in a fair and equitable manner, distribute resources to all Guyanese who are deserving, then come up with another programme. If you do not want to give everyone the people's money, give every household, as I have indicated, access to land. Give it to farmers in this country. The cost of living is high and if we are to bring it down, it requires farmers to farm more. So, how are we going to help our farmers farm more? It is by using a common-sense approach. One is, I say to this Government, give our farmers more lands; give our farmers access roads to those lands; give our farmers subsidised fertilisers; and most importantly, in my view, give our farmers crop and livestock insurance. We have seen how farms are ravaged by floods. I say, if those farmers had crop insurance backed by the Government, they would have been able to get back on their feet automatically. Give them livestock insurance so they do not have to wait, wait and wait. They can invest more, knowing full well that the Government is backing them.

Mr. Speaker, public servants need help. Public servants need help. [**Mr. Hamilton:** Finally.] Yes, finally. Many of them have ventured into small businesses. The Government has indicated that it is giving grants to small businesses. Many of those public servants have registered businesses and have attempted to venture out to become entrepreneurs because the Government is not helping

anyone; it is not giving public servants any increase. People want to be entrepreneurs in this country and that is why they have registered small businesses with the hope that the Government will provide them with their own resources to make those small businesses grow. What did it do? The Government had a discriminatory approach when it came to the distribution of those grants to small businesses. In Linden, the Government bused in its people and put them under a big tent at the Watooka Guest House. It brought people out of Region 10 and gave away those grants that were deserving to be given to Linden's small businesses. Mr. Speaker, that is what this Government does.

11.38 a.m.

The handful of Lindeners who were there, some of them were so-called big time contractors and big time promoters. Families and friends received this grant and some of them do not even have a business. That is the discriminatory approach that this Government is doing.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying, help our public servants who are desirous of coming out of the Government system because they are aware that this is an uncaring Government; help them to become entrepreneurs. It is really sad that the people in the permanent establishment in the public service have to wait so long to get their moneys. Then, to curb the issue of unemployment in this country that is extremely high, the Government promised 50,000 jobs and their quick fixes are temporary jobs at \$40,000 a month. [**Mr. McCoy:** It is part-time jobs.] Part time jobs, same thing; it is semantics. The fact of the matter is, that is not the solution to curb unemployment in this country. Do you know what we said, Mr. Speaker? We have said to our young people and the Guyanese people, who are struggling in this country, to take those 'temporary jobs' as the Member wants it to be referred to. Take it; after all, it is taxpayers' money. Forty thousand dollars a month cannot be sufficient to sustain a family. It brings a minute relief, probably for three days, given the high cost of living in this country. Take it. You have given young people \$40,000 a month and you plug them into the fixed establishment, the fixed system. You put them in the teaching service, you put them in the healthcare sector, you put them in the system that requires some degree of training. When you put a young person at a school, what is it that they are doing? When you put them in the healthcare sector, what is it that they are doing when they have no training? That is why the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service that the Coalition Government had instituted was ideal to prepare young people to get involved in the public sector, Mr. Speaker. They

would have been trained and they would have gotten on the job experience so that when they are placed into the system, they are equipped to service the system correctly. Now, we have a lot of persons in the system getting \$40,000 a month, but they do not know what to do – *headless chickens* in the place.

We need to bring back the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service to train young people to be prepared to go back into the public service. If this Government is serious about helping young people and cushioning the high cost of living and, more so, bringing about some level of food security, I would advise the Government to take the \$40,000 that they give to a young person and group 20 of them together. If you bring 20 of these young people together and you give them \$40,000, it is equivalent to \$800,000 a month. If you are to multiply that by 12, it equates to \$9.6 million a month. Mr. Speaker, I am saying, do not wait for the whole year for these young people, bring them together now in a group of 20, give them this \$9.6 million now and say to them, ‘go and establish a chicken farm’. Do you know what that will do? That \$9.6 million will be able to build that farm; it will be able to provide the chicks and the feed for that farm. For six weeks, the young people would be able make a profit far superseding that \$40,000 that this Government is offering. Do you know what it will continue to do? It will teach them business and entrepreneurship. Mr. Speaker, it will keep them permanently employed, while at the same time, do you know what that will do? It will contribute to lowering the cost of food in this country because those young people who have that farm in that particular community would be able to sell the produce to the residents of that community at a cheaper cost. The amount of money in profits that those young people would be able to make, they will be in a position to employ more young people. That is job security; that is teaching young people business; that is contributing to bringing down the high cost of living; and contributing to food security in this country. This Government has no plan for Guyana’s youth; it has no plan in solving unemployment in this country; it has no plan in solving crime in this country.

We are in support of the Hon. Member’s position with regard to ensuring that our public servants be paid in the shortest possible time when they have given their service to any agency of Government. It is a common-sense approach; it is a humane approach. If people work, why do they have to wait three months to get their salaries in such an environment where the cost of living is affecting every Guyanese citizen, especially those who are not Ministers of the Government.

I want to give my unanimous support to my Colleague who put forward this position to Government. I believe it is a position that should not even be debated upon. It is one that should be accepted. Why? Because it is a position that every Guyanese would support. If you go into the streets, Mr. Speaker, if you go to the marketplace, and you randomly ask any Guyanese if one works for one month, should one wait to be paid three months after, the answer would be a resounding, no. Therefore, this is a position that every Guyanese would support. I trust that good sense will prevail, and the Government will jump on the bandwagon with the Opposition and support this position articulated so eloquently by my Colleague, and give its unanimous support to ensure that this comes into being and becomes a Guyanese reality. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, before I call on the next speaker, let me join with you in recognising Mr. Richard Allen, a former Member of Parliament (MP), who is with us today. Our next speaker is the Hon. Minister of Public Service, the Hon. Member, Ms. Sonia Parag.

Minister of Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying that this Government unequivocally values public servants. They value their time, their effort and all they do to keep the *wheels of Government turning*. I am going to move an amendment, that was distributed in the National Assembly, to the motion that was raised by the Hon. Member. It states:

“BE IT RESOLVED CLAUSE

Delete word “*advises*” in the first line and substitute with word “*encourages*”.

Delete phrase “*no more than one (1) month after the commencement of their employment in public sector*”.

And replace with the words “*within a reasonable time on receipt of a letter of appointment or a signed contract.*”

Mr. Speaker, even before I get into the debate of this Motion, I wish to stand here, as I am standing right now, on a Point of Order, Standing Order 41(6). The Opposition Members come here and say that they do not want to make this political but, yet, the first thing that comes out of the Hon. Member Mr. Figueira’s mouth is an attack and abuse on the Speaker. I am going to raise Standing

Order 41 (6) and stand on that Point of Order because it is absolutely ridiculous that you could come here and say that the Speaker has done so.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order, Standing Order 41(6).

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*] Hon. Member Mr. Figueira. Hon. Minister, let me hear Standing Order 41(6).

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Minister is imputing improper motive toward me, and I trust that she would stick to the matter at hand and debate...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, I do not agree with your interpretation of Standing Order 41(6). Hon. Minister, please continue.

Ms. Parag: Thank you. The Hon. Member may shout on the other side that we are not sticking to what is before us, yet three quarters of his presentation was not on the motion.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, stated that as the Minister of Public Service, she wanted to be able to see persons being paid timely. Now she said that she wants to see them being paid within a month. The Hon. Member sat in the very office that I now sit, for approximately one year, so I figure she would gather what the process is. This Government does not want to see public servants waiting three months to be paid. They do not even want to see public servants wait for two months to be paid. There is a process in place if one is on a new employment list, or recruitment; one has to go through a process. First of all, the agency has to submit one's name; that has to be done in a timely manner. There are credentials and other documents that have to be submitted by a new public servant or someone who is entering the public service and one has to also get those documents within a timely manner through multiple agencies. When one gets to the Ministry of Public Service, one goes through several agencies before one gets there.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, for your information, what is a fact is that even when persons are waiting for their approval, agencies such as the regional bodies and other ministries would pay an advance. They will place them on a temporary employment so that they can be paid while waiting. That is the system that is in place right now. [**Hon. Members:** (*Inaudible*)] The unfortunate thing for the Opposition is that I am in the *driving seat* at the moment, so I know what is happening factually. When we come here and we speak, on the other side, we bring a lot of hearsay to the

House and say that we cannot say this, and we cannot say that, because it is for security reasons. Every public servant that has come to the Ministry of Public Service, we have tried, within a timely manner, to be able to give those persons their salaries.

11.53 a.m.

That obviously involves a multi-agency collaboration. Let us get our facts straight before we come here and we want to throw out to the public servants that the Government does not care. That is absolute rubbish. As a matter of fact, for almost five years the Opposition was in Government. I heard the Hon. Mr. Figueira saying that we need to take care of this and that we need to take care of that, but nothing was done in the five years to remedy the situation—absolutely nothing. I can say that a circular was put out by the Hon. Member. I am not afraid to stand here and say that Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley put out a circular in December, 2019, in which she said that persons were reporting to her Ministry, at the time, that they were waiting three months for salaries, and that she wanted it to cease. That was all that the circular basically said. There was no timeline placed to assist public servants.

Based on our amendment, I am saying that we are going to work collaboratively with all agencies, to ensure that within a reasonable time after the request has been sent, to be able to get persons their salaries. I stand here today and I take offence to everything that has been said, because whether be it public servants, whether be it farmers, whether be it the vulnerable groups – the senior citizens, the young children – this Government, from day one, has been in all of the regions and villages in this country trying to assist, and has been assisting. I suppose that it becomes a threat to the Opposition when we are doing what we have to do for the people. It is also no secret that the Opposition is affected by the Government being in places like Region 10, like Buxton, like Mocha and all of those places, treating all of the citizens equally, as they deserve. That is why half of my Hon. Friend Mr. Figueira's presentation was based on cost of living; that is why he deviated from what the motion was. He wants to carry a narrative that this Government is doing nothing to help people when, in fact, our work is showing for itself.

The Hon. Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance will come and speak on this issue as well. I am very certain that he will also come to tell public servants that he has been putting a system in place to assist. All agencies will be collaborating to ensure that

public servants get their salaries within a reasonable time. I am to say that while we absolutely agree that no public servant should wait three months for their salary, the Hon. Member could not, as a sitting Minister, put a timeframe of one month, as she wants to do in Opposition now, because she understood at that time what was the process to have salaries paid out to new employees. Where there are bottlenecks, we will look at them. I find it quite disappointing that we had a whole conversation about how public servants want to pass through the Public Service Commission (PSC). Let me say that as the Minister who receives the information, public servants either want to be on the fixed establishment or they want to be on contract, as is allowed by the *Public Service Rules*. It is a prerogative that they have, and it is a prerogative that we are going to allow public servants to have. That is one.

Two, I am also disappointed that the Hon. Member said that persons were not being passed through the fixed establishment. In all of the almost five years that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) sat in Office, persons were deliberately not being passed through the PSC. That information is on hand. It was your Government that controlled it at the time; public servants were left off. I find it quite dishonest that the Hon. Member would come here to say that this Government is trying to prevent persons from passing through the fixed establishment. They have the right to go on contract if they want, and this Government has been allowing that. Employment has been taking place. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** *[Inaudible]*] Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul seems to think that he does not embarrass the entire country when he speaks, but he does, whether it be in Opposition or in Government.

Mr. Speaker, again, I stand here to tell you that a problem that existed while the APNU/AFC was in Office but did nothing to fix was that agencies and ministries continued to employ persons physically, without the approval of the Ministry of Public Service and without the approval of the relevant ministry. When there is someone sitting in a position for four months and then the request for approval is sent, the approval gets to the Ministry of Public Service three or four months after, the Ministry approves, it goes back to the agency, and then it goes to the Ministry of Finance to be placed on the payroll. That causes a delay. We are trying to remedy all of those things as a Government. That existed then, and nothing was done to cure that, which caused a major problem, or the majority of issues that surrounded the timely payment of salaries to public servants.

I want to assure, and I move, that this Hon. House sees that the amendment is relevant, sees that the amendment that is proposed by myself and the Government of Guyana is appropriate in terms of the timely payment of public servants, based on what we can remedy in the system, based on the system itself, and the process as we have multi-agency collaborations. I thank you. [*Applause.*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Before I call on the next speaker, the Hon. Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, please join me in welcoming Professor Vishwanie Mahadeo-Heads and her son, Mr. Ishaan Mahadeo-Heads. They are the sister and nephew of the Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo. Professor Vishwanie Mahadeo-Heads is a very distinguished researcher and is now credited with the discovery of the Brn-3b, which contributes to forms of breast cancer. Our honoured guests today, Professor Vishwanie Mahadeo-Heads and her son Eeshan Mahadeo-Heads. Hon. Member Ms. Nima Flue-Bess.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say, before I begin my presentation, that once again I am here at the National Assembly and I am very disappointed that we continue to endure the ignorance that Hon. Member Mr. McCoy continues to display in this House. The nation is watching; when are we going to get it right? It is very saddening to know that our young people can act...

Mr. Speaker: But Hon. Member, I have no problem with you citing anyone, but I have a big problem with your use of the word “ignorance”. I know the formal meaning of ignorance is lack of information, but the connotation is also something we need to take into account. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am so guided. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just listened to the Hon. Minister make a presentation. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all of us that when we took the oath of Office, we said that we do hereby solemnly declare that we will bear true faith and allegiance and serve the people without affection or ill will. If you go to Buxton, Linden, and you go to Mocha Arcadia, and not Mocha, to serve the people, it is your responsibility. You are in Government, and you are responsible for serving all people, regardless of where they are located. That should not be something that you should stand here to say as though you are doing us a favour. You are serving the people of Guyana; that is expected of you.

I would also like to point out that even as the Minister spoke earlier, it appeared to me that she was questioning Ms. Sarabo-Halley's work that was being done. No. She is a sitting Minister, so if there is an issue, she has to fix it. It is amazing to hear the statement that this Government values public servants and yet, because of this great value, we would like to have an amendment to say, "reasonable time" or when one receives a "signed contract". Why is it in this time and this day of technology, we cannot have systems implemented where you use DocuSign, HelloSign, Adobe Reader, or SignWell or something, that the documents can be signed and passed to all of the agencies, eliminating the entire dead process that takes place for three months. I would expect that in the time of technology, we use it so that we can improve our system to help public servants. In all the utterances that the Hon. Member McCoy carried on with, do you know what he said while Cde. Sarabo-Halley was presenting? He said that it is an old country, so what do you expect? That tells a lot. Genesis 3:19 states:

"By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground..."

The sad thing about it is that when people sweat in the public service, they have to wait until three months to eat from their sweat. Is that fair? Is it right? No, Mr. Speaker. How important is our salary? How important is the timing to which one must receive their salary? Why do people work? All of these questions are important and deserve answers. Moreso, with the current situation of the high cost of living in Guyana, it is absolutely necessary that the public servants be paid within the one month, so that they will not be led into poverty and suffering.

12.08 p.m.

The high cost of living in Guyana has women, mothers, pensioners and fathers who face the markets daily complaining about the prices. A pound of milk moved from \$400 to \$880; a small oil moved from \$360 to \$800; butter moved from \$400 to \$700; rice moved from \$1400 to \$1800 for a 10-kilogram (kg) pack; one kg of flour moved from \$300 to \$500 and all the prices keep climbing. Mr. Speaker, could you imagine the main caregiver of a family would apply for a job in the public service to provide all of this for his/her household and, yet, has to wait three months to receive his/ her salary? What are we doing to our people? What are we doing to our children? What are we doing to our pensioners? What are we doing when we have them wait a whole three months to be paid?

To be the main provider of a family, employed in the public service and to have to wait three months simply means that, one, the children would have poor nutrition and every possible family member. The mother or father who leaves home to go work would probably go to work hungry or not well fed and he/she has to perform his or her duties. It simply means that the mother or father would eat less and, as I said, milk has gone up. Only yesterday, I was in the supermarket and recognised that milk is now \$880. This means that if a person is working in the public service and cannot afford to give the babies or the children milk, what is happening? We need to do better. We need to fix the system and fix it now; not when we think it is reasonable time but, now, because of the current situation that exists in our country. As a representative of the East Bank, Demerara, and some places that the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, visits frequently, I could talk about what is happening to the persons in those areas who might be employed in the public service and have to wait three months to collect their salaries.

I refer to the community of Laluni which is at the back of Kuru Kururu. To get out of there, currently... For the last two years, I spoke about the roads and nothing has been done to fix the roads – absolutely nothing has been done to fix the roads. It is because of the current situation, the residents in the area are now paying \$3,000 for a taxi to come out from where they are to the highway and \$3,000 to go back in.

Now, just imagine, if someone from Laluni who joined the teaching profession and has to come out every day, let us say to Kuru Kururu Primary School to teach, look at the cost that he/she would have to endure. Then, still he/ she would not be paid in a timely manner. He/she would have to wait three months. Let us think about it; is that fair? It cannot be fair. It is not right because that individual when calculating \$6,000 at five days per week would already be \$30,000 and, in addition, he/she would have to get things to eat. Who would be standing the cost? Where would he/she gets the money? At this time, it is very difficult for him/her to go to the neighbour next door and ask for some assistance or to go to a family member because all of us are living in the high cost of living in Guyana. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that there be an improvement in this system so that, within one month, persons who are being employed in this system could be paid.

I want to give another example of the people living up the Demerara River. This is another area where the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, loves to frequent. He gets his free fuel to sail the boat pass

all the villages to go where he has to go. Yet, the persons in that area have to get five gallons of fuel to come out with their personal boats.

Now, I am thinking, what would happen if someone joined the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and is working at Timehri which is stationed right at the dock. I am not going too far but it is right at the dock. That individual would have to find \$5,830 to put fuel in the boat to get out work at the station. Just imagine, that individual would have to wait three months to get paid. What is happening there? Mr. Speaker, could you imagine? Mr. Speaker, imagine if that individual has a family to take care of, such as a baby who will need pampers, who will need milk, who will need to get baby food and who will need to get sugar. By the way, I am very saddened. I could not find sugar yesterday on the East Bank, Demerara. There was only white sugar at one supermarket and I drove the entire East Bank, Demerara. This is the reality on the ground. We cannot allow our public servants to wait a whole three months to get paid. It is not fair. It is not right. The system must be fixed.

This unfair practice needs to be looked at urgently. Why? When we think about the Permanent Secretary (PS), the Ministers or the Chief or main Administrators in the office – look at the reality – one, they would get free transportation and; two, they would drink all the free drinks from in the fridge, all of the free water and all of the free snacks they would enjoy. If there is a workshop, they could carry home dinner for their families, lunch for their children and all of that. The ordinary staff who might be just the driver who drives the vehicle or it might be the cleaner who is sweeping inside of the office have to wait a whole three months to be paid. That is so unfair, and that is why it is absolutely necessary that the system be fixed. I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, it could be fixed with technology.

When we think of the unfair practices that carries on in the offices, such as the cleaner who may not be able to ask the Minister for a raise and the secretary who may not be able to leave to go to the Chinese supermarket and ask for credit. He or she would have to bear the burden of providing for his or her household within that three-month period. Therefore, I call on this Government, if it truly, as the Minister openly said, care or value the public servants, it would employ technology to improve the system and to ensure that the public servants are paid within one month.

In closing, I give support to this Motion by my Hon. Member and I say to you as Carlos Tevez said:

“Salary matters shouldn’t be told to everyone, it’s a matter of respect...”

Let us respect our public servants. I, thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, this is a good time for us to take the suspension for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 12.16 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.50 p.m.

Thank you, Hon. Members, please, be seated. We had a very sumptuous and relaxing one and a half hours. I trust that we would make up for some of that time, as I call the Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings, to make her contribution.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my fellow Colleagues, on this side of the House, to speak on behalf of the public servants of Guyana who have long endured the hardship before they are employed and while waiting for their first salary. I am speaking to that Bill.

It was Ebrahim Fakir who reported that the role of public servants’ service in a democratic developmental state should focus not only on the delivery of services. The author further inferred that the public servants being placed in key sectors should be able to provide the needed capacity to implement economic policies effectively. In Guyana, we could boast of public servants who have distinguished themselves as professionals and have played pivotal roles in societies. These public servants have been pacesetters, as they have upheld parliamentary democracy, demonstrated respect for people, committed to fair and transparent governance, and assisted in the improvement of policies and better working conditions.

It is remarkable to see only recently, the caring and compassionate attitudes displayed by the public servants during the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, as they managed to save lives. Hence, this category of workers, who possess the skill set and long-standing expertise in their specialised fields, and who assist humanity, must be well taken care of. This prevailing pattern of

practice of a three-month wait for salary after being employed by the state, – with the capital letter M – ‘Must’ be addressed. This becomes more urgent, when we consider those who are impacted and are within the 35 years age cohort and who accounts for over 36% of our population. This primitive method of payment delivery to employees in this technological age must be revamped, since we have become an upper-middle income and oil rich country and economy. This unrealistic practice must be changed. Why? It is because money is available. The second point to note is that money is available.

After an organisation has advertised a vacancy and an individual is recruited, there should be mechanisms in place to ensure that the needs of the employees are met. Could we tout that we are a democratic society and the basic needs of individuals are not met? [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] *The buck stops here* with this People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Regime who is often critical as my learned Member of Parliament (MP) said just now of criticising the works done by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), while we were in Office. I must say that it is the one who is governing now.

The goodly Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana should enlighten and inform the populace or let alone his Cabinet Members or Ministers that the wage bill to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio is an indicator of the public service personal cost share of the total economy. If the wage bill is on the decline, then the economy is on the decline. Mr. Speaker, this is not so. As I quote the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, MP, in his *Budget 2022* presentation and on several occasions stated that the economy is on the upward trajectory. The point is, there is enough fiscal space and financial sustainability as money is available to pay the public service *via* the financial Appropriation Bill on time and every time. Mr. Speaker, have you ever considered the impact this practice of a three-month wait for a salary has on the employee and his or her family?

1.56 p.m.

I must let you know that such impractical policy would set up one to be bellicosed. Persons and households as a result of late payments missed or have defaulted at least one mortgage, one rent, one loan, one credit card, bill, lost property, and sequester or sold property at a very low price. With the cost of living on the rise –when I talk about the cost of living, I am talking about a

situation in which the price of everyday goods and services, such as groceries and household bills that are rising faster than the average income.

One study reported that missed payment rates were found among the highest persons who get lower incomes. I spoke to single parents and retirees who would be the worst affected and, as a result of late payment, the ordinary citizens now have to shop around in the different stores or buy extra items maybe when on promotion. They also have to buy cheaper products. As a result of high food prices some public servants, especially the vulnerable groups, have to skip meals or perhaps prioritise who in the family will get meals this time around. There is a small percentage of persons who may be looking perhaps for a food bank. There are a lot of adjustments to be made to public servants. They are spending to stay afloat financially. They dread the possibility that their first cost of living payment could be delayed by months. This delay in payment of first salary is very discouraging, frustrating and should I be divisive when the payment is slow. The prompt payment directory found that persons have become depressed and suicidal over late payments.

I recall two incidents, year three, where I had to intervene in Regions 1, 4 and 10. In one case there was an electromagnetic radiation (X-Ray) Technician who was not at his station that day and I enquired the reason for this absence from duty. I was told that the young individual was not paid for nine months. This highlights a point also within a point, with the extensive evolution of financial and administrative power given to Local Government following decentralisation as seen in the regions of Guyana, there could be far-reaching implications for the public service. Another example of this unfair action by the State was seen at the Matthew's Ridge Hospital. There was a case where a medical professional collapsed and needed to be resuscitated. Luckily, the relevant treatment was available to assist him. This incident occurred because the medical personnel was unable to purchase food for his sustenance because he had not been paid for approximately six months. If these two examples of the physical and psychological traumas are meted out, especially, to new public servants on the job... If they are inadequate, then I do not know what is. Just imagine the stress this practice and the health problems afford the family. The delay in public salary is not only a violation of human rights but a crime too.

Mr. Speaker, just recently, there were some community healthcare workers from Regions 4 and 10 who were asked to continue on the job or asked to continue on the job while not getting paid for nine months, with no renewal of contract in sight or any attempt made to place them on the

Fixed Establishment. One Nurse Practitioner was pregnant and struggled to get food to eat and the necessary items for her baby's arrival. Could you see what has happened there, Mr. Speaker with this healthcare worker? She could have gone into Eclampsia which is hypertension with fitting. There is a problem of marriage as well, such as broken marriages. There are lots of implications with delayed payments.

When one is employed and placed on a three-month probationary period, this employee is asked to be punctual and to work with diligence. Therefore, the question is, how does the employee gets to work on time? Where would the money come from to pay for the transportation? How could the employee manages his/her everyday duty? Hence, before the employee could benefit from the hard work he/she has engaged in, he/she has already incurred a lot of expenses and has borrowed from others to fulfil his obligations. When the rent is due, if the employee does not have the necessary finances, could the employee tell his/her landlord to wait three months for the rent, be it pre-COVID-19 or post COVID-19? Morally, there is humiliation and loss of dignity, and it may result in suicide.

This unjust system does not prognosticate well for the families of the individuals who are poor or near poor in an oil-rich economy. This unkind practice of depriving families, especially among large households with extended families, of their daily bread is responsible for and could be attributed to some of the various ills in society. We have seen children dropping out of schools or stopped schooling. Such situations appear far-fetched to some of our Friends on the other side of the divide and far removed from Members of the Government and some of their acquaintances are not affected and could easily obtain \$250,000 such as, perhaps, the sugar workers and some of the fishermen. They are out of touch with the lives of the ordinary workers who are not from their base but from the backbones of our economy, because they are the ones who ensure that our system of government works and the engine continues to turn.

This ritual seems to be more pronounced and it speaks in the regions as they become even decentralised. This present Regime may want to argue that this is not so. I am not speaking of pre-election proposals which would normally be used to shower largesse with arm of wings support and a tactic to keep their Members happy. It is a very important issue and it needs remedying right now. I want to suggest that all is not lost. I turn my attention to countries with best practices. From

literature review, I am looking at an article captioned, *Potential Claims Resulting From Covid-19: Part 1: Delay in the Payment of Wages*. It was reported :

“The Massachusetts Wage Act (MWA) protects employees’ earned wages. The law says when, what, and how employees must be paid. The MWA obligates employers to pay employees on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule.”

The article further states:

“For most employees, the statute requires the employers pay all earned wages within six days of the pay period in which the wages are earned. Once an employee earns wages, that money is owed to them in a timely manner, and an employer who delays a payment is violating the law.”.

In New Delhi, India, I have seen the circular sent out to all states captioned *Guidelines on Compensation for Delayed Wages Payments-reg*. The document speaks to payment of wages, compensation due to delay in the payment of wages, calculation of compensation, the prompt verification of the delay compensation, responsibility for operationalising the system and the action under the payment of Wages Act. We do not have to go too far. Right at home in our own backyard – I worked at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) – is an example of best practice. When it comes to the payment of wages to employees, it could manage the system well. In fact, there were times I recall when I had to be called that a cheque was waiting for me. I am suggesting that the payment of wages to new employees after one month of service is doable and practicable with a proficient and efficient staff.

It is not a myth or I do not see where the stated law speaks to the legality that public servants should be paid salary three months after working. In this dispensation workers must be paid for services rendered in keeping with conditions of employment. The public service should be paid at the end of each month, in a timely manner and not several months after. This draconian measure should stop and must be condemned. We, on this side of the House, would continue to flag any breach of the Constitutional rights of making a worker happy and creating any excess burden on the employees.

As I conclude in my presentation, it is my contention that relevant systems could be put in place or rather must be put in place to allow for the employees to get their salaries no later than one month of employment. As you noted, Mr. Speaker, I have been repetitive with the aim of stressing that better could be done in this regard. Therefore, I say that after the decision has been made to recruit someone, valiant efforts must be made to see that the worker be paid in a timely manner. It is about time for the PPP/C's Regime to respect the workers' rights. If the needs of the employee are met, it would be better for the society. Our public servants would continue to look for greener pastures if this issue is not resolved and not seriously and earnestly addressed. My point of contention is that this situation about workers having to wait three months for salary is pathetic and should not be as we are an oil producing state. The least this Regime could do is to respect employees' rights and improve their conditions of work and pay them their salaries on time, every time and all the time. I think it was the Prophet Mohamad who said: "Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries". In the *Bible*, Deuteronomy Chapter 24:15 states:

"You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it."

Another translation states:

"He is counting on it so that he does not cry against you to the Lord, and it becomes sin in you."

This afternoon, I am sending out a clarion call to this PPP/C Regime to do all the good it can, by all the means it can, in all the ways it can, in all the places it can, at all times that it can even with this new Integrated Financial Management and Accounting System (IFMAS) and Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) system to all the employees it can until the next election where the alternate and the next government in waiting would ensure a good life for all Guyanese, especially to our hard-working and deserving public servants. I, thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, to make her contribution. Hon. Chief Whip of the Opposition.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Sir, may I?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Chief Whip for the Opposition, proceed.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. Cde. Speaker, according to the list the Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, is next.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry, I now have to look for your updated list. I have the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

2.11 p.m.

Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, my apologies. There is a new list and the next speaker is the Hon. Member, Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zulfikar Mutapha. Hon. Minister, proceed.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by saying that this Government – the People’s Progress Party/Civic Government – respects the right of all workers and not only the public servants. I want the Hon. Member who just spoke to know that, as a Government, we take pride in the achievement of the workers of this country.

To put things into perspective, unless we forgot what took place in our country just over two years ago, it was the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government who imposed on our citizens many [*inaudible*]. They will think that they are the saviour for the workers of this country. Let me put the record straight, under the APNU/AFC Government, 1,972 Community Support Officers (CSOs) were dismissed. What does that mean to the village economy in the interior? It took out \$40 million from the village economy every single month and they are saying that they care for the workers right in this country. They do not want to remember that they put 7,500 sugar workers on the breadline, they broke up families, destroyed communities, caused many workers to commit suicide and they have pride coming to this honourable House to tell and to preach to us that they have so much concern and love for the public servants. We have love for all the workers of this country and we have work for all the workers of this country. I will just put the record straight about the public servants just now. I want to remind them of what they did when they were in government. They are coming now to preach and say that they love the workers of our country.

To date, we have reemployed not 7,500 sugar workers and not 1,972 CSOs, but we have reemployed thousands of people who had lost their jobs under the APNU/AFC Government –

thousands of people. Today, they are coming here with the audacity to say that workers are punished. We heard just now the Hon. Member from Linden talked about a lot of things about agriculture which he does not know anything about. For example, he spoke of Crop Insurance. I want to challenge the Hon. Member for him to go to any Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and find out if there is any Crop Insurance presently. There is none. Now, in the ministerial task force that was set up because of the work our President is doing we are now looking at Crop Insurance to many Caribbean countries. The point is that nothing exists. He was showing that other countries in CARICOM have Crop Insurance, so the point is that we, as a Government, are leading that charge in the Caribbean. The PPP/C Government is leading that charge in the Caribbean today and we will ensure that happens.

That is the type of leadership we were given because when we took Government two years ago, Guyana lost its place in the Caribbean in terms of agriculture. Its place was taken up by St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Today I am proud – not because I am the Minister of Agriculture – to be a citizen of our country because Guyana is leading the agriculture drive today and His Excellency, the President, is driving the agenda in the Caribbean. Today, the entire Caribbean is looking to Guyana for leadership in Agriculture, Barbados, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent and Grenadines and I can say that unlike the APNU/AFC who slaughtered the agriculture sector in this country. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(Inaudible)*] You are talking about the Bill. When Mr. Figueira was talking, he did not talk about the Bill. What did he speak about? He spoke about agriculture, he spoke about the pork industry and a number of things. I will respond to the Motion and to the issues that were mentioned before me. I will mention to the misinformation.

Countless public servants were dismissed, under the APNU/AFC, because of political affiliation. Many public servants were dismissed under the APNU/AFC. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** *(Inaudible)*] The facts are hurting. The caring Government of the APNU/AFC took away the schoolchildren grant of \$10,000 which we started in the year 2014. That is the caring nature of this Government. I want to remind you of what you did in Government and you are coming here today to show that you care for workers' right. You were the persons when in Government who took a 50% increase in wages and salaries and give the workers scum in this country. That is the record for all of you.

Under the APNU/AFC, we saw the addition of value-added tax (VAT) on electricity, water, and on basic and essential food items. Under the APNU/AFC, we saw unconscionable heights in

drainage and irrigation fees to our farmers who are the very people who feed us and they are coming here today and talking about the cost of living, and they are coming here and talking about the public servants. It is because of the caring nature of our Party and our Government, when we came into Office or Government in 2020, we immediately, removed all the burdensome taxes and measures imposed upon the people of our country. The inhumane taxes and measures crippled the livelihood of many ordinary Guyanese and business including the public servants of our country. We do not want to bring a motion to the house to promptly devise any strategy or talk about giving the public servants salaries early. There is the Hon. Member who has an amendment which we will support reasonably time... There is not policy in the Government to give workers within three months. We will ensure because reasonable time could mean one week; it could be one month. We will ensure that we protect the rights of the workers of this country which is the nature of our Government.

They are coming here and talking about cost of living. It seems that these people are living in a cocoon at the world. It seems as though they do not face the realities in the world. I will talk on what is taking place. We have had a pandemic for two and a half years; recently, we have had Ukraine and Russia war and we have seen what has taken place in the world. It is not only in Guyana. What is the reality in the world? I want to quote, in Turkey, the inflation rate today as I am speaking here is 54%; and in the United States of America (USA), for the first time for the last 11 years we have seen inflation increase by 8.6%. In the United Kingdom (UK), we have seen inflation increase by 9.4% in June. In the Caribbean, right here, we have seen an inflation in Jamaica by 11.9%, in the Barbados 9.3%, in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago 5.1%. I am proud to know that we in Guyana are doing well and countries around the Caribbean are looking at the model of Guyana. While they are having inflation, we are having growth and we will continue that trajectory to improve the economy of our country.

Our Government have been exceedingly responsive through its action in bring relief to the citizens of our country. The relief has taken the form of addressing the key pillars of food security. Food security, today, is one of the most important sector in our country. I want to tell you, when all of you raise your hands and give up Guyana, unlike you, we are consolidating what we have, we are expanding what we have, and we are going in new areas to diversify. Today, Guyana is not only consolidating and producing vegetables and fruits, but it is going into corn and soya; it is going

into high value crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and very shortly I am optimistic that it would also produce wheat in this part of the thing. That is the way that we have been going. We are not sitting on our laurels and wait for things to happen. We cause things to happen in this country. We cause things to happen in our country.

In making food more available for our citizens, in the face of serious conditions and those conditions that I have mentioned before, we have sought to provide essential production input such as fertiliser. The Government of Guyana would be making \$1 billion available in fertiliser to the farmers of our country – \$1 billion available to the farmers of our country. Let me go with the measures that we have put in place in *Budget 2020*. Beginning from September, 2020, which is just one month after we took Office, the Government began the distribution of over \$7.5 billion in COVID-19 grant to every household of this country. Every household of this country received \$25,000. That was the first grant and it seems that it is hurting all of you now because all of you cannot take it.

Now in 2021, ... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** We want sugar.] I will tell you about sugar just now. ...we expended over \$7.8 billion to bring flood relief to the citizens who suffered losses in the flood that we had in the year 2021. The sum of \$7.8 billion was distributed and the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, do not know what is taking place in Linden. There was over \$65 million distributed as flood relief to the people of Region 10. He does not know what is taking place because the people do not want him to represent them anymore.

In the *Budget 2022*, \$5 billion in relief measures was earmarked towards various interventions aimed at easing the burden of the rising cost of living. This is our Government making provision for each Guyanese to be assisted with high cost of living in Guyana. Let me go to the specific measures that we have taken over the last couple of months. The Government restored the Because We Care cash grant that was taken away by the APNU/AFC. It is because of that we have increased it from \$10,000 to \$15,000 and from \$15,000 to \$25,000 when the school uniform voucher is added to that every child who attends Public or Private school received \$30,000 from the Government of Guyana this year. The sum of \$30,000 which is what the APNU/AFC took away from the children of our country. As I am speaking here today, we are in the process of distributing \$25,000 to each riverine household across this country. The sum of \$100,000 under the Hon. Member, Minister

Dr. Vindhya Persaud's Ministry will we going to the disabled children in our country. Those are genuine measures to ease the cost of living in our country.

2.26 p.m.

There was a one-off payment of \$25,000 given to all public sector employees in December, 2021, placing \$2 billion in the hands of almost 60,000 employees. In August, 2021, there was another one-off grant of \$25,000 given to all old age pensioners, persons receiving public assistance and persons living with disability. Some 90,000 persons benefited to the tune of \$2.2 billion along with \$200 million of electricity credit provided to the most vulnerable groups. Does the Opposition remember it removed the subsidies for water and electricity from the pensioners of our country? There was an increase of old age pension from \$20,500 to \$25,000 monthly, providing a total benefit of \$4 billion annually to our senior citizens.

These are measures that we are putting in place and we have put in place to ensure that we ease the burden on the backs of the Guyanese people that was imposed by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) with the high cost of living. Also, we restored the year-end bonuses to the Disciplined Services. We gave a seven *per cent* increase to public servants and I could go on and on. The point is that we have not only given cash grants to these sectors and groups but what we have done is remove the burdens that the APNU/AFC placed on the backs of the Guyanese people. We took away value-added tax (VAT) on water and electricity. We took away VAT from agricultural machinery, pesticides and chemicals. We took away VAT on a number of basic items in our country, so that persons could now have more disposable income in his/her pockets. They have more money now to spend in their pockets.

With the reduction and the reversal of the drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges and land rental from \$15,000 to \$3,500, we have saved the farming community in this country \$1.8 billion more. They have \$1.8 billion more to spend in their pockets. As I said, there are a number of measures that we have put in place so the APNU/AFC should not come here and say that the public servants need their salaries in three months. We will ensure that we pay them in a reasonable time. It had five years in Government, what did it do? Its actions caused it to be over there. That is the result of the things that it did over the last five years in Government. We will continue to bring measures to alleviate the problems and ensure that we improve the standard of living for the people of our

country. For every category of workers in our country, we are giving them some form of help. We have given to the fishermen. We have given to the sugar workers the APNU/AFC dismissed. We ensure that we rehired a number of workers that were dismissed by the APNU/AFC Government. We ensure that we build back the village economies across this country. We are ensuring that the public servants today are more professional. People are doing their work better rather than have a party dictate for them what they have to do. That is the professionalism that we have brought back to the public service.

As I said today, the APNU/AFC is coming to this House saying that it loves workers, but it has destroyed the working population in this country. It has destroyed the infrastructure of our country. It caused our country to retrogress over the five years that it was in Government. It has made our country so poor that many people had to migrate. Today, we are seeing investments coming to this country. We are seeing more freedom to the people of our country. We are seeing that people are living in a free society. The APNU/AFC should be the last to talk about freedom in this country. It was the one that wanted to steal the government in front the world and the international community. We had the election in March, 2020, and we had to wait until August, 2020, for the results because of the APNU/AFC were insisting that it won the election without providing the statement of polls (SOPs) to this date. As I said, we have a proud record. Every single Minister and Official in this Government travelled the length and breadth of our country. Only this morning at 4 o'clock, I accompanied His Excellency, the President, to the fishing wharf at Meadow Bank because we concern about the conditions and the interest of the poor and the downtrodden in this country. That is why we are working overtime. We are in overdrive to increase and improve the living standard of these people. We will continue to do that rather than to come here in rhetoric. When the APNU/AFC had its chance in Government, it blew it up, it took 50% increase, corruption was rampant, it gave away state assets and today it is coming here to talk about its love for workers in this country.

We do not have to come and talk about the love for the workers of our country. Our actions are showing the love we have for the workers of this country. We are ensuring that the population of this country enjoys the benefit of the wealth of this country. As I said, we are easing the high cost of living measures and I repeat... There was the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, there was the Russian/Ukraine war and we have seen what the world went through, but I am proud that

Guyana has prudent management and good leadership. Our economy is sound, and we will continue to ensure that we put measures in places to improve the life of every single Guyanese. When my Colleagues visited Buxton, there were hundreds of people who turned out to listen to them to get the benefit of this Government. When the Vice-President led a team to Linden, thousands of persons attended that forum. Today, we are hearing that the APNU/AFC was trying to busload of persons from Victoria, Nabaclis and Golden Grove but they refused. Why did the people refuse? They refuse because they do not want anything to do with it anymore because they know what it has done to this country. The people will support the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government.

I want to repeat what I said, the COVID-19 cash grant granted to fisher folks, residents in the hinterland and riverain areas, sugar workers and farmers affected by flood, the increase of educational and school grant, uniform vouchers, removal of VAT on electricity and water and the increase of wages and bonus for the Disciplined Services were being implemented since 2020. These measures continue, today, to bring relief to the people of our country. The intervention made by the PPP/C Government are impactful and demonstrates the caring nature of our Government. It is not a case where we sat on our hands and did nothing. Everyday we are in the fields listening to the concerns and working to resolve the people's issues. This is what the Government is about. It is a people-oriented government. This is the hallmark of the PPP/C Government. As said earlier, the motion before this honourable House, I will support the amendments being put forward by the Hon. Member of the Ministry of Public Service. I know the amendments state:

“... reasonable time ...”

I think that is very appropriate for this motion. Let the Opposition not come here and raise the issue that it has all the concerns for the Guyanese people. The APNU/AFC should come here and say it is sorry for what it did to the Guyanese people for the last five years, and also apologise, repent to this nation and compliment the PPP/C Government for prudent management and good leadership. Thank you, very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson to make her contribution.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, thank you for acknowledging me. As national leaders, when we come to the National Assembly, we must come with truths and facts. Before I turn my attention to the actual motion, on the floor, which is being debated, I wish to turn my attention to a few points the Hon. Member who spoke before me alluded to. However, before I get into those points, it seems to me that the Hon. Member focus was more on the motion that is expected to come after this particular motion, that is, the high cost of living in Guyana that is on the Order Paper to be debated today. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Hon. Members, were provided with a letter indicating the motion would not be proceeded with at today's session but yet the Hon. Member stood before us not so long ago and glorified this August Assembly with the measures that the People's Progressive Party/Civic had put into place to address the high cost of living. The reality is real out there on the ground. I do not know where the Hon. Member is living, perhaps he is living on cloud nine. Therefore, I trust that you would use wisdom to ensure that the motion to address the high cost of living here in Guyana is debated in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I issued, yesterday, a notice to state that particular motion which would cause a financial implication on the Consolidated Fund which is the purview of the Cabinet to be withdrawn. I allow you some liberties because you refer to the issue of the impact of rising prices on the people. I have allowed a lot of latitude among all the speakers so far in that area because such statements do not make a call on the Consolidated Fund from this House. I would trust that you would stick to this motion. If you want to make references to the plight of persons, you are free to do that, but if you are going to insist on the issues that I have ruled on, addressed and cause notice to be given, then I will have to ask you to resume your seat. Please proceed. You will get back your time.

Ms. Ferguson: I think you missed the point I was making. The Hon. Member spoke to the issue of measures and high cost of living. I was actually highlighting the fact that perhaps there is need for us to proceed with the ...

Mr. Speaker: We could engage in a debate, but I am not going to engage in a debate with any Member on the floor on a matter I have ruled on. There are other mechanisms one could invoke to deal with that, but I would not engage in that conversation with any Member on this floor.

2.41 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, let us not fight. I will carry on. Before I go to the actual motion that is before us this afternoon, I wish to make reference to a few points the Hon. Member before me raised. The Hon. Member said, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government brought hardship on Guyanese. However, I will share our track record since he shared the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) track record.

We give Guyanese, the good life and Guyanese now have the hardship. We give Guyanese no police state, Guyanese now seeing the return of a police state. We right sided the sugar industry while the People's Progressive Party/Civic closed La Bonne Intention (LBI) estate, closed Diamond Estate and closed the Enmore's Estate. We give public servants 77% between 2015, and 2019. What did the Government give to them in 23 years? It give three *per cent* and five *per cent* and what else? He spoke about us reversing the Because We Care Cash Grant that it instituted in 2014. Let me remind the Hon. Member and his Colleagues across there about a Cabinet decision signed...

Mr. Norton: A point of order Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Norton: I want to refer you to Standing Order 45 (c), in which it states:

“shall maintain silence while another Member is speaking and shall not interrupt, except in accordance with these Standing Orders...”

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Members, kindly give the Hon. Leader of the Opposition some respect.

Mr. Norton: While I accept that they could be heckling reasonably. What is happening here especially by the Hon. ‘Disruptive’ Member is unacceptable and therefore, I hope that in some regard you will maintain order in keeping with the Standing Orders. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I fully endorse and thank you for that observation and I would again caution all Members of this Assembly of the shouting across the room. This is not heckling; this is now degrading into something else. Let us now do better. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, I owe you a lot of time.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. The APNU/AFC brought social cohesion. What do we see? A divided cohesion in our country. The APNU/AFC reduced the 16% value-added tax (VAT) to 14% VAT of which the PPP/C instituted on the Guyanese people in 2007. What else we did the APNU/AFC do? We reversed the cost in travel at the Berbice River crossing bridge. What did the PPP/C do? It imposed a high cost in travel on the people in Berbice. We brought the Bertram Collins College to the public servants. What did the PPP/C give them? It abandoned the Bertram Collins College, when it came into office in 2020. We gave the people of Guyana a no narco-state and now we have seen the return of a narco-state in this country. We did not give the people of Guyana the ‘Su-Gate’ scandal, but we received the ‘Su-Gate’ scandal which all Guyanese are fully aware of.

I now turn my attention to the motion before the honourable House. I rise to add my contribution and support to the motion and payment of first salary to public servant’s in in one month, moved by my colleague Hon. Member Tabitha Sarabo-Halley. Sir, the core issue the motion is seeking to address is a flawed system which has been a bug bearer to the public service and public servants. I could only guess what took place when the PPP/C came to Government in October, 1992. Many attempts, Sir, were made to wipe out the public service by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. It corrupted the public service just as Su and his landlord would have done every other sector in this country. Besides the ‘Su-Gates’ scandal, this is what the APNU/AFC coalition Government inherited. It is disheartening to hear the Hon. Member Ms. Parag stated the APNU/AFC Government did absolutely nothing for the public servants.

This is far from the truth, but I could understand the PPP/C because it lacks decency and integrity. Therefore, it cannot help themselves. Sir, growing up as a young girl, I always heard my grandmother and mother admonishing myself and siblings, to speak the truth it will always set you free from sin. Therefore, my encouragement to the Hon. Member is to all time speak the truth. Let me remind the installed regime of the coalition’s Government track record where the public service is concerned. Sir, a Commission of Inquiry into the public service was done, and yes, we were on track in implementing the recommendations set out in that report. Yes, we commenced modernising the public service to make it a professional one. Public Servants were trained and enjoyed 77% under the coalition Government and better improved working conditions. I put this question to Hon. Parag who did a poor presentation during her contribution to the debate. Ms.

Parag is now the sitting installed Minister of Public Service approaching two years, could you report to this Assembly whether you have seen the report and what recommendations have you implemented thus far from the Commission of Inquiry report? Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Hon. Member is living in a bubble.

How could the Hon. Member state that the PPP/C Government value public servants? Are they serious? When it has launch a heavy attack on public servants from 2020 and continued to do so daily by not treating them fairly and with equity. Hon. Parag do you recall the famous campaign and manifesto slogan by the PPP/C Government which stated:

“Public Servants will be paid 50% salary increase”

When my colleagues and I from this side of the Assembly, advocated in 2020, 2021 and 2022 during the debates of these years for public servants to be paid salary increases no less than 10%. During the budget debates for 2022, in this House, we called out the Government for not honouring its campaign promises. The Hon. Member took umbrage of this and went publicly to say the 50% was never a campaign promise. It was a photoshop. These were your words Hon. Parag. Please do not come here playing pity for public servants when you have shown disregard, discontent, disrespect and have discriminated against the hardworking public servants in this country. This is what public servants were treated with. In 2020, rather than the Government giving them an increase, what did it give to them? A one-off \$25,000 for Christmas. A minimum of \$5,000 in some quarters in the public service to treat perhaps their families at Christmas. It got 0% increase in salary. What did the Government give to them in 2021, when we advocated in this House for nothing less than 10%? What did the Government give to them? A seven *per cent* taxable increase in salary and the Hon. Member spoke about her valuing public servants. The Hon. Member needs to wake up.

The unfair treatment of public servants is what this regime have done for other categories of workers. The sugar workers benefitted \$250,000 cash grant plus they got the \$25,000 Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) cash grant plus they got the seven *per cent* increase in salary and yet our country is short of sweet sugar. The other category of persons benefitting tremendously, the Indigenous people. Last week we heard that the Government is going to inject some additional \$3 billion into Indigenous communities. What are we doing for Public Servants, Hon. Ms. Sonia

Parag? We on this side of the Assembly are not averse to our people getting assistance from Government but cash pay outs must be done structurally where all Guyanese must enjoy the pie and the patrimony of their homeland. This must be done with equity.

The only whereas clause in the motion, my colleague Hon. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley eloquently shared experiences of persons whose willingness to work in the public service with high expectations of receiving their first pay cheque within one month only to be disappointed that they will be paid three months after the first day of employment. I could share similar sentiments during my tenure as Minister in Government where persons complained bitterly of not receiving salaries in a timely manner and Sir, in most cases when the three months are up, many of the persons have not received their salaries because you know what? They are told that their documents have been misplaced. The situation is an unfortunate and untidy one and the onus is on the Government to find ways of addressing the flaws within the system. Earlier in her contribution to the debate, Hon. Nima Flue-Bess advanced a workable solution which the Government should seek to implement and have the entire public service modernised and make the current *status quo* obsolete. I guess there are precedents around the Caribbean region the Government could use.

2.56 p.m.

However, when it comes to matters of this nature, the uncaring and unconcerned People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government will not spend moneys to make the public service less bureaucratic. Sir, the moneys are spent on infrastructural development on the fantasy to excite Guyanese that hotels 'x' and 'y' will be constructed. Who is this to attract, Sir? We are aware that studies were not done to determine the cost-benefit analysis that these hotels will bring.

Let us parallel this motion to what is currently happening in our nation regarding the high cost of living. When last have you ventured into the marketplace, Sir? It is there one will find ordinary public servants navigating through the markets to purchase basic commodities. Now, in this oil-rich economy of Guyana, it is an absurdity to tell a youngster entering the public service, that he/she has to wait some three months for a salary. The question we all must ask ourselves is – how he/she is making out? Again, the system is egregious and must be fixed. This is no time to throw the blame, play the game, cast aspersions, and play politics with our hardworking public servants. Hon. Ms. Parag, it is the public servants who make you and your Colleagues look good. It is the

public servants who diligently and dutifully report for duties and give their services since they find it a joy. Have you paused to ascertain how these persons get to work daily? Rather, you have done them a disservice.

I now turn your attention to the single be it resolved clause in the motion, I earnestly believe that the contents contained therein are reasonable. It is simply requesting of the regime to ensure that public servants are paid their first paycheck within one month. My heart pained when I heard the speaker before me saying that there is an amendment to the motion, and the amendment will now be asking for a reasonable time. What is a reasonable time? This reminds me of the report that was done during the recount when the observers there said, reasonably credible. The word, reasonable seems to be a very loosed word for the Government.

It is simply requesting of the regime to ensure that public servants are paid his/her first paycheck within one month, Sir. Hon. Members, Ms. Parag and Dr. Singh, is this not doable? Since I believe that you both will have challenges here, well, my simple and straightforward response is, yes. I can assure the Members that all resources to get this done are available. All the Members have to do is click *Google* and the information will show up. Therefore, as I prepare to bring my contribution to this debate to a conclusion, my appeal to the Government is – since it has withdrawn \$83.3 billion from the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) with a focus on infrastructural development – consideration should be given to invest moneys from the fund to improve and modernise the public service to make it user friendly and less bureaucratic. Sir, I call on the Government to support the motion on its merit and take into consideration the recommendations and suggestions advanced by my Colleagues on this side of the House.

Finally, let us prove to the people of Guyana that we can work together to make life easy for them. May God's blessings be with us. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson. I now call on the Hon. Member Ms. Hastings-Williams to make her contributions.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We were in Government, and it is recorded that the Granger Administration began addressing and working on the reform of the public sector. There is a *Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service of Guyana* Report with recommendations to bear this fact. It was our Government that established the Bertram Collins College of the Public

Service for all the young people who were interested in becoming public servants. Maybe someone from the other side of the House could explain to the nation and the many young people why the programme was discontinued.

Hon. Minister, Ms. Parag, and all of us in this House are aware that this has been happening before the year 2015 and beyond. We can come to this House, year after year, stand here to deliberate for long hours about what we are doing for our public servants here and there... Handing out cash grants of \$25,000, \$150,000, \$30,000, and \$250,000. We can come here and talk all day but as long as we do not fix the system, it will not solve the problem. The \$25,000 placed in a young person's hand, whether it is a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Community Development Officer (CDO), an entrepreneur, or whatever you call them, will not solve the problem. The National Toshias Conference (NTC) just concluded, and whilst the \$45,000 is welcoming, I must remind this House that the Toshias do not have a turn-on and turn-off time; they work 24/7. They are the ministers of their villages and satellite villages. When there is an education problem, they go to the Toshias. For domestic violence, they go to the Toshias. For transportation problems, they go to the Toshao. For health problems, they go to the Toshias who are the Chiefs of those communities. If may I place on record that the Toshias have families to maintain, and they are public servants, as I said for the communities. I am placing on record at this time of the day that the Toshias are asking for at least the minimum wage of a public servant. Why could they not be given \$70,000 at least as public servants who control and look after the welfare of their communities?

We on this side of the House are proud and will remain proud of what we did as the representatives for public servants whilst we were in Government. Let me remind this House of what we did for our public servants between the years 2015 and 2018. Persons working for up to \$100,000 were given a seven *per cent* increase. Persons who earned between \$100,000 and \$299,999 were given a 6.5% increase. Persons who worked for between \$300,000 to \$499,999 were given a five *per cent* increase. Persons who earned between \$500,000 to \$699,999 were given a three *per cent* increase. Persons who earned between \$700,000 to \$799,999 were given a two *per cent* increase. Persons who earned \$800,000 to \$999,999 were given a one *per cent* increase. Persons who earned \$1 million and above were given 0.5%. I want to remind this House that that was progressive and equitable [*inaudible*]. When we talked about equity and equality, we increased the persons' salaries

at the least and they received the most percentage of an increase. In 2019, we give our public servants tax-free retroactive salary increases of nine *per cent*.

I agree and I support fully that payment of the first salary to public servants must be done within a month and it is more so relevant at this time. Standing here in front of you, is a person who was a public servant for more than 33 years. I have served this country for more than 33 years and I do not regret being a public servant. When I started to teach, I had to wait six months to receive my salary. I continued to go to school day after day with my siblings to look after, being the eldest child, because my mother was no more. My mother was deceased when I was 14 years old and yet, I stood there for the children in my community. When I became a trained teacher in the 1990s – we all will remember who was in Government at that time in 1994, 1996, and 1997 – I had to wait nine months before I received my first salary. It was nine long months and that is the experience for many of our public servants in the hinterland. Many of our public servants, whether they be forestry guides from the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), workers from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), policemen, teachers, nurses, nursing assistants, or doctors, they go through similar experiences. It is very painstaking. Do you know why? It is because of their determination and commitment that they continue to turn out to work daily. When they are paid, eventually after a long time, we all know what happens, moneys have to be paid back to the grocery or the village shops because the teacher had to eat and provide for his/her family.

3.11 p.m.

The nurses have to eat and some of them have to travel distances. Many of our teachers who are trained, and nurses and doctors, go through similar experiences. I am in full support of this motion that is before the House. The public servant must be paid within one month. Why is this so? It is because I do not know what “reasonable” means. The public servants are listening. We may have been told that they will be paid within “reasonable” time. Perhaps, the radio operator there, if he could have announced and ensure that the public servants are paid on time for the work they do, that would have made much more sense to the citizens of this country.

We cannot segregate high cost of living and the timely payment of salaries to our public servants. Imagine, a doctor leaves Corentyne. Because of his/her commitment, he/she trains in Cuba then

have to leave to serve in the hinterland, which is very much welcoming to the residents in the hinterland, then to be met there with the high cost of living. I can give you some examples. The last time I spoke in this House, even though we are exempting tax from cement, cement board and other construction materials, if a teacher decides to build his or her home in Kamarang, Chinowieng or Philippi in Region No.7, where I hail from, to land a bag of cement only to Kamarang will cost at least \$14,000 to \$15,000 for a bag. Do you know why? Air is the only means of transportation from here to Kamarang, to Chi Chi and there. At present, a freight of about \$182 approximately for a pound. If you are going to take in 10 bags of cement, you will see what that teacher or nurse will go through, Mr. Speaker.

The cost of an egg is between \$100-\$120. To provide protein, as simple as an egg for family. Imagine, a teacher or a nurse just turn out to work and she cannot afford to buy that for her family to provide that basic essential. Mr. Speaker, who knows, maybe the Indigenous people may turn from cropping cassava bread. Maybe, they are now looking to plant hemp or maybe most of them may become Rastafarians because they cannot afford to buy chicken, eggs, beef and all these things for their families.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Speaker, as I stand today, it is always a burning issue, and we are all representatives of our people. We need to work together. It is time we stop throwing who was with Granger, Granger girl, Granger Minister, Granger Government, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government and A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government (APNU/AFC) Government. We need to work together to move this and to correct what is existing in hindering our public servants to at least enjoy a good life. We should be ashamed. We all should be ashamed. Being an oil producing community or an oil producing country, we have withdrawn so much. The Bank of Guyana's report will show you how much moneys we have withdrawn as profit oil, as royalty. Our public servants, who are the backbone of this country, need consideration. They need to be paid on time and they need to be paid salaries that will allow their families to have an enjoyable life like anyone else.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to also place on record that, in correcting this system that exists presently, we have to come up with policies and we have to implement strategies. I always give credit where credit is due. I will never stand to say that you have done nothing for our public servants. The APNU/AFC had done something for the public servants, and we look forward to the PPP/C Government to continue to do better things for our public servants, I call on all of us, as I call on the Government who is sitting in the Chair. I am in full support that, with no hesitation, unanimously, we will support, and we must support the payment of first salary to our public servants within one month. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Mr. Speaker, let me say from the outset that the matter we are discussing, I think is a matter that is important and should be important to all of us. From the Government side, let me say that there is a recognition that this is a matter that must be fixed. Secondly, let me say that the matter to be fixed is not a political matter, it is an administrative matter. What we see happening here all afternoon, whilst some Members over there are saying let us work to fix it on one hand, they are doing their darndest to politicise the matter.

In some instances, some of them are politicising the matter in ethnic terms. If you agree, like we agree, this is a matter that should be fixed, and it behoves all of us to ensure that we can work together to have the matter fixed in the interest of the public servants who my Colleagues across the aisle say they love so much. The debate now has spun on one month and my Colleague has indicated the amendment that speaks to “reasonable time”. Some persons across there are asking what is “reasonable time”? You can put any time in my view. Unless we attempt to fix the administrative system that will allow for timely payment, all that is happening here this afternoon is just chatter. It is just people trying to play to the gallery, people playing politics.

Importantly, Mr. Speaker, I heard many persons on the Opposition side who were Ministers of Government speak to this motion. The Hon. Karen Cummings, former Minister of Public Health, while she bemoaned the problem, she did not utter one sentence as to what she did as Minister to help fix it. The mover of the motion, same thing. The Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams who just spoke before me and said that she was Minister of everything, not a sentence or a word to say I attempted to have this matter fixed because I recognised this matter was not one that did not hurt public servants. That is the issue. Why when my Colleagues on this side speak to the motion, they are making the point. What is the point? I have said before what the APNU/AFC is noted for.

When they were in Government, they were the dullest dull, but when they are out of Government, they are the brightest lights – brightest lights. In Opposition, they will come here and pontificate about everything that can be fixed and how it should be fixed. They were in Government for five years. They spoke passingly about a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) that they established. None of the Hon. Members could say what ‘we’ implemented from our own CoI, not one of them. The recommendations were with your Government for four years. You spent large sums of money to have a CoI done. *Yuh see*, the ‘market’ is starting up there because it hurts. The ‘market’ will get louder just now. You went into Government, you said you recognised that there were deficiencies within the public service and how they were managed. Therefore, to advise yourself, you go and establish a competent commission of inquiry, as you said. This report – the attempt was to help us to understand the issues and, secondly, to fix the problems and I can go. The Ministry of Education, same thing. CoI, lots of money and yet to see the light of the day and they will come here and pontificate about everything that is wrong with education. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), they love CoIs, but after the Report, n-o-t-h-i-n-g. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] That was your stewardship. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] Okay, yea, yea, yea, okay, [*inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker, you have many of the speakers over there who spoke. The Hon. Jermaine Figueira pontificating about what should be done for farmers in Region 10. When he had the power to fix it for farmers in Region 10, do you know what he did? The only farmer he fixed was himself, to set up a pig farm. He was not finished with that. He went on to get a spread of land in the last days of the Administration, during the five months. For the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) to transfer to him and the other Minister who used to be the Minister of Housing. They care so much about the people. That is the annoyance if you all want to know why we are so annoyed when you all speak. That is the annoyance. You have the gumption. The Jewish people would say *yuh have da chutzpah*, then you come into this place and pontificate. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] You started the politicking. I am responding to you. I am responding to you. You do not like it? You do not like the pontification; you do not like the politicking?

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Hamilton: You do not like the politicking? You should have spoken with Mr. Figueira when you said that.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker...

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Mr. Shuman]: Hon. Minister... Yes, Mr. Figueira.

3.26 p.m.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, I stand on Standing Order 46, where the Hon. Minister is imputing negative motives against me on a matter that the Chief Justice has ruled on. I suggest, Hon. Speaker, that you ask the Hon. Member to refrain from making those allegations and remove them from the record.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, one minute please. Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, could you clarify the Standing Order on which you rose?

Mr. Figueira: [*Inaudible.*]

Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, you may continue.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, let me repeat...

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, let me repeat...

Mr. Figueira: Standing Order 46(1). The Minister has imputed negative comments towards my name, a matter that is before the courts and is still *sub judice*. However, the Chief Justice has ruled on one of the cases relating to what the Minister has just brought to this House. He is grossly incorrect and is misleading this House, Sir.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member Figueira, the Standing Order under 46 (1), if you wish to clarify...

Mr. Figueira: Standing Order 45(5). I stand corrected.

Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 46(1) is very distinct.

Mr. Figueira: I am correcting myself, Hon. Speaker. But the issue still exists; the Minister is imputing negative wordings towards my name, a matter that is still *sub judice*.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Mr. Figueira, there is also no Standing Order 45 (5). Hon. Minister, you may continue.

Mr. Figueira: It is Standing Order 45 (d), Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, please continue.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I have said and let me repeat: the Members in the Opposition always wonder why, when they speak, we have this annoyance. It is because, as I have said, they come to this place, and if someone did not know them or did not know they were in Government and hear them speak, believe me, they would believe that these are saints that fell from heaven. They would believe that, because they try their darndest. I give the Opposition Members credit for this. With a straight face and a bare face, they will be in your face making comments and saying things that are untrue. It is the most brazen thing I have seen in my political life. I have been in this National Assembly since 1998 and I have never seen a crop of Members of Parliament who were so shameless, who come forward, speak, and pontificate, having no shame in this regard. That is the annoyance. Outside of this National Assembly, that is the annoyance of the Guyanese people when they look at you on the television. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, just spoke, and she veered into the territory of corruption, a person who gifted herself bangles and bedsheets from Government funds. This is the most brazen thing...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to put before this House and the Guyanese people why they must not at all believe...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, as I understand parliamentary procedures, if the Member rises on a Point of Order, the proceedings must stop instantly, and...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I am trying to...

Mr. Norton: [*Inaudible.*]

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I am trying to listen to the Leader of the Opposition, so please permit him an opportunity so that I can get his point explicitly clear.

Mr. Norton: Once a Point of Order is made, as I understand it, the Speaker has to stop, and the Member is invited to raise the Point of Order and state under which Standing Order. In this regard, I thought Hon. Member Ferguson was raising a Point of Order, and she should be allowed to.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I thank you. For the consumption of all my Hon. Colleagues in this House, the Standing Orders are very explicit in that the person that catches the Speaker's eye shall be given an opportunity. The first person, in that sense. The second point being that when you rise on a Point of Order, you must explicitly and clearly state on which Point of Order you are rising. Barring any of those, it becomes really difficult for the Speaker to enforce the Standing Order, *per se*. It does not permit someone to stand on a Point of Order and then having to go through an encyclopaedia to find the point. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order. Standing Order 41 (6):

“No Member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly.”

I am submitting that here we are having a case of a Member doing just that, and that Member should be made to desist. Thank you.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, one moment. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Standing Orders are very explicit. I need not repeat them. I think we are all capable of reading what the Standing Orders are saying on how we stand on a Point of Order. Hon. Minister Hamilton, you have the floor.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, let me say, and I am sure that the records of this National Assembly... The Leader of the Opposition was not around these parts of town at that time. The evidence was brought to this National Assembly, receipts and invoices about Hon. Member Ferguson's bedsheets, bangles, and bracelets, and it was never contested. The *Hansard* will show that. I do not plan to continue with this.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hamilton: But just to make the point...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hamilton: I am trying to make the point here.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Anette Ferguson, you have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand on a Point of Order, and I refer you to Standing Order 41(6). This is what Standing Order 41(6) states:

“No Member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly.”

I wish to state for the records of the National Assembly that I, Annette Ferguson, who served as a Minister of Government, was never given bangles, was never given bedsheets, and was never given beds. Since the Hon. Member made reference to those items, I am challenging the Hon. Member to bring the evidence to the National Assembly. This is because the Hon. Member is not learning. I have him in the courts.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, if you have evidence of the Hon. Member having those things, please lay it before the National Assembly. If not...

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, I am not done.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: If not, Sir...

Mr. Hamilton: The evidence was already laid in the National Assembly.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, I have not completed what I was saying.

Mr. Hamilton: I will submit the evidence.

Deputy Speaker: And until such time as that evidence is submitted, we will refrain from imputing improper motive to the Hon. Member. Thank you.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, facts, in my view, are not imputation. Let me move on. I was saying, the annoyance that the Guyanese people have against my Friends across the aisle is that, for all of the things they did, they will stand up brazenly before the National Assembly and the Guyanese people and they try to say to the Guyanese people that this is factual and that this is truth, we all have it wrong. It is the most brazen thing. [**An. Hon. Member:** *Inaudible.*] Please, Opposition Leader, you know that I am capable of dealing with any *kavakamite* in the People's National Congress (PNC), so please leave me alone and let me move on and deal with the motion.

The people across the aisle, the Opposition Members, they loved the workers so much that when they went into Office, one of the first things they did was to bring an end to the Ministry of Labour. One of the first things these people who love workers so much did was abandon the Ministry of Labour and disband it. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), from since August, 2020, had to restore, re-establish and expand the Ministry of Labour. We are the ones who care about workers. That is the evidence; that is the real issue. Those are the facts of this discussion. You love workers so much and you saw it fit to bring an end to a most important Ministry in national development. You thought it was not that important. Let me say this for the chanter, whichever one of them is chanting there: importantly, when you are discussing workers and their rights, it is not just about salary and wages. That is why you all are stuck in the past. The issue about their development, the issue about human development, training and development of workers, those are important issues to argue and debate.

3.41 p.m.

Issues about safety and the health of workers, issues about proper housing for workers, and issues about proper healthcare for workers. That is people who are serious. That is how one discusses public servants. That is how you discuss the training and retraining of workers, human development issues, and the protection of the rights of workers. You cannot come here and glibly say, okay, let us ensure that in one months' time the workers would get their salaries. If we are serious and honest people, there are other important issues that we have to, together, ensure that when we talk about the protection of the rights of workers and their constitutional right... I heard

that the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, read a book. My dearest, you should have read it when you were a minister, not come now as a Member of Parliament (MP) and read it. It would have given you some guidance on how to deal with your employees who worked under you, and maybe you could have shared it around to your other Colleagues. My good friend, Mr. Figueira, MP, first time, second time, and the Leader of the Opposition now – he would tell you how much his heart and soul, and his belly are in Linden. Ask any one of them what programme or programmes have they taken to Linden to ensure that people's life could be developed? What educational development programme have you taken? Your constituent...

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, if I may?

Mr. Hamilton: ... and you would pontificate about all of the votes you...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member asked what I have done...

Mr. Hamilton: He would get his time to speak. I do not know what is happening.

Mr. Norton: On a Point of Clarification...*[Inaudible]*

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member...

Mr. Hamilton: You are speaking in this debate, Mr. Norton. You will get your chance to speak. Why are you jumping up like a peacock all of the time?

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister of Labour, you have the floor.

Mr. Hamilton: I was saying that the Leader of the Opposition should not be jumping up like a peacock all of the time. Your name is on the list to speak, and you will have your time to speak. I was saying that they disbanded the Ministry of Labour. Today, they will come and talk about workers and what we are doing for them. There is a Department under the Ministry of Labour called the Board of Industrial Training (BIT). Let me give you the evidence to show how much they cared about the people. Under the APNU/AFC, the average amount of persons they trained in technical skills was between 1,300 to 1,500 persons per year. The People's Progressive

Party/Civic came into Government in August, 2020, and when 2020 finished, we had already trained 2,000 persons. In 2021, we increased that by over 50% by training 3,086 persons.

Right now, as I speak, just last week Monday, I was in Linden, Region 10. Whilst 179 young people assembled at the Linden Technical Institute to get training and development in skills, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition was speaking to some chairs across the river. Do you know what that is saying to us? People's concern are not political rhetoric and nonsensical discourse. Their interest is about their development. That is their interest, and you all are yet to understand that over there. Region 10 – and I need to make these points so that people would understand when they ask what we are doing. In Kwakwani, 124 persons graduated last year. Do you know what one of them testified? For the first time he or she had a BIT graduation and people trained in Kwakwani – your constituent Mr. Aubrey Norton, Leader of the Opposition.

Presently, as I speak, about 400 young men and women are being trained in Region 10 in specific skillsets so that they could participate in the economy and the development of this country. [**Mr. Norton:** But *whey de wuk deh?*] You *gon* see, near sighted, no sighted. *Whey de wuk deh?* If you are building 1,000 houses, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you would have to have masons and carpenters, so you would have train them now. Do you not understand? If you are discussing oil and gas employment for our people, one of the fundamental skills there is welding and fabrication. Those concepts, apparently, you do not understand so you are asking *whey de wuk deh?* The work is all around.

In some of the languages I heard: is this conversation about discrimination? That is the reason why I am painting this picture here, so that people could get an understanding as to what is happening. My good Colleague, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, could come here and stand, and make the same arguments. The Minister of Education, and all of the Ministers could come here and put before you the facts about how in the last two years we have been making things possible for the development of the lives of the people in this country. That is the fact of the matter. Do not come and shed crocodile tears and alligator tears for the public servants. The public servants are wise enough. The issues that the Hon. Mr. Mustapha raised when he spoke about the measures of Government, those measures impact positively on public servants and all workers. It is this non-sightedness. When the Hon. Priya Manickchand, the Minister of Education, made available the 'Because We Care' cash grant, many of the children are children of public servants. The failure of

the APNU/AFC is because you all were so blind. You all had no understanding about the connection of government, one sector to the other, and that was your failure in everything you did. The Hon. Ms. Ferguson stood up and asked me to present the evidence.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, in order for you to ask more questions, you will need a five-minutes extension.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, I ask kindly that the Hon. Member be given 10 minutes to conclude his presentation.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand, the most the House could grant is five minutes.

Ms. Manickchand: Five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson asked me to present the evidence about the bangles and bracelet. The Hon. Member stood there not so long ago and said, deliberately, that the People's Progressive Party/Civic's Manifesto promised that it would give the public servants 50% when we got into government. That is a total untruth, fabrication and all of the other words that I cannot use in this Parliament. That brazenly knowing that to be untrue and knowing that to be false... [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible.*)] Look, the man who block up the road is saying that too.

As I said when I started, the Government of Guyana recognises that this matter must be fixed. The Government of Guyana will fix this matter like we have fixed so many other matters that you failed to fix. If my Colleagues on the opposite side are serious about this matter, they would allow the amendment that was put forward by the Hon. Member, the Minister of the Public Service. The Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams talked about us working together for the benefit of the public servants. Accept the amendment and let us work together for the benefit of the public servants. Other than that, all you will be doing all afternoon is trying to politicise a matter that only could be fixed administratively. At least you are here.

If the Hon. Member who piloted the motion is so serious as a former Minister of the Public Service and you have repented, you should accept the amendment and let us work together as the Hon. Madam Hastings-William said, ‘for the interest of the public servants’. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes. Hon. Members, there has been a change that was not recorded in the Speaker’s notes, so I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir.

3.56 p.m.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to support the motion, as moved by my colleague, relative to the payment of first salaries to public servants in one month. [**Mr. Nandall:** You started calmly, Ms. Walton-Desir]. You know what that means. Mr. Speaker, I want to draw our attention to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. I want to specifically draw our attention to the preambular paragraphs which state:

“Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,”

Mr. Speaker, I ask this afternoon, why are we here? Why do we have a Parliament? It is because it is intended that we, as elected representatives of the people, should uphold this and should make sure that the rule of law is followed so that mankind, as a last resort, does not rebel and have recourse to tyranny. It means that when we come into this honourable House, unless it is contrary to some particular Standing Order, some norm or some rule that is set out in the Standing Order, we must be allowed to ventilate our matters. This morning, as a Member of this Assembly, I sought clarification on a notice that was sent to me. The Hon. Speaker of this House directed that my microphone should be muted. If that is not an attack on freedom of speech and my freedom of

expression, I do not know what is. If this House is not going to be complicit in the degradation of the rule of law and complicit in the death of democracy, we must urgently change course. It is unbelievable to me, as a first-time parliamentarian, that this is where we are. The people of Guyana deserve better. We have asked for a motion to be moved, a motion that simply states:

“WHEREAS in Guyana, and countries around the world, continue to experience a tremendous health and socio-economic (cost of living) impact from the Coronavirus 19 pandemic: raging in Guyana, over a thousand tragic deaths so far to an alarming increase in the cost of living;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Guyana, in its efforts to cushion the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, provided a one-off twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) COVID-19 cash grant.

AND WHEREAS there has been a substantial increase in the cost of essential food items, some doubling or nearly doubling from pre-pandemic levels, including those grown ...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, there was a ruling made this morning in relation to that motion. I will ask that you stick to the motion at hand.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, the ruling related to the motion being tabled. There is nowhere in the Standing Orders or in any rule of procedure that states I cannot quote this motion. I am not laying the motion in the Parliament. I am quoting words from an Order Paper. There is no rule that says that I cannot. To that extent, I am going to continue. It says:

“AND WHEREAS the Government of Guyana provided a 7% taxable increase in salary to Public Servants ...”.

It goes on to state...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, there is a motion that is currently before this House and any debate has to be directed to the substance of that motion.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, I am not yet at the end of my debate and, therefore, you cannot conclude that it does not relate to the substance. If you allow me to finish, I will be happy to show you how it relates. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, that we have asked:

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Government of Guyana promptly devise a strategy or plan to address the high cost of living for Guyanese ...

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Government of Guyana makes provision for EACH Guyanese above the age of eighteen (18 years, to be assisted with the high cost of living ...”

Mr. Speaker, I stood in the House this morning, as I am entitled to do, to ask the Hon. Speaker to clarify why this motion was disallowed. As a Member of this National Assembly, I received correspondence late yesterday afternoon which stated:

“After further review, the Hon. Speaker has found that the motion published on Notice Paper 178 (Increase in the Cost of Living for Guyanese) dated 1st June, 2022, contravenes the Standing Orders”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a logical question – because I am able to think – to want to know what Standing Order this contravenes. It does not indicate here. I think it is a reasonable question, since reasonable seems to be the word that the Members on the other side want to use, for me to be advised as to which Standing Order it contravenes. I am aware that the letter that was sent to the Hon. Member stated that the motion was disallowed because it contravenes article 171 of the Constitution. It being that I am big, and I could read, I went to article 171 of the Constitution. This is what article 171 (2) states:

“Except on the recommendation or with the consent of the Cabinet signified by a Minister, the Assembly shall not - ...”

And it gives a set of criteria. The Hon. Member was advised that it was because the request makes a charge on the Consolidated Fund. I just read the text of that motion and nowhere in it does it seek to make a charge on the Consolidated Fund. It simply asks us, as responsible people and as the elected representatives of our people, to come here and devise a strategy. It is completely offensive to my comprehension of the English language and to the comprehension of the English language of probably a Grade Six student, for me to be told that we, as Members of Parliament, cannot

devise a strategy to bring ease to the woes that we, as Guyanese, are facing because it offends some constitutional provision that has no application whatsoever to the issue at hand.

That attitude and that disposition is why we are complicit in the death of democracy in this House. Our people deserve better. To sit and to listen to the manner in which the speakers on the other side make a mockery of cost of living...as if it does not concern the life of every Guyanese. We ought to hang our heads in shame in this National Assembly. We just sat at a meal where we had all kinds of curries – duck and whatever – and right now, there are Guyanese who cannot feed their families. And you dare to come here and talk about who did what, and when, instead of getting down to the business of the people of Guyana the way they expect us to do. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. The Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, came with some cute thing about repentance. It would have been cute if our people were not starving. You come here, as the Minister of Agriculture, and you cannot tell me where I could find a pound of brown sugar to buy. You speak to everything else, expect your portfolio's responsibilities. You think it is cute when our people are suffering.

We have to be serious in this House. We blame the war in Ukraine, and we blame the COVID-19 pandemic as though Guyana is the only country besieged by these two issues. Every country in the world has suffered the fallout of it. Every country in the world has suffered. What you see progressive leaders doing is getting down to business, taking care of their people, and announcing proper relief so that people could eat. It is not an excuse; it is a lack of leadership on the part of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). They continue to obfuscate, and they continue to distract with their red herrings so that the people of Guyana would be fooled. The people of Guyana are not going to be fooled. You had better pay attention to Sri Lanka and Suriname. You had better pay attention. We have not had a sitting of this National Assembly for in excess of 60 days. We have a Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance who says he is monitoring the situation. As the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, your people are starving, our people cannot eat, and you are monitoring the situation. Do you know what? He exists in a vacuum. He exists in a bubble because his phone bill is paid, his light bill is paid, his water bill is paid, his groceries are bought and his transportation is paid, all on the backs of taxpayers' money. So, none of them could relate to the hardships that

people are facing. We need to get serious. Do not come into this House and pretend that you care or that you could relate.

We are discussing airfares. This is what the leadership of this country is obsessed with and concerned with – cheap airfares. Where is it to go? Where are the people of Guyana going? They are starving. They cannot afford a meal a day, but our obsession is about airfares, before we get down to the business of the people and devise a menu of measures to bring real and proper relief to the people. No! After 60 days, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance came to this House to put value-added tax (VAT) exemption on a supply of building cement, a supply of cement boards and a supply of sheetrock because our people could eat concrete, cement boards and sheetrock. He came to this House and asked for an exemption on a supply of lubricating oil. For the life of me, why? Is it so that you could make the shafting of the people of Guyana easier?

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I have sat here for 12 minutes into your debate. I think the Standing Order also speaks about sticking to the points of the debate. I have not heard yet anything that relates to the substantive matter. I will ask...

[Interruption]

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, your guidance is noted.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I think it is by the Standing Orders, also, that when the Speaker is speaking, everyone else shall listen. I go back to my point. The Standing Orders also speak about sticking to the points of the debate. I think 12 minutes of latitude has been afforded. Let us get to the point, please.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, respectfully, I am accorded 30 minutes. Unless Mr. Speaker is attempting to tell me how I must order the content of my presentation, he will agree that I have 17 minutes left. Please, Mr. Speaker, allow me to proceed in the manner in which I wish to deliver my presentation. I could order my debate in the manner that I wish.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, the Standing Orders also state that one must stick to the points of the debate. At some point you have to get back to it. What I am saying is that I have sat here, and I am still awaiting something on the point that is to be debated.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, I crave your patience because I promise you that the point will be made.

4.11 p.m.

We need to be serious about the business of our people. We need to be serious about the people's business, including the public servants and the farmers. Every Guyanese we need to be serious about. I have sat here, today, and I have heard the attempts at revisionist history. They continue to insult the intelligence of the people of Guyana. I will give us an example. My friend, Christina, is a public servant and she has three school-aged children. She got a \$30,000 cash grant, as they so love to boast about, but Christina... [**Ms. Manickchand:** *inaudible.*] Priya Manickchand, I am making a point. It will do you well to listen. Christina has three children, and she was given \$90,000. Christina has to take public transportation; Christina's children have to pay \$100 either way for short drop; that is \$200 per child per day. So, every day, Christina spends \$600 for those two children to get to and from school. One multiplies \$600 by five days per week for school and one would find, if one does the math, that she spends at least \$9,000 per week for three children. So, they gave a cash grant of \$30,000 per child per year and they took away savings she would have had, had they left in place the free transportation to school that was put in place by the David Granger-led Administration. That is the level of duplicity in which they engage. That is the degree to which they continue to want to insult the people of Guyana. They stand there and talk about the VAT on water and light and they are so duplicitous that they do not say to the people of Guyana that it only applies to the usage of light and water over a certain amount – the amount which the average public servant and the average family of five would never meet. They did not say that. You would notice that it is very quiet over there. This is because the truth hurts. This is why it is important that when we come to this National Assembly, we come, and we speak the truth. It is because the people of Guyana are depending on us to do so.

Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, the Hon. Member, stood in here. He is the man with the responsibility for sugar, and up to now he cannot tell me where I could find a pound of brown sugar to buy. He spoke about everything else under the sun, except to the portfolio for which he is responsible. They come here, and they continue to politic with the lives of people.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, who just spoke, spoke glowingly about them being reorganised. That continues to be the problem with the PPP/C Administration. They confuse activity with progress, but activity is not progress. So, their focus is on the Building Expo and cheaper plane tickets, but you came to this National Assembly, and you forbade a debate on the bread-and-butter issues that are affecting our people. We ought to be ashamed of ourselves in this House; we ought to bend our heads in shame; and we ought to pack up our briefcases and we ought to go home because we are not taking care of the needs of the people of Guyana. It is our failing and we have to address it. Right now, there is a mother who is not sure what her children will have for dinner. But do you know what? We are going to stand in this House, and we are going to debate. At four o' clock, we are going to take a tea break and the people of Guyana are not sure if they are going to be having dinner. The public servants are not sure if they would have transportation to get to work tomorrow. How dare you come into this House and try to politic and play with the lives of people? Yes, all of you should walk out because you should be deeply ashamed of yourselves.

I wish to say that we, on this side of the House, would ask that the amendment proposed by the Hon. Member be withdrawn as it lacks specificity. We do not know what reasonable means in this context. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*inaudible*)]. We understand what reasonable means, but as you so pointed out in your speech, you are a lawyer and you should, therefore, know that we have to clarify so we are sure. If we are resolving that our people should be paid in a month, then every administrative reorganisation must be geared towards making it happen in a month. It is not rocket science. We have to fix the obvious. So, to come here and play semantics and use it as an opportunity to politic is unacceptable. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Now, (*inaudible*) get to the motion.] Are you not happy that I did, Hon. Attorney General? Hon. AG, I might be looking at you too much on the Caribbean Court of Justice's (CCJ's) proceedings. I may be falling prey to your failings at the CCJ. Let me stay on track.

I will ask, if we are serious about this, that we commit to paying our public servants in a timely manner and that we commit to doing it in one month. As my colleague, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, said, with the advent of technology, we can do it. We all are in agreement here that the public service is important. We all are in agreement here that, in this new oil and gas economy, it is indispensable that there be a public service that is efficient and well-staffed.

As I am on my feet, I want to encourage the Government, not because it is our idea, to really look at reintroducing the public service school, the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service, so that we can have a cadre of well-trained public servants. In an oil and gas economy, you need an efficient public service. The public service and the public sector are important parts of the Government's regulatory apparatus. There should not be any fight about it. Let us pay the people one month after they commence duties because we can do it. We were paid, as Members of this National Assembly, from the first month. So, if we are serious about taking care of the people of Guyana, we can do it. The vendors at Mon Repos got compensation the very night. So, do not come here to tell me that our public servants cannot be paid within one month of the commencement of their duties. We are the National Assembly. You are the Administration and, as Mr. Joseph Hamilton pointed out, it is an administrative duty. You are the Administration. Take care of it and pay our people on time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, there has been a little bit of confusion in term of the points of debate, on which I think we all need a bit of a refresher. Standing Order 41(1) very explicitly states:

“Subject to these Standing Orders, debate upon any motion, Bill or amendment shall be relevant to such motion, Bill or amendment, and a Member shall confine his or her observations to the subject under discussion.”

I do not think that we would all need a refresher going forward. I now ask the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Public Works, Hon. Minister Indar, for his contribution.

Minister within the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** Stick to the motion.] Are you worried I would go off the motion, Mr. Mahipaul?

Before I get into my remarks in respect to the motion, my colleague, the Hon. Joseph Hamilton, made some comments at the podium earlier. He was stopped by the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, and by the Leader of the Opposition from providing invoices or proof in relation to this matter about bangles and whatever it was. I will lay this over with you. This is the evidence of that wrongdoing. I will give it to the Clerk or one of the helpers here. This is evidence of that wrongdoing. I will lay it over to your desk, Sir, on behalf of my colleague who made the claim at

this podium. This will be given to you. Could someone collect this and give it to the Speaker? That is the evidence that my colleague had.

[The Hon. Member displayed the document.]

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Indar: Mr. Speaker, just now we heard...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker?

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you may proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for acknowledging me. I refer to Standing Order 41(6) which speaks to the issue of a Member being wrongfully imputed. Now that this purported evidence is before the National Assembly, I am asking that the evidence be made available before we leave the Assembly today.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your remarks are noted. The Speaker and I will have a look at it, and if so, it will be circulated to every Member.

Mr. Indar: Mr. Speaker, I wish to continue with my remarks. Just now, we had to sit and listen to the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, speak about help for poor people. She spoke about caring for poor people. She spoke about being serious about poor people. She spoke about politicking. I do not know if the Members of the Opposition, who are sitting here now, broke out of a tomb last night and have come here as if they did not know about this matter before, or that people were poor or just became poor. I want to ask the Members – and anyone of them to come after me – did you just break out of a tomb? Did you not know that people were poor all the time? Mr. Figueira, the Hon. Member, spoke about the cost of living. I will get to you just now, Sir. Let me deal with Ms. Walton-Desir's comment first.

4.26 p.m.

Did they just wake up to this new beginning that people are poor, and that persons are hungry? We found people poor and licking crumbs off the floor when we came into Government in 2020 and we fixed that problem. We found people broken, downtrodden, beaten and without hope. When

we came into Office in 2020, we had to fix that. We do not want the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, to come into this honourable House to lecture anyone of us; none of them. Ms. Walton-Desir spoke about lubricating oil, cement and sheetrock. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, brought to the House...This particular thing was passed since 2020. In the first budget that we brought to this House, they were exempted. We have now brought it back here. What do people do with lubricating oil? Anybody who has an engine uses it; the poor people, the fishermen and everybody. So, I do not know what the Hon. Member is talking about. Do you know something? Maybe the lubricating oil is short in the vehicles outside. When they go to start the engines, maybe the engines will break. Nevertheless, as a Member of this House, I feel ashamed of those comments that were laid in this honourable House.

They talked about bread-and-butter issues. Does anyone of them on the other side, and I ask you, Mr. Speaker, know how bread or butter is made? I will tell them because I know. I made butter for 17 long years. I will tell them how it is made. This crop of Opposition Members in the House believes that they know it all. They come here and they preach like they are saints. They quoted the Bible. I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Flue-Bess, talk about paying somebody before the sun is down. Mr. Speaker, do you know what this sounds like to me? It is like *Laban*. There is a character in the Bible called *Laban*. In the flock of Moses, he used to corrupt the flock. That is who I heard there – the *Laban* of the Bible. I will get into the bread-and-butter issues, which every single one who spoke before me went into, which is the cost-of-living issues. Butter is made with palm oil, palm stearin or soyabean oil. It comes from various places across the globe, mostly Malaysia. Some is from Singapore and other small countries. Mr. Speaker, this is the World Bank information. I have it in my hand and I will lay it over to you. Maybe, you could give every single Member of the House this piece of information. I would say this to you... Mr. Speaker, I am at your mercy here. When the Hon. Member spoke, I sat quietly in my chair, and I heard all of the garbage that came out of his mouth. Let me respond. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Who are you talking about?] I am talking about the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, who spoke earlier.

[*Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.*]

This is the World Bank information. Palm oil's average price in 2020 was US\$75. As of June, 2022, it was US\$1,501 per metric tonne. Mr. Speaker, that is 100% increase in the price of palm oil. Palm oil is used to make shortening and shortening is then used to make bread. That is Free

On Board (FOB) from Malaysia. When it comes here, freight has to be added. This is the information on freight from Drewry World Container Index. In 2018, freight for a container coming out of Malaysia was US\$3,100. Now, it is US\$20,000. It grew seven times. There is the increase on the commodity, then there is another layer of cost, which is the freight, then it comes into the country and goes through processing. All of that our country has to bear. Do we plant and process palm in Guyana? The answer is no. Do we do those things in Guyana? We are subject to a global phenomenon that we have never seen in 40 years.

Mr. Speaker, I will lay this information over to you. The World Bank put out some information. The United States of America's inflation has never seen such a high since 1981. For 40 years now, it is at 9.1%. The entire euro zone is at 9.6% inflation. Guyana's annualised inflation rate is around 5%. For the Caribbean region, if you take out Guyana, Latin American countries are 7.5% annualised. Everybody in the world is facing this inflation. When they face the inflation in their countries when they manufacture goods and those goods are shipped, a built-in inflation comes into our country and carries up the cost on the shelves. Let me tell you what we have done about that. They say that we sit and do nothing, and we are the Government. Let me tell it what we have done with tradable goods. We have adjusted the tax value for tax purposes, which persons pay to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), to pre-pandemic levels. We have put the rates back. If an importer's tax liability goes down, it would mean that their input cost would go down and he/she could sell for cheaper on the shelf.

I want to point you to crude. Crude prices have been going up. Mr. Speaker, I will give you the United States (US) Energy Agency's report on crude. I would lay this over to you. I ask that you share this with the rest of the House so that they could understand what is going on globally and what we are facing. It is something that we have not faced in 40 long years. In January, 2018, crude was \$69 for barrel. In June, 2022, it averaged out at \$122 per barrel. It is a 76.8% increase in crude prices. Just imagine what that does to a person. The price goes up when every transportation, every ship and every aircraft move goods simply because fuel price went up. The biproducts of fuel, like diesel and gas, are used to power manufacturing plants and the price of those go up too. For example, the same oils that I was talking about – the oils that are used to make bread and butter that they talked about – have to go through severe heat exchanges. Heat is burning fossil. Heat exchanges make fractionation of oil so that edible foods could be made. That price went up.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch a little on natural gas prices from the same document. Natural gas is measured in Metric Million British Thermal Unit (MMBTU). Natural gas went up. I will tell you this. The information states that in Europe natural gas, in January, moved from an average of \$3.24 for an MMBTU to about \$34. It went up by 956%. Natural gas is used to make fertiliser. It is an input into making fertiliser. Fertiliser is then sold to farmers so that they could grow crops so that we all could have them on our kitchen tables. Fertiliser cost went up. What do you think the production of farm produces is? It went up. What have we done as a Government? We have given \$1 billion in relief to farmers so that it could ease them. That is what we have done for farmers. Wheat has gone up by 128%. This wheat is coming from various part of the world. They talked about how we are blaming COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, but it is the problem. The COVID-19 became a problem when ships and ports did not have workers. There were no workers at the ports, so the ships were stranded, containers were not available, and it created an entire ceasing up of the system globally. There is a problem with freight. [**Ms. Ferguson:** Speak to the motion.] None of you all was not speaking to the motion so please *hush*. They were all over the place. Allow me to do my thing. *Hush*.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you could say, none of the Hon. Members over there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Indar: None of the Hon. Members over there was speaking to the motion, Mr. Speaker, so please *hush*.

Mr. Speaker: Are you telling me to *hush*?

Mr. Indar: No, Mr. Speaker. It is the Hon. Members. I want to explain the gravity of this situation and then I will come to context of Guyana. The reason I am doing this is not just because of the Hon. Members in this House. I care not if they understand, or they do not. I care for the people who are listening out there who I believe they are trying to mislead; they must understand. I want to make this point. Nickel prices went up by double. In January, 2019 nickel was about \$13,914 per metric tonne. It has raised to \$25,600. The reason I am raising this particular problem is because the London Metal Exchange stopped its operation. It stopped the operation because of the volatility of prices and what it was doing to the market. That is how bad it was in terms of volatility in markets with commodity prices. I have a list here of three pages with over 60 different commodities. Every single one of them has been suffering from massive amounts of price volatility

in the upward trend. This is what is causing problems globally. Guyana is not immune to this. We live in a global context. Most of the tradable goods that comes into Guyana comes *via* ships and the transportation sector. It affects us because the freight rates went up. It is a global thing. Guyana is not isolated. We do not have our own shipping line.

The Hon. Members in the House believe that we could just sit down and just wave a magic wand. We do not do that, but we systematically go through the problems and find the solutions. That is why we are helping the farmers. That is why we are helping the fisherfolks. That is why we are giving back the school grant to the children. That is why we are creating 10,000 to 15,000 parttime jobs so that we could put money back into people's hands. [**Mr. Jones:** What about the public servants? Silence.] Hon. Chief Whip, what did your Government do for public servants?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, if you want to speak directly to him, I could terminate you now and you could go out.

Mr. Indar: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I want to point to two more specifics. One, is the World Bank commodity price for low- and middle-income countries. In other foods, it has raised by 44% and for other raw materials it has gone up by 29%. What that means is that every manufacturer or every person that gets into manufacturing of food has seen an increase. How does that increase translate in the marketplace – tradable goods? It is passed on to the consumers. It is not a Guyana problem. If you look at every single country in the European block, you will see that the inflation starts from somewhere around 7% heading to somewhere around 22%. It is for every single country, whether it is Estonia *et cetera*, is suffering from inflation. It is something that we in Guyana have managed to keep a lid on. We are at 5% annualised. The Hon. Member, earlier, spoke about [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Mr. Indar is putting me to sleep.] You cannot handle it, Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, and so you are walking out. I know that and I am glad. I want to speak about fuel and what we have done. I have just said that fuel cost has gone up tremendously. Our Government has removed the excise tax to zero. Just imagine that when the APNU/AFC was in Government, it carried up taxes. Tax, from 2014 to 2020, when they demitted office, went up by 67%.

4.41 p.m.

Imagine if they were in power, had that tax burden on the poor people whom they now suddenly care for, with this increase in cost of living globally, what would have happened to people? We

would be literally licking crumbs off the floor with the policies and the philosophy of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC). They know how to tax and spend, nothing else. They do not have intervention that will help people. The Hon. Minister Zulfikar, Minister of Agriculture, who spoke earlier today, spoke about the number of areas we are addressing with farmers to deal with meat production and food production. We have been leading in that stead. There is no country in this regional block that could claim that they are leading in food and food production like Guyana is, no country could claim that. There is no Government that could say that Guyana is not responding to the effects of cost of living and price increases because, for every area that we could have done something, we did something. There is zero tax on fuel. Because we know that it is so bad out there and that the markets continue to be on a flux, we have reduced the excise tax on fuel, which is the Government's take, to zero. We do not tax fuel, Mr. Speaker.

Guyana is the only country, as my colleague Mr. Vickram Bharrat said, that has zero excise tax on fuel. The Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, spoke boldly about how her Government reduced value-added tax (VAT) from 16% to 14% and they brought the 'good life' to people. What the Hon. Member failed to say is that, when they dropped the tax by a meager 2%, they broadened the net on the goods that actually were taxed. What they did was to remove everything from the zero-rated category and put them into the standard-rated category which attracted VAT the prices were carried into the supermarkets. That is what they did. I do not believe that the Hon. Member understands that. It is what you call, in taxation, a tax ploy; it is a ploy. It is that one gives with one hand and then takes with 15 more hands. That is what they have done. Financial analysts and taxation experts understood what they did. The catchment area for collection of tax in VAT has been increased massively and had showed up in the numbers. Every budget that they brought here, in the couple years they were in Government, showed that the revenues and VAT were going up all the time. It was because you were taxing people. Do not come to this honourable House and say that you reduced tax nominally but, yet your average tax collection went up by 67%. How do you explain that? The answer is that they taxed everything *under the sun*; that is what happened.

Mr. Speaker, I want to raise the issue...

Mr. Speaker: I want to tell you that time is running out fast, so you need to now make a connection.

Mr. Indar: This is the last one, Mr. Speaker. I want to raise the issue of wheat. I am still on the *bread-and-butter* issue; I have not gone on to anything else. From 2018, wheat has gone up by 171%. It is now at a high-high. The reason being is that there was a war in a country that exported around 30% of the total global consumption of wheat – Ukraine. When there is that kind of shock in supply in an environment that there are markets, it will carry a price. That is why it is affecting us here. What have we done? The Hon. Minister of Agriculture, again, is trying to find ways in which we could grow our own. We did not sit idly, Mr. Speaker. I made the case here today that what is happening in Guyana is happening in every other country on earth. There is no insulation from this problem; it is a global problem, and we have to address it with a global solution. We are not in isolation; we are not *an island of excellence in a sea of mediocrity*. We are *part and parcel* of this; we *have dog in the fight too*. We have to do what we have been doing and that is to make sure that we put the stimulus in areas that they are needed with the common people – with the fishermen, with the farmers. With everybody on the ground who do not have a job, we are trying to give them one.

Mr. Speaker, this motion that was brought by the Hon. Member from the Opposition. Although the motion seeks to set a timeframe, the dictionary has the definition of a reasonableness test and our Government is a reasonable Government. We look out for the people unlike what we saw in the past. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes to make her contribution.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is sad that we are speaking to a motion titled:

“Payment of first salary to Public Servants in one (1) month”

The Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, just spoke for approximately 30 minutes, Sir, and he attributed 30 seconds to that motion. He attributed 30 seconds to a motion he spoke on for practically 30 minutes. The motion that we are looking at right now states:

“WHEREAS there have been consistent reports from new public servants that they were informed they must wait three months before they received their first salary.

BE IT RESOLVED: That the National Assembly advises the Government of Guyana to ensure that public servants receive their first paycheck no more than one (1) month after the commencement of their employment in the public sector.”

This motion, on the surface, seemed like a pretty straightforward motion. It is a motion that, as representatives of the people, we could have come to this House and have a constructive debate on these issues. We heard persons, Ministers of Government, standing here at a podium and, instead of giving representation and actually speaking to the motion, dissenting into character assassination. The people of Guyana deserve more. It is unbelievable and it is unacceptable to see the level at which debates have descended to in this honourable House. Mr. Speaker, I must share with the House that, as the Hon. Member Mr. Hamilton made his presentation, the comments that followed through online were that it was unbelievable that this was allowed as parliamentary ethics in Guyana. The individual stated that him or her was ashamed and asked why we were enduring this. Another person stated that Mr. Hamilton, Hon. Member, had not uttered anything resembling sense up to that point and that they (the people) were suffering in this country and that character assassination was the best the Hon. Member could have come up with. Another comment states that the Hon. Member was talking about BIT training but that he was not telling the House how two months ago the participants finished the training but never received the \$40,000 per person as was promised in Region 1, Moruca.

These were the comments which came in. Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely necessary that we bring these to the House because persons must understand that it is not okay to come and just beat your chest and believe that it is all good and that it is business as usual. The people of this country are listening, they are responding, and they are asking for answers. It is not okay. No matter how much you believe you are doing a good job at shielding off the question, it will never be okay when ordinary Guyanese are *feeling the squeeze* and then they have to look at the level of Parliament... You guys, Hon. Members you all are, are coming to this honourable House and speaking as though you have zero concern as to the actual motion in question right now. Mr. Speaker, I must respond. It is absolutely necessary that I respond to some of the comments made by the Hon. Member, who is not in the House right now, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha. I am sorry, the Hon. Member is out of his seat, I did not notice, Sir. We often speak about the fact that the representatives of the PPP/C Administration come to this House and they tell untruths. We often speak to it; we often speak to

a specific untruth that they come to this House and tell. I heard it being repeated by Mr. Mustapha when he quoted again, Sir, as he does so many times, the figure '7,500' sugar workers being put on the headline.

Mr. Speaker, the records of Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) states 5,160. The records of GuySuCo records that. The official studies conducted on that shows that is the number. Yet, they come to this House and they continuously tell this untruth of 7,500. It is unacceptable and they do not talk about the severance pay which was paid to those workers, Sir, it is unacceptable. I noted also that the Hon. Minister sought to speak to Mr. Figueira in response to crop insurance. He spoke about the fact that they have a taskforce looking at crop insurance. This is something that we have questioned at the level of the Economic Services Committee. One thing was very clear – the key issue when it comes to dealing with crop insurance that they are looking at right now is the fact that they have not determined yet what proportion of the cost will be borne by Government and what proportion of the cost... would principal cost be borne by the farmers themselves?

Mr. Mustapha said in those meetings that he was going out and doing consultations with farmers. I am telling you, Sir, if those consultations are being done, it is being done on the highest level of secrecy in this country ever. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Zulfikar, spoke about the slaughter to the agriculture sector. I do not know if the facts evaded Mr. Mustapha that, under the administration of the Coalition, this country saw the highest production in rice. I do not know if the fact evaded the Hon. Minister of Agriculture that it is under his tenure, right now, that we are having a sugar shortage in Guyana when they said that they would have made sugar great again. This is the fact that we have to deal with right now. I have to record some other fallacies, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Minister further spoke about riverine households being given \$25,000 cash grant. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something. An announcement was made by none other than the President of this country. An announcement was made saying that riverine and hinterland household each will receive \$25,000 cash grant. Mr. Speaker, what the Hon. Minister is not telling you is the level of corruption in the distribution of this particular cash grant.

Mr. Speaker, in Bartica, we are seeing residents from one constituency being divided. The PPP/C Administration is refusing to give some persons the cash grant when they are going around the road in the same constituency and giving the others cash grants. Do not come and speak to us about these matters when it is laced with discrimination and corruption. These are the facts. You cannot

blow your chest and go to those persons. These people are complaining publicly. They are online on *Facebook*, and they are making their cases. How dare you pretend that you are doing a good job. It is unacceptable, Sir.

4.56 p.m.

So many times, we hear the Hon. Members on the other side come to this House and ask what we did in five years. This has been a mantra of the PPP/C Administration – what have you done in five years? I do not know how they make sense of it because the PPP/C Administration, prior to 2015, was in Government for 23 years and they are coming to this House to fix so many things they never looked at during their tenure in Government. Then, they come to this House and question what we have done in five years. Come on!

He spoke about the \$25,000 ‘Because We Care’ cash grant and the \$5,000 school uniform voucher that are being distributed to every school child right now. We have in our presence the Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Manickchand. The Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand, came to this House, indeed, and this House budgeted for that amount to be given to every child. They spoke at length about how they cared. They said, ‘because we care’, they are going to make sure that every child gets this \$25,000 cash grant and \$5000 uniform voucher. Then, the very same Hon. Minister, who is sitting across from me, under her stewardship, had a circular sent out which complicated the bureaucratic process even further by now giving the power to the persons on the ground to determine who should and who should not get the cash grants. She knows about the failure in the system when it comes to record keeping. Now, she wants to couple that with the return of textbooks because she cares. It is because the Hon. Member cares. That is what they come to this House and provide us with, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I must speak to the motion at hand, unlike the other Members of Government. I will speak to the motion at hand as we are looking at it. Public servants are the backbone of the mechanism that runs every Government Ministry and agency in this country. Every Minister here would be unable to perform their function without public servants. Today, I stand to speak to the matter affecting them which requires urgent attention. Today, the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, presented to this House a motion which seeks to change a fundamentally wrong system or, I would prefer to say, a fundamentally wrong practice of payment in the public sector. It is a system

that lacks foundation, and one that is cruel and only adds to the social insecurity woes of the public servants in this country.

Today, we put the 'Because We Care' and the 'One Guyana' slogans to the test. Anyone who truly cares and truly believes that Guyanese should be treated equally would support this motion, and not fixate on excuses of bureaucratic constraints in their arguments. Public servants in Guyana are subjected to wait three months after employment to receive their first paychecks. Today, we seek to stop that once and for all. We live in a country in which public servants, from 2020 to now, have only seen a 7% increase across the board, coupled with unprecedented inflation rates. I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, speak earlier. He sought so desperately to tell Guyanese that they are not in this alone, that there is high cost of living in other countries, and that inflation rates are going up in every country. That is not the issue at hand; the issue at hand is the methods in which it is dealt with in Guyana. What are the mechanisms and the policies that are being instituted by the Administration to deal with these issues that we have right now? It is not okay to come and say that 'you are not in this alone'. How does that help any of us? It does not help any of us for you to just come and plaster your speech with excuses and say that the citizens are not alone in this.

I noted the Hon. Member mentioned how many measures they put in place to aid the core of the issue, as he so eloquently tried to put it over. What the Hon. Member failed to say is that, after all those methods that they put in place – methods that would rely strictly on a principle of trickle-down economics for the ordinary Guyanese to benefit from – the price levels on the market did not go down; it went up further. What is he saying about that? Failed policy measures are not something with which you come to this House, boast about and pretend to be economic wizards about. The ordinary Guyanese are still suffering after you instituted those failed policies. We are not here to hear nonsense at this point in time. This is not the time in which public servants can afford to be paid three months after they have worked. Public servants, the majority of whom use public transportation to travel to and from work, are facing a steady increase in transportation costs. They simply cannot afford to be forced to wait three months to be paid for work done. The reality of these struggles may escape the comprehension of many Members of this House who never faced such difficulties. Those realities are faced by thousands of workers daily and they cannot be ignored. I do not think the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, could relate to any of what I am speaking to right now, Sir.

Guyana is recording youth unemployment at 31.9%. There is 31.9% of young people actively seeking work. Once any of those persons are employed right now, they will be forced, in a country which Hon. Minister Mr. Indar just said that inflation rate is high and that cost of living is high because it is happening all over... In a country that he admitted has a high inflation rate and a high cost of living, they will be forced to wait three months for their first paycheck. It is unjustifiable and unconscionable for us to continue like this. Good governance requires that you examine the issues before you, on a day-to-day basis, and institute policies. As a good Government, if you need to be that, you institute policies that are going to deal with the struggles of today. You do not go back and say what was going on 20 years ago. You deal with the issues as presented before you today. That is how good governance operates.

To date, I am yet to see, when, where, and why this three-month wait was instituted. Personally, I can tell you that I would have done a paper whilst studying for my degree at the University of Guyana. Whilst studying there, I did a paper in which I went into the public service and sought information as to where this concept started. To date, no one was able to present one piece of evidence showing that this system is one that was done by way of circular or anything like that. There was absolutely no documentation. It has been a practice coming down and we are yet to be able to trace where it started. It is unacceptable. Sir, somebody just said that you had five years to do it. Let me just say this, the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley entered the public service in April, 2019. Within her short stint as a Minister there, she had meetings with every relevant personnel she was required to have meetings with when it came to addressing this issue right here. This is not something that she is bringing now. This is something that she started from day one in office. She knows what she came to this House and presented here today.

My very first job was one as a public servant. I had to undergo the three-month wait, along with so many others who had started to work with me. I witnessed persons receiving low evaluation scores because of missing days of work in the first three months. No one bothered to ask why they missed these days of work. There are so many complexities and hardships that are associated with this three-month wait. You will not begin to comprehend the thousands of Guyanese who have suffered because of this draconian practice that we have in our system right now.

Mr. Speaker, there are numerous sad stories and experiences shared by people on social media, in the newspapers, and all of that. I can only speak directly to persons who communicated with me.

One particular story caught my attention. A young woman wrote and stated: I am writing this letter to you seeking your intervention in a matter at my workplace. I am a 22-year-old woman who started working as a public servant two months ago. However, when payday reached at the end of my first month, I did not receive any money. After asking my boss, I learned that I will not be paid until three months after I started working. I moved from Region 1 to live on the coastland because there was no work for me at home. I am renting a small apartment and the landlord is waiting for his rent. I do not know how I will survive the remaining of the time left before I am paid because all my savings were used up already. I am seeking your assistance to make representation for me and all the others like myself. I am not asking for a handout. I work hard to provide for myself, and I think it is unfair for me to work and not be paid. This is very frustrating.

We can go through endless other letters and notifications that were sent out by persons. These are real issues that we are bringing to the House today. We are not bringing an issue to the House today for us to have a *cuss down* about it. At the inception, it should have been a no-brainer that everyone comes to this House and say that this is an issue that requires urgent attention. Everyone acknowledges the high cost of living. Everyone acknowledges the inflation rate that is constantly rising. Everyone is acknowledging that. Why is it so difficult for persons to accept that these methods need to be put in place? Before I stood up, I looked around the room and I saw so many persons – even from the media – working diligently. They are hard workers, and they need representation. These are the people who are the backbone of our country. We need to represent them. It is not okay for them to come to this House, listen to persons debate a motion and speak to everything else except that motion because they know that, if they are to leave this job and go to another agency, they will suffer the same fate of having to wait three months for their pay again.

No bureaucratic system – or systemic constraint rather – can be used as an excuse today by my colleagues on the other side as justification for the sloth in the system. My colleague just spoke about this a few minutes ago and I would find it extremely difficult – I think even the Members of Government should find it extremely difficult – to face public servants and give them reasons they have to wait three months to be paid. We have been witnessing that the Government of the day, the PPP/C Administration, is sitting in this House today and, time and time again, they have been showing the Guyanese population that they have the ability to pay people money in less than 24 hours. They are not speaking to the bureaucratic constraint, a system that has to be fixed, and all

the semantics which I heard from the Hon. Mr. Hamilton a few moments ago. They are not speaking to that, Sir. The Hon. Member came into this House and said that he was speaking to the people of this country. He sought to tell the people of this country that we needed to look at the system and that there must be a systemic fix and all that. How does he go with a straight face to the ordinary Guyanese and say to them that they require this systemic structure to change?

5.11 p.m.

The others that are being paid in less than 24 hours have an exemption. They are a different breed of Guyanese. We are not accepting that. We are simply saying that, not because you are the PPP/C Administration, not because you are the Government of today, not because you are not on this side of the House it means that you have to oppose a motion that makes absolute sense when it comes to representation of the ordinary Guyanese. It is unacceptable. The Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, is the Minister of Labour. The Minister of Labour came here and sought to beat down on this motion on something that benefits public servants. People can parade around this country everyday shouting ‘One Guyana’, but these are the tests to prove it – the walk to back up the talk. Today’s argument is not seeking to cast any blame but to correct an error in the system.

The practice of having public servants wait three months for their first pay cheque is not a one-off wait. I think this is a very fundamental issue. I heard non other that the Hon. Minister, Hon. Parag, spoke to this when she presented for those few minutes. She spoke to this matter, and she said that, because persons are new to the public service, they have to hand in documentation and all of that. Sir, I would like the Minister to know that that three-month wait is not a one-off wait. If someone moved across agency, if someone leaves a job at one agency in the public service and moves to another agency, they have to wait again. That explanation that she sought to bring to this House is one that is flawed. The struggles associated with increased cost of living have a direct relationship with wages and salaries and no one else could say otherwise. As such, governments around the world are looking at innovative ways to adapt and develop fair systems that protects the most vulnerable in society. The most vulnerable in our society are public servants who are earning minimum wage. Those workers need this intervention more than ever.

As we look across to other countries, we can explore the various methodologies being explored by governments to make sure that they are providing policy incentives to deal with these issues. In

Grenada, the current Prime Minister is exploring the option of paying public servants fortnightly in an effect to address the cries of the public servants in Grenada. While we are here fighting to have workers paid after the first month and not after three months, we have the Government of Grenada looking at measures to pay workers fortnightly because that is what you do as a government that wants to govern with good practices that is going to benefit the people of your country.

The PPP/C Administration promised public servants many things, particularly, to increase their wages and salaries by 50%. This is a known fact and, although Hon. Minister Sonia Parag publicly claimed that is not the case, to date, there are still those posters mounted on light poles. When that statement came out from the Hon. Minister public servants, public servants were completely enraged, and they took to social media in the thousands and complained bitterly and angrily at what was going on there, Sir. As I wrap up, the PPP/C Administration, while in Opposition, and they demanded that there be a 50% increase in wages and salaries for public servants. Sir, that demand was made before the first bit of oil resource was earned by Guyana. Sir, to date, since the PPP/C took Office, and with \$1.2 trillion later, since August of 2020, they are yet to institute that 50% increase. They do not walk the walk; they cannot stand in this House and profess to love and care for public servants. Even the media personnel that are sitting here right now are directly affected by this particular motion.

Sir, as I close with my final statement, I would say: Let this not be a fight of politics alone. Let us have a heart and a conscience for public servants. Let us not seek to cast blame as to who did what and who did it when. Sir, let us look at the issue today. These are the challenges being faced today and, as the Hon. Deodat Indar said, for over 40 years. This has been the worst over 40 years. If the PPP/C Administration is to take any bit of the advice given, they will be putting several policy interventions in place to make sure that not only public servants, but all Guyanese face less constraints as to how they would survive and suffice on a daily basis. Today I ask that the Members of Government remember that they are responsible to the people of this country. Sir, let them remember that, when they go back to their offices tomorrow, they have to face public servants. Let them not believe that these ideas and these arguments are escaping the minds of those persons. Let them do the right thing, withdraw the amendment which makes absolutely no sense and stick to a

policy that states that after the first month, public servants should be paid their wages and salaries.
I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I see that we are going to have a very long evening. Let me call on the Hon. Minister of Education to move Standing Order 10 (2) to be suspended so that we can continue this session until the business is concluded.

Suspension of Standing Order 10 (2)

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 10 (2) be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 10.00 p.m.”

[Minister of Education]

Ms. Manickchand: I move that Standing Order 10 (2) be applied appropriately.

Mr. Speaker: We will have a break now and we are arranging to have some additional sustenance. I know that there has been a lot of comment about how much we eat in Parliament. Maybe, who does not want to eat, we can pack a box and arrange for it to be distributed to the people in the street who may need it. Nevertheless, I will eat.

Finally, there has been a lot of comments on the issues of cost of living. I want to make the distinction between comments during this debate on cost of living and the motion I disallowed which called a charge on the Consolidated Fund. With that, let us take a suspension and we will be in one hour which is 6.19 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 5.19 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.28 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The Opposition's Chief Whip has just informed me that Ms. McDonald and Mr. Mahipaul will not be speaking on this motion. I would like to call on the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, may I ask for either a few minutes for Minister Nandlall, who I understand is in the washroom or if Your Honor wants to proceed to the other person...

Mr. Speaker: You may, but do not let us assign where he is as an excuse. Hon. Members, we will wait a few minutes. Hon. Members, we still have a long night to go, as I mentioned.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you, Sir. I thank my colleagues on the other side for their indulgence.

Mr. Speaker: I want to reiterate that the bell is a warning to get back to the Assembly to get a quorum. While we do have persons online, who constitute the quorum now, we have to be...

Ms. Manickchand: It is an unreserved apology, Sir, no 'buts', but I will say that washroom calls and calls of nature would not really respect a bell. It is an unreserved apology being offered right now on his behalf, and he is coming through the door. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: It does not look like he was under that constraint. Hon. Attorney General, we have two withdrawals, so it is your turn to make your contribution to this debate.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Thank you very much, Sir. Permit me to apologise for the delay. Sir, the motion before the House is very simple and straight forward. I have no doubt that it is grounded in good sense and, I would say, in some degree of nobility. We on this side do not have a fundamental objection, in principle, to the terms of the motion. A lot of statements have been made about the motion itself that I believe should be addressed, and a lot of statements have been made outside the scope of the motion which are on the record now. I believe that it would behoove me to traverse those statements as well. Sir, I want to begin by recognising that the sponsor of the motion herself accepts, in the language of the motion, that the motion does not express a truism. It states:

“...there have been consistent reports from new public servants that they were informed they must wait three months before they received their first salary.”

There are a number of suppositions inherent in that statement. I listened to my friend, for example, the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, and she asserted, factually, that this is the situation. In reality, the motion itself does not state so. The motion states that information has been received and reports have been consistent in relation to that information that it takes three months. I know of cases

where it took three months for persons to get paid. I do not doubt the varsity, but I want to state for the record that it is not a fact that it takes three months for persons to be paid in the public service.

6.34 p.m.

I heard it said repeatedly that it is a policy. I want to reject that forcefully. If you check the speech of the Hon. Member who last spoke, she repeatedly spoke of a policy. There is no such policy, at least not in this Government. The mover of the motion also, to her credit, admitted that this situation about which the motion speaks existed across Governments. So far as it is real, you on that side of the House must accept responsibility for being in Government for five years, from 2015 to 2020, and not fixing this problem. You did not fix the problem. The mover of the motion, as I said, to her credit, has recognised that. As my Hon. Colleague is reminding me, it is not that the Hon. Member was not positioned to change it. We heard about how quickly things can get done in the Government, and how things are being done in the Government. Take for example, you got into Government on 15th May, 2015, you took about a week to get sworn in, and you took another week to be assigned your responsibilities and to establish your bureaucratic structure, and after the expiration of one month, you raised your salary by 100%. The point I am making is that the mover of the motion, though belatedly was appointed a minister, spent one year in the Ministry, and that was a long enough time for her to have corrected this situation. Then, she obviously replaced a minister who was there four years prior. Again, that was a long enough time to correct the problem.

I also want to point out that there are many, many persons working in the public sector who joined the public sector and were paid within one month. There are many, many—thousands of persons—who are working in the public sector and they were paid within one month, or the month for which they worked. It is across the public sector. I will tell you that the Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority is an agency within the public sector, and if you go and work there from 1st July, by 31st July you will be paid. I can tell you that; I have ministerial responsibility for that agency. The point I want to make is that you cannot *use one brush* and paint the entire public sector. I say so, not denying the fact that there is a delay of the type that your motion describes. All I am saying is that we must set the public record accurately, and not give the impression that it is across the public domain, that at every single agency it takes more than one month to process a person's payment.

Let us now deal with the issue of the delay. There are many reasons why there is a delay. Permit me to say—and I have no doubt that my Colleague, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, when he speaks, will address it more elaborately—that efforts were being made long before you put this motion on this Order Paper. Efforts are being made, and were being made, to rectify this very situation. Many of us in Government are aware of this reality, so it is not a case of Christopher Columbus. We on this side have been working on rectifying the situation long before the motion. That is the reason why we can say positively to you that it will be impossible to bind oneself to a month's period, as you are suggesting. We are proposing an amendment to put 'reasonable time'. Obviously, that means less than three months. But to bind ourselves to a one-month timeframe in a public sector machinery is not healthy at this point in time. There are many, many reasons.

For example, it has to do with the process of an application. The application goes to the Ministry of Public Service, then the Ministry, in accordance with the law, depending upon the status, has to forward that to the Public Service Commission. The Public Service Commission is an autonomous body that regulates its own process and procedures, and that is the Commission that is vested with the responsibility and authority to approve the appointments. That takes a time. When that approval is granted, it has to be sent back to the Ministry of Public Service. Then, that letter has to be sent by the Ministry of Public Service to the particular agency where the person is applying for the job. Then, that agency has to put that data into its financial system and send that record to the Ministry of Finance. That is a process, and no matter how much you try to abbreviate that process, it is a process that has the different and disparate steps, to which I have made reference. I do not know how that can be condensed within one month.

Here is the problem: many persons take the liberty. The persons who are complaining are complicit in this, and they do it because they want a job. A Permanent Secretary or a Minister will say, 'Start. We have begun your process'. Therein lies one of the difficulties. So, one ends up working while one's application is being processed. It should be the other way around. One should not have been allowed to work until one received a formal letter of appointment. But the very persons who turn around to complain about the length of time, they themselves contribute significantly to the process by turning on to work because they want to work. I do not fault them, but at the same time, they must appreciate that they are turning on to work without being hired.

That is the truth. [Ms. Chandan-Edmond: *Inaudible*] What is that? ‘Reasonable’ would depend upon the circumstances. You are a lawyer; you must know what reasonableness is. ‘Reasonable’ means that from the time... We know that three months is unreasonable. Do you accept that? We start from that logic. Three months is unacceptable, so it is less than three months. I have just outlined to you a process that is very difficult to curtail or control. That is why to bind oneself to a one-month period would be a difficulty. Now, the system can work perfectly if the person, when he or she applies, is told, ‘stay home, we will reply to you’. Once that happens, there is no delay. If the system takes six months to process it, there is no delay; you are not going to work for six months. But a lot of people do not want that. When we come here, we must not come here blinded to reality; we must recognise what the reality is. You ought to be fresh out of Government, so you ought to understand how the governmental system works.

There is another scenario that you must address your mind to. It is this: many public servants, as the Hon. Minister explained in her presentation, are employed by contract. They may even be on the permanent establishment, or they may not be, but they have contracts of service. Those contracts have a renewal clause that allows for the renewal of the contract but with a conditionality that there must be a three months’ notice given if there is an intent to renew. That renewal clause and that notice provision is observed more in the breach. The person waits until the three months is about to expire and then makes an application for a renewal. By that time there is an accounting machinery that will remove his/her name from the system, including the payroll, once that contract expires and it is not accompanied within the contractual stipulated time with a notice of renewal. That is another reality. That renewal also takes a process. It is not that one will serve a notice to one’s head of department or supervisor and that automatically means that one’s contract is going to be renewed. One does not have a guaranteed right to a renewal. One requests a renewal and it is open for that request to be rejected. Quite apart from that eventuality, one has to deal with the process. That contract now has to travel the road, because the power of approval may not lie in one’s immediate supervisor. It may not even lie in the hands of one’s Permanent Secretary’s; it may lie at the Public Service Commission; it may lie at the Ministry of Public Service. That is another process that is triggered. If one is off the payroll, by the time they get one back on, months elapse. That is another factual reality that you ought to address your mind to.

Government is a complex thing. You hold us, as you should, rigidly to a standard of transparency and accountability, and we wish to withstand that and to comply with those standards, but those things consume time. Therefore, while, as I said, we recognise that the motion addresses a problem, we must also be realistic and pragmatic if we want to conscientiously address the problem that the motion has raised. That is why we are making the proposal of an amendment to the BE IT RESOLVED clause to give us some degree of timeous elasticity, to give us some time rather than bind us to a timeframe that the machinery itself may not be able to comply with.

6.49 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is what I would like to say on the motion. But a lot more has been said because some aggrieved party, whose motion was disallowed by Your Honour, has chosen this motion as the platform to prosecute the disallowed motion and, therefore, has used this motion as a basis to speak about all matters under the sun, including the cost of living and everything else that we have heard of. [**An Hon Member:** (*Inaudible*)] It is not a matter of importance; it is a matter of relevance, but the train has gone off the track and I am on the train. I am going to the destination where the train is going. Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General (AG), I am listening. You said, “the train ...off the track”, does it mean that somehow the Speaker has allowed this thing to go off the track? I saw a lot of relevance between the two issues, because if I cannot get paid in a timely manner, I have serious consequences.

Mr. Nandlall: I did note Your Honour’s absence from the chair for a conspicuous period of time.

Mr. Speaker: Absence does not really mean absence; absence physically, present virtually.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, we were regaled here about the cost-of-living increases and about the plight of the ordinary man by my Hon. Colleagues on the other side, and many speakers on our side have given reasons why we are in this social/economic situation. We all know what is happening in the global environment and the external factors over which we have no control, that are determining certain realities in our country. For example, in 2019, when my friends were in Government, one container from China used to cost US\$4,000 to arrive in Guyana; that is, freight. I took a container off the wharf yesterday and it was US\$18,000. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, I always do

well. That is just for freight charges; and US\$18,000 is about \$3.6 million from \$800,000. That is freight charges alone. We have adjusted the regulations, the laws, and the customs to allow for the calculation of duties and excise taxes that do not take into account that increase in freight. That increase by a tax measure is not being allowed to pass on to the consumer, but he or she lives in a free business environment. We have removed completely all taxes from gasoline, diesel and kerosene oil. When the Hon. Members on that side spoke – I think my friend, the Hon. Minister Hamilton spoke to it, and the Hon. Minister Indar also spoke to it – one really gets an impression that, honestly, all of you have a gift. I must give it to you. You have a gift of coming here or over there and making a presentation that is so convincing as though you just dropped from planet Mercury; you were not here in Guyana, and moreover, you were not in Government from 2015 to 2020.

While you were in Government, you imposed, on the very poor people that we hear you vanguarding here tonight, you dropped 200 taxes on their backs – value-added tax (VAT) on electricity, VAT on water, VAT on medical supplies, VAT on educational supplies, VAT on the donkey cart man, VAT on the death announcement man and right across; every licence fee was increased by 100% and 200%. You went to the state lands, and you raised the state land rent and rate by 1,500%. Those people are poor people. You went to the West Coast Berbice and on the Corentyne Coast; you sent tax officers to calculate the people's *baigan* in their backyard, so that you could tax them. Did you not know that? Did you not know how poor those people were then? You sent home 1,900 Amerindian Community Support Officers (CSOs). It was one swipe. Did you not know that they were poor? Did you not have an appreciation of what they were doing to the Amerindian economy?

In one morning, you sent home 1,800 workers from the Wales Estate. Then two months after, you sent home another 4,000 workers from the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). Did you not understand how poor people were? Did you not understand that? You sent home thousands from the public service because you believed that they were supportive of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). Did you not know how poor they were? You got your Ministry of Communities to attempt to seize core homes from single mothers. That is what you did. I had to go to court and get court orders against it. You took away the lands from the poor rice farmers, some of them who voted for you, so that you could give it to your party group Chairman in West

Coast Berbice. Did you not know those people were poor? Mr. Speaker, when they come here, and they try to prey/play to the emotions of the Guyanese people, you must understand, as you said in your presentation, that the Guyanese people are not fools. They voted you out. It was all of you that they voted out. They voted you out because they knew what you were doing to them and what you were using. The business community knew what you were using the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) to do, what you were using the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to do, and what you were using the Gaming Authority of Guyana to do, and that is, to extract money from them for corrupt purposes. I am a lawyer and I have all of the information.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, your time is up, but I could allow you five minutes to continue if someone moves that motion.

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, I am asking kindly that the Hon. Attorney General be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Manickchand. Go ahead, AG.

Mr. Nandlall: It is this Government that reversed those 200 measures, and today, we have VAT-free water, VAT-free electricity, VAT-free medical supplies, VAT-free education, cash grant, and all the other grants that my Hon. Member, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, spoke about. When the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir comes here after eating the duck curry, the coconut *choka* and the dhal, and tries to say that people are hungry out there, she did not say that she ate it too. I saw her go back two times; I was monitoring her. She was sitting next to me. She must not come here and speak about those things. Our Guyanese brothers and sisters are intelligent.

It is already a matter of public record that the Hon. Member worked her entire professional life with the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government; and her last held salary, her last held remuneration package, was about \$1.8 million, and today she is a champion of poor people. She knows who is eating and who is not eating. It was \$1.8 million. I never said what she said, and I am getting more than that. That is public record, and I deserve it; in fact, I deserve a little more. We cannot come here and pretend to represent poor people and have no credentials. You have no track record. You lived a life of a bourgeois, worked with the very Government for all of your

professional life, and now you turn around and criticise it as the most demonic force on planet earth; drawing a salary of \$1.8 million a month, and then pretending to represent poor people.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we had a good, comprehensive discussion on the motion. I support the motion in principle, subject to the approval of the amendment that we will be tendering. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Attorney General. Now Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, the most self-contradicting presentation I have heard in this House...

Mr. Speaker: I suggest, yes, use the podium.

Mr. Mahipaul: Anil did that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, you are imputing the Attorney General of fixing a certain microphone; be careful. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, your time starts now.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, I was pointing out that the most self-contradictory presentation I have heard in a long time, I just listened to it. Here is the Attorney General getting up to say that, where he works, people get paid for the first month or there are agencies in which people get paid the first month. By saying that, he is admitting that it could be done in a month. Then he proceeded to try to rationalise all these phases that it will pass through. Clearly, he is confused. I want to read from the Constitution of Guyana, Article 22. It states:

“Every citizen has the right to be rewarded according to the nature, quality and quantity of his or her work, to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value...”

It ends by stating:

“...and to just conditions of work.”

One is in violation of our Constitution when one does not want to give our workers just conditions. I am saying to you, a worker waiting for three months, it cannot be just working conditions. I want to invite Members of the Government to ask themselves a question. Is it not true that most of the people that come into the Government service are young people? You all will admit that they are

young people. Implied in that, especially if they are just out of school, is that they do not have the resources to wait three months to be paid. If you care about the young and if you care about these people who are coming without the resources to sustain themselves for three months, you will agree in principle, that they should be paid in one month.

7.04 p.m.

For many of them, it is their first employment. It is not a case as if they have a bank account to clear a container for US\$18,000. They do not have the capacity to buy the container much less to clear it. It is self-contradictory. He was talking about the bourgeoisie, and he is clearing a container for US\$18,000 unless he does not know the meaning of bourgeoisie. I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, a lot of these persons are in their first employment. Some of you know what it is to get your first job and you looked forward to being paid. [**Mr. Persaud:** What was your first job?] To try and educate you. We need to recognise that these people we are talking about, many of them are not only young, it is their first employment. Therefore, it is unfair to ask them to wait for three months. I was of the view that this particular motion would have seen us finding consensus, because it is so straight-forward a motion that should cut across Party political lines. The public servants that we are talking about, some of them support you, some of them support us. Why the fight? Is it that we must fight? This is a motion that should obtain support from both sides.

It is well accepted that a lot the people going into the public service are single parents. I have already established that many of them are young, it is their first employment and many of them are single parents. How do you in good conscience ask a single parent to wait three months to be paid? Are you suggesting that person's child must wait? That is unreasonable. I am saying to you that they are single parents, and the Government should do everything to ensure they are paid within a month. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, many of them are poor people. To the extent they are poor, they need their money within a month. It is easy to come and make an amendment to say reasonable time. When you do that, you are giving yourself latitude to ensure that you do not do it in a month. I invite you to do what is much better, to strive towards giving the people their money in one month. That will be a noble objective. We will not crucify you if have problems with one or two of them. Generally, as a rule, we cannot live with people being paid three months after.

May I point out to you, Hon. Members, that I have been travelling the riverine areas. I heard Minister Mustapha indicating that there is going to be riverine grants or vouchers, or whatever they be. May I bring some news to you from the river? In the Berbice River, people are complaining that they do not get their Old Age Pension, sometimes for six months. There are many people who, by the time the Pension arrives, are dead. This is not restricted solely to the public servants. I am pointing out to you that we need a general policy which states we must deliver to our people on time. I am not here commenting on the fact that the people who carry in the Pension sit in the boat and want the elderly people to come in the boat rather than they go out. We have not reached that level of poor treatment. At minimum, we need to put systems in place to ensure that we deliver to our people.

The Hon. Attorney General said that there is no policy, but he admitted to the practice. Is that not strange? The practice is what matters. If you have a policy that says people should be paid in a particular time, but the practice is that they are being paid three months and after, then we need to address the practice. It does not matter if it is a government policy. What matters is that we develop a practice to ensure that people are paid within the month and on time. Let us also recognise that the people we are dealing with do not have a livable wage. Even when they get the money, they cannot live a month without problems. The fact that wages and salaries are low makes it worse, because they are not getting it on time and whenever they get it, it is inadequate. That is draconian. Those conditions we need to get rid of. I have heard the attempt to explain all of this away by inflation in the world, inflation here and inflation there. We accept that there is inflation. What we do not accept is that the Government must take a 'do nothing approach'. It has to come up with clear policies and programmes to ensure that our people could access resources. There is need for the complete overhaul of the public service I heard your logic that we were in power for five years and did not do anything. You were in power for 25 years. What did you do? I do not want to get into the details. For 25 years it persisted, and you are focusing on 5 years. Feel free to do so, but let us understand that there is need for us to change it so that our people could access resources.

I have heard all the talks about the removal of this tax, removal of that tax and removal of the other tax. That is not the critical question. Do you know what is the critical question? The critical question is: Are the people of Guyana at present having a better life? The answer is no. People are worse off today. You can say what you want about what tax you removed. The people of Guyana

know that in 2020 their income was buying more than it can buy now. Let us not run away with all these things about what taxes you removed and what taxes you did not. The critical issue is, what is the state of the people of Guyana? They cannot afford to live, and that is why we have been calling for a minimum livable income. This is one way in which you can help. Cash grants might have their place, but if you could do a proper analysis, come up with a minimum livable income and deliver that to public servants, we will be in a better position. It should be clear to *all and sundry* here, that this motion is a very important motion, and we believe that it should be supported without the amendment.

I want to invite the Government to show goodwill, to show that it believes that it is competent and so it could take this on and do it in a month. Failure to do that is suggesting that the Government is incompetent. I honestly hope that it believes it is competent. If it is a competent Government, just as the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, knows it is happening in some places, let it happen in all places. That is what we ask. For those who asked what we were doing, sometimes people do not understand the role of education. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I think one of them just uttered a few words. A lot of people do not understand the importance of education. The establishment of the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service was aimed at improving the efficiency of the public service. The critical issue here is that we need to come up with ways and means of improving the public service so that the people within the public service are efficient and effective. Education is critical. I want to urge the Government, one way to help in dealing with this issue is to become involved in training. Training is critical. Some people cannot be trained at all.

Mr. Speaker, I am recommending to this House, that we adopt this motion as is. It is a good opportunity for the Government to show it is competent, it is a good opportunity to show that it cares about the workers. It is a good opportunity to show many things. I do not intend to respond to everything you have said. It is time you stop saying that Ministers increased their salaries by 100%. It is not true. Do you know what is the main thing about that, if you forgot? You forgot that when you were in Opposition, you were saying that you would rescind it, but you never did. In fact, you proceeded to put in place a mechanism where you give across the board increases. What that means is, as Ministers, you will increase your amount and the gap between rich and poor will increase. That is not providing just conditions for our workers.

I want to submit that this is a motion with the good intention of helping the public servants, helping the pensioners and helping *all and sundry*. I do not believe we need to fight over it. I believe, as a Government, you have a glorious opportunity to embrace a sensible motion, suggest to the world that you are competent, and deliver to the workers their salaries in one month. I support the motion and I look forward to good sense prevailing. And on this particular one, we can work together and your Government will be in a better position to say to workers, yes, it is serious. At present that is not the case. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley to conclude the debate.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the majority of the debate. I tried to focus primarily on the parts of the debate that focused on the motion. Starting with the Minister of Public Service, I was expecting her to focus on the issue faced by the public servants.

7.19 p.m.

I listened expecting the Hon. Minister to give some commitment to those public servants who currently find themselves in this predicament, so that they would know that coming out of this debate something would be done urgently on their behalf. The Hon. Minister failed to, first, give this honourable House a clear definition on what reasonable means, who would define what reasonable means and how it is they are going to ensure that what is happening stops. The Hon. Minister is proposing that the one-month timeline be replaced with a reasonable time. A lot has been said about that. I am here trying to understand why it is that with such a motion and a recognition that we want the public service to reach to a stage where it is efficient that we would put a statement in place that gives the public service leeway to not be as efficient as it could be. What that means is that one stays one month and one works towards one month. One does not say reasonable and hope that one gets to one month or two months. We say one month and work towards it. That is what I was hoping would come out of this debate.

I know the Hon. Minister may choose to close this debate, as is her right. I am asking her to really respond to this issue as to what is reasonable and who will determine what is reasonable. Is three months reasonable; two months; six months? Who or what will ensure that this reasonable time is adhered to? What systems would be put in place to ensure that the letter of appointment or contract

is prepared in a timely manner? As my Hon. Colleague stated, the amendment lacks specificity. The Hon. Minister boasted that she is *in the driver's seat*. Yes; you are and that is why, not just us, but Guyanese – public servants – are looking to you for the answers because you are in the position to make things right. You are in the position to get it right. You are in the position to do what is right for the public servants. What the public servants require right now is that after one month they get paid. It is all good to make political statements. It is all good to have political banter. The fact that we are here and the whole point behind the motion was to recognise that public servants deserve better. At some point, we have to put the politics aside and do what is right for the public servants and for all Guyanese.

It is one thing to state that the APNU/AFC did not do or that I did not do when I was Minister – which is not quite accurate. I think the Hon. Minister knows that that is not quite accurate. [**Mr. Persaud:** What was accurate?] That there was a lot that was done in the Department of Public Service and it was the intention of the APNU/AFC Government to continue down the path of professionalising and making the public service a lot more efficient than it was when we got to it in 2015. We must also recognise that, before 2015, the public service was in a worse state than it is right now. At this juncture, a lot more is required of those who are in the seat of Government and who professed before they got there that they could do better. Now is your chance, as the Leader of the Opposition said, to show that you are competent.

The Hon. Minister spoke about advances. She stated that there is something called an advance in the public service that public servants can utilise as they await their salaries. There is a problem with the issue of advances. There is such a thing called advances in the rules and regulations of the Public Service Commission (PSC), but it is very specific and it deals with specific things. It deals with very specific things. If one goes outside of that, it would be deemed illegal. We have to ensure that when we are telling public servants about advances, that we are telling them the right thing and we are not asking them to go outside of the rules that currently exist. To state publicly about advances and being able to use advances as a way to get earnings – we have to be very careful with that and ensure that public servants are actually utilising the rules that exist. Further to that, I believe the system has to work equally and equitably for all. That is the other problem with advances that it is on a preferential basis. Whoever is in charge at that time will make a decision on whether they want to give the person in front of them that advance. [**An Hon.**

Member: (*Inaudible*)]. It is very subjective. Thank you. What we want is a system to be put in place so that no matter who is coming into the public service, the system will work equitably and equally for everyone. That is what we are looking for.

I heard a lot being stated about the fact that different agencies have different configurations and different ways of dealing with staffing and appointments. The reality is that Guyana is not the only country in the world with a public service. The reality is that Guyana is not the only country in the world in which the State employs people. Yet, it seems to be the only country in this hemisphere that seems to be all right with persons waiting three months, six months and a year to get their salary. The point I am trying to make is that if another country – the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica – can get it right then we can get it right. We cannot stand on the fact that there is a system in place and there are procedures that have to be taken so it may take a longer time. That is not acceptable. It is not acceptable to the person who is trying to find a job to feed his/her family, with the person expecting to get a salary at the end of the first month. We need to do better than that. We can do better than that and we should try our best to correct the system to do better than what we currently have.

A lot of talk has been had about technology. We heard about smart classrooms and talk about something else about classrooms today. There are other issues where technology can be utilised to ensure that the public service is a better space, more effective and efficient. If the issue is paperwork and moving paperwork from Region 1 to Region 4 then putting systems in place for technology can make that paperwork movement a lot faster and maybe no paperwork at all as it is done online. It is not a case where systems are not available and where programmes are not available to make the work easier, and faster and efficient. We just have to be committed to doing it and deciding that we are not going to allow it to move or to continue in this particular manner at this particular stage. I am not going to be long. I believe that we had a very eventful day. We had a lot of debate on this issue and, I think overall, everyone agrees that the system, as is, needs to change. We, on this side, believe that one month is what is required. Nothing more. Nothing that is not specific. Nothing that would allow persons to go beyond the one month that we are proposing. I commend this motion to the House for passage. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, you have the floor.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]:

Mr. Speaker, permit me to seek your leave to exercise the right of reply provided for under Standing Order 39 (2).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you could make your presentation there.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Sir. As I indicated earlier, pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 39 (2) to exercise the right of reply provided for under the said Standing Order. I do so very reluctantly. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it would have been my strong preference not to have to speak on this motion because to be frank with you – in my mind, respectfully, paying due deference to your infinite wisdom and deliberate judgement – it is an issue of a purely administrative nature that should not even have been the subject of a motion. Having become the subject of a motion, should not have been contaminated, distorted and misrepresented with the sort of political misrepresentations and innuendos that characterise this debate.

In fact, I started this afternoon's proceedings with some measure of optimism because I heard the mover of the motion, the Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, say that this should not be a political or politicised debate. I thought that given that she is the mover of the motion and given what I thought was a very deliberate attempt on her part – not to make an overly political presentation on the matter – perhaps her Colleagues would have taken their cue from her. Perhaps it was reckless of me to form that expectation because true to form and consistent with their long-established pattern of behaviour, the APNU/AFC displayed their customary incoherence, disjointed approach to every issue, inconsistency and fragmentation.

The Member who came immediately after the Hon. Sarabo-Halley on that side of the House, went into an extremely inappropriate, if I may say so myself, distortion and manipulation of this issue.

[An Hon. Member: Was that Mr. Figueira?] It was the Hon. Member Mr. Figueira. Completely moving away from the tone that Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley sets, introducing all manner of irrelevance and altering the tone of this debate for the rest of the evening. Let me say, this is an administrative matter which indeed, is the subject of concern on the part of the Government but is by no means a new issue. All of the Members on that side of the House who came here and sought somehow to suggest that this is an artifact of an uncaring People's Progressive Party/Civic Government would have been guilty of alienating themselves from the facts surrounding this

matter and deliberately pretending not to understand, first of all, the fact that this is a long standing issue that persisted throughout their term in Government... [Mr. Mahipaul: And yours.] And indeed, ours.

It has a perfectly credible reason and explanation. In 2019, I am not sure if the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, was Minister... I know she came in at some point in time towards the tail end of their term of Office. She may have been Minister at the time. The Hon. Member was Minister at the time. The Department of the Public Service, under the ministerial tenure of the then Minister Sarabo-Halley issued Circular No. 2 of 2019. That Circular reads as follows: ... Mind you, that was four years after they assumed Office.

7.34 p.m.

Purportedly, with all their concern and love for the public servants, four years after they entered Office, after Ms. Sarabo-Halley entered the Cabinet, after her Government lost its constitutional legitimacy, they belatedly discovered this problem and issued this Circular. The Circular is here Sir and I would be happy to share it with anybody who is interested. It is dated 9th December, 2019, and it reads as follows:

1. “There is seemingly some misinformation concerning the practice of the payment of salary to new entrance into the Public Service, which is being relayed could only be done within a three (3) months period.
2. Please be advised that, there is no such official policy/regulation/rule; hence, the practice and misinformation...”

This is a four-year old Government speaking here.

“...**must cease forthwith.**”

3. Under no circumstance should an employee be told that they have to wait until three (3) months to be paid salary.
4. All Permanent Secretaries, Regional Executive Officers and Heads not under Ministerial Control are reminded...”

Here is the solution that they proposed.

“...that, the Department of Public Service...”

As it was then miniaturised to as ‘the Department of Public Service’

“...will issue for the convenience of the payment of salary, an approval for not more than six (6) months of temporary employment. However, simultaneously, the approval to fill must be sent to the Public Service Commission for permanent pensionable appointment by way of the issue of the Government Order.

5. In order for employees to receive their salaries in a timely manner. Permanent Secretaries, Regional Executive Officers and Heads of Departments not under Ministerial Control **are hereby cautioned** to acquire the necessary documentation for employment, for e.g. birth certificate, ID card, TIN certificate and bank account information prior to having persons assume duty in their agencies.”

This was the carefully considered solution. Sir, do you know what the consequence of this was? It simply postpones the problem because the temporary appointment was issued. When a permanent appointment was subsequently not issued in a timely manner, countless employees fell off the payroll and then had to await the issuance of their permanent employment letter or contract to return to the payroll. This is a widely known fact.

The background to this Circular reflects – clearly the Minister received the advice of her technical officers – an understanding of what the problem was. The Hon. Attorney General described this problem. The reality is that given the employment process which involves typically an advertisement... I am speaking here of the Central Government not of the semi-autonomous agencies and so on, because they have a similar but slightly different process. In the Central Government, the reality is that positions are advertised, applications are received, top-ranked candidates are identified and offered a job. A process to formalise their employment is then initiated. That process involves sometimes approaching the Public Service Ministry for a contract to be finalised or approaching the relevant constitutional commission be it the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) or the Public Service Commission (PSC) for a government order to be issued. The reality is that process – not as a result of Government policy – partly because the executive

does not have control over the constitutional commissions; partly as a result of the bureaucracy sometimes not moving as efficiently as it should; partly as a result of inadvertent delays committed often times at the desk of public servants who, otherwise, generally are incredibly hardworking people and for whom we have the highest and greatest of respect. sometimes end up being a protracted one.

As a result of which, if that individual is told to turn out to work before the government order is issued, before the contract is signed or before an appointment letter is issued, the reality is that the employee ends up having to wait for the government order to be issued, for the contract to be signed or for the appointment letter to be issued.

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition cited the example given by the Hon. Attorney General. I believe this process is typically completed in a month and, I believe, it was the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, who made reference – she will no doubt correct me if I am wrong – to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), where she said that the process works very well there and it is completed in a month. There is a reason for that, which is that those entities are semi-autonomous. They are governed by Boards of Directors and those Boards of Directors have exclusive authority over recruitment matters so once the management decides to appoint somebody that recommendation if it is of the relevant in some cases the authority to employee is delegated to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Managing Director if it is of certain seniority it goes to the Board of Directors and it is typically approved within a month. It is a very simple reason that at an entity such as the Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority or at the GPHC which is an example that the Hon. Dr. Cummings cited, the process is completed within a month.

In the case of an employee who is subject to contract that goes through PSM or a person who is appointed by a Constitutional Commission, the process regrettably can be a more protracted one. This, as the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, I am sure is aware having served as a Minister in that Department as it was then called, I have no doubt that she is well aware of what the solution is. There is a very simple solution. The simple solution is to say to every single Permanent Secretary, REO and Head of Department that nobody is to be told to assume duty until his/her government order is issued with an effective date of employment or until his/her contract is signed with an effective date of employment. That would solve this problem immediately because, by that way, nobody is going to come on the job and wait for weeks or months until the contract is signed

somewhere, then contract moves from somebody's desk to another person desk, all of whom are incidentally public servants and, as I said, hardworking public servants who sometimes are overwhelmed by the volume of tasks on their desk. If they told, as a Government, or if we tell now, as the incumbent Government, every Permanent Secretary that he/she is not to have any staff assume duty until his/her government order is issued as I said a minute ago or until his/her appointment letter issued or contract is issued with an effective date of employment he/she must not turn out for duty, this problem will not be there, because the employee is going to turn out for duty when the appointment letter is issued. The same appointment letter is going to be processed immediately to put the employee on the payroll and he/she might get pay within the first month.

This is not question of technology. The technology is about the electronic processing of the payroll. Technology cannot control when the Public Service Commission will meet to approve the appointment. Technology cannot control when the Teaching Service Commission will meet to approve the government order. That is the reality. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(Inaudible)*] I just said, the solution is to say, do not turn out for work until the government order is issued or until the contract is signed.

Imagine this reality, having a young person... The Hon. Leader of the Opposition quite rightly said that most of these people are young. Certainly, under this Government because I gathered under our predecessors one has to be a minimum of 70 years old to obtain employment. We are not going to open that issue now. Perhaps, this is why the Hon. Leader of the Opposition was too young for a suitable appointment during that term of Office. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, quite correctly, said that a lot of these people are young. ...who has just left school, has just gotten his/her freshly minted Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) certificate, Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), who has just graduated from University of Guyana (UG) and who has just gotten this transcript or this letter from the University or a certificate to state that he/she has graduated. The young person is busy sending out letters of application and a government agency calls him/her who is the bright young person with eight or nine grade ones or whatever it is or a distinction or credit at UG. The young person is interviewed, did well at this interview and the Government needs the person in place as quickly as possible. This is why the position was advertised in the first instance; it is because the government agency needs the person immediately and, probably, the person wants to get this job quickly. A lot of young people, if one says to them,

well, do not turn out as yet because we have an administrative process. They will go away and be worried if somebody get will get my job, if this job would still be here, what am I going to do, my friends are already working, I am not working as yet or I would like to be in the employment too.

We live in the real world. A lot of these young people, the same young people who the Hon. Leader of the Opposition spoke of, want to start out. They want to use their skills; they want to have a job and the government agencies want to utilise their skills. These two parties – the recruiting agency and the potential new recruit – have a choice. They could agree to say, could you turn out on Monday; we want to recruit you and we are going to put this process in train? Do you want to turn out on Monday? We are guaranteeing you that we are going to employ you. You are the top-ranking candidate but, under that, there is a bureaucracy that is not functioning as efficiently as it should, so it is probably going to take a while for the government order to be issued, but we want you or it is going to take a while for the contract to be issued. The person says that I am glad to take this job and decides to turn out for the job. The bureaucracy does not function as efficiently as it should and it ends up taking two months. That young person takes that job knowing that when the first pay is processed, it is going to be retroacted to the day that he/she started. It is not that the young person is not going to be paid for that first month or that second month. It is retroacted to the date that he/she appointed. He/she may end up in that first month if he/she had to wait two months; they would get two months' salary on that first month.

There are two very simple alternatives. The alternatives are either, we permit this practice to continue, where we tell people to turn out; we process their contracts; their appointment letters go through their course and, admittedly, that process should be made efficient. We would be the first to say so. Secondly, we say very simply that until we fix this bureaucratic inertia that has persisted, clearly at least during the five years that the APNU/AFC and frankly speaking even before then, we can take the position that we want to bring this thing to a stop you are not turning out for duty until the government order is issued or until the contract is signed. It is that plain and simple. That is what this is all about. One could very easily take the position that we will implement that. We will not let anyone turn out for duty until there is a contract that is signed or until there is a government order that is issued. We could easily take that position.

7.49 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I could assure you that by the next month people will be on the payroll. That is a simple matter. This bureaucracy that my Colleagues on the other side of the honourable House is complaining about is that, clearly, they grappled with for five years until they realised that there was a problem and then implemented a half-baked solution. They did not solve the problem. They give persons a temporary contract to hold on and then they were going to see what happens. Let me say this, the very bureaucracy they are lamenting that they were unable to solve and they are saying that we, the Government, do not want to solve it is manned by the public servants. They are hardworking public servants. [Mr. Nandlall: *(Inaudible)*] Sir, what I am saying is very simple English language and anyone who is working in Government... They knew of this problem because they knew the Circular. I saw the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, smiling with recognition when I referred to it. They knew of this problem and they knew that when they came up with perhaps what they thought was the best but admittedly half-baked solution to the magnitude of the problem.

The reality is that this Motion had nothing to do with concerns for public servants and caring for people. This Motion was plain and simple political grandstanding. An attempt to deceive the public servants because *dem tek dem eyes pass the people and tink di people* stupid but they are not. An attempt to insult the intelligence of these public servants who all understand this process because they are working in the public service. Let me hasten to add that the public service is full with remarkable, hardworking, good and talented people. I have had the privilege of being a public servant myself. I have had the privilege of serving as Minister in a Ministry that is populated with some of the most outstanding public servants who I have not encountered anywhere in the world. This was an attempt to engage in political grandstanding to come and pretend to be concerned about the public servants.

Let me make this point. The Hon. Member who spoke on this side before me – I believe it was the Hon. Attorney General – spoke about all the poor people who they professed to love and whose cause it professes to champion but whose circumstances they damaged in a lasting way. Our Colleagues, on that side of the House, claimed that they love public servants and they champion their cause. Does the Opposition think that the public servants do not know or have forgotten that they compelled thousands of them to give up their contract gratuity status and move to the permanent establishment status? Do you know what effect that had? It had the effect of reducing

those persons emolument by $22\frac{1}{2}\%$. The APNU/AFC while in Government compelled public servants to give up their contract gratuity status including professionals such as medical doctors who may not want to stay until 55 years old to get a pension. They were told that they have to give up their contract gratuity and lose their $22\frac{1}{2}\%$ and go over to the fixed establishment. They did not love the public servants then. In that one action, they did not give them the option. One cannot impose security on people. If they wanted to offer the public servants the option then, that is a different matter. They were told that they do not have a choice and they had to go over to the fixed establishment. That reduced the total emoluments of these people by $22\frac{1}{2}\%$ and they took away their contract gratuities. Does the Opposition not think that those people remember of what they did to them? Sir, that is not all. [**An Hon. Member:** (*inaudible*)] You wonder why they sent you back to that side of the House.

Many of these public servants – I am using public servants here not in the narrowest of definition but in a slightly broader definition – were members of the discipline services. Many central government employees were members of the discipline services, policemen and policewomen, men and women in uniforms, soldiers and firemen. I am not talking about contracts. Do you know what they did? They took away the one-month bonus from them. I know that they are contracted employees, but I also know that under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government they used to get a one-month bonus and the APNU/AFC vindictively took away that bonus from them, thereby reducing their emolument by $1/13^{\text{th}}$. They vindictively took it away from them which hurt them in their pockets. They are now coming to pretend to love these people. Do they understand why the public servants sent them over there and will keep them over there for a very long time? That is not all.

They issued an edict that salary in lieu of leave will be banished and outlawed to the same public servants that they claimed to love. They went publicly and said, 'use it or lose it'. If a person does not use his/her leave he/she will lose the leave. They issued a circular. If I had the time, I would find that circular and read it. The APNU/AFC said that if a person does not use his/her leave, he/she will lose it; use it or lose it. It did not matter that the exigency of the service did not allow a person to take his/her leave and no matter if one is working hard doing the work of the Government and the work of the people. If you do not take your leave, use it or lose it. Thousands

of public servants who had historically been accustomed to a situation where if they were told that the exigency of the service prevented him/her from taking his/her leave, he/she could have accumulated and defer his/her leave and either take his/her leave in a larger block or alternately obtain payment for his/her leave. They abolished salary in lieu of leave. It does not end there. I have the circular here.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share this with you that while the APNU/AFC issued a circular to tell public servants that they cannot get their salary in lieu of leave, several of their Ministers went public to say that public servants must take their leave or else they would lose it. What was very interesting is that when a certain public servant was moved over from her public service status to her ministerial appointment, she managed to convince one of her ministerial colleagues who is sitting in this House. It is a matter of public record that when the Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, was moved from her public service position where she was subject to the same *Public Service Rules* like all the other public servants and appointed as a Minister, she secured a letter from the Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams, assuring her that she will be paid for her salary in lieu of leave, while all the other public servants were being told that they would lose their salary in lieu of leave. The Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, got a letter to say that she will be paid for her salary in lieu of leave. Not only that, when that letter was sent to the Ministry of Finance, under the APNU/AFC Administration, refused to process it because it knew the rule. It said that there is no exception to this rule; we are not going to process this. When the People's Progressive Party/Civic assumed Office, we receive a lawyer's letter from the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Ford, demanding payment of salary in lieu of leave to the Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I will have to give you a minute to wind up. The timings for this debate were 25 minutes plus five minutes and you have exhausted the plus five minutes.

Dr. Singh: Demanding payment of a hefty sum... My apologies, Sir.

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, we ask kindly that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister Ms. Manickchand, the time we had was 25 minutes plus five minutes. The Hon. Minister started at 7.27 p.m., according to my computer clock, and it is now 8.01 p.m. I

was saying to the Hon. Minister that the plus five minutes was also exhausted. I will grant him two minutes to conclude.

Dr. Singh: Every well, Sir.

Ms. Manickchand: It is just to finish the thought, Sir.

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Sir. The Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, got her legal representative the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Ford, to write legal letter and institute legal proceedings demanding payment of the same salary in lieu of leave to herself which she was denying public servants across the entire public service. It was a very hefty sum. Do not come here... [**A Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] That is a matter of public records. Those legal proceedings are a matter of public records. This People's Progressive Party/Civic Government had to pay the Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, a huge sum for salary in lieu of leave which she and her Government had denied thousands of public servants in Guyana. ... pretend to love public servants. Do not come here and pretend to champion the calls of public servants. The Opposition served nobody but themselves and that is why they are on that side of the House and that is why it will be on that side of the House for a very, very, very, very long time to come. Thank you, very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

8.04 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I will now put the motion, but we have two amendments moved by the Hon. Ms. Sonia Savitri Parag to the resolved clauses and it states:

“Delete word “advises” in the first line and substitute with word “encourages”

“...the Government of Guyana to ensure that public servants receive their first pay cheque.”

Then, where it states:

“Delete phrase “no more than one (1) month after the commencement of their employment in the public sector.”

“And replace with the words “within a reasonable time on receipt of a letter of appointment or a signed contract.”

Let me ask the Hon. Minister to move those amendments.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move the amendment to the motion presented by the Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, and it states in the be it resolved clauses:

“Delete the word “advises” in the first line and substitute with the word “encourages.”

“Delete phrase “no more than one (1) month after the commencement of their employment in the public sector.”

“And replace with the words “within a reasonable time on receipt of a letter of appointment or signed contract.”

Assembly divided: Ayes 33, Noes 28, Abstained 4, as follows:

Ayes

Mr. Shuman

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks

Mr. Narine

Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj

Mr. McCoy

Mr. Persaud

Mr. Indar

Ms. Rodrigues

Ms. Parag

Mr. Ramson

Dr. Persaud

Mr. Croal

Mr. Dharamlall

Mr. Bharrat

Mr. Hamilton

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Manickchand

Dr. Anthony

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Todd

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Nandlall

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips

Noes

Mr. Sears

Mr. Sinclair

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. Philadelphia

Mr. Jaiprashad

Ms. Flue-Bess

Mr. Rajkumar

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Cox

Ms. Fernandes

Ms. Ferguson

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Mr. Henry

Ms. Hughes

Ms. Mc Donald

Ms. Walton-Desir

Mr. Jordan

Mr. Jones

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Ms. Lawrence

Mr. Patterson

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Mr. Holder

Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Norton

Abstained

Mr. Duncan

Mr. Trotman

Mr. Forde

Mr. Jagdeo

Motion, as amended, put and agreed to.

Motion

LIABILITY INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR OIL SPILLS IN GUYANA

WHEREAS Oil production offshore Guyana is expected to increase rapidly from its current rate of 120,000 barrels per day (bopd) to close to 1 million bopd, with the number of FPSOs increasing over 10 times by 2026;

AND WHEREAS the emergency response and cleanup of the British Petroleum Macondo oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has so far cost more than \$70 Billion USD;

AND WHEREAS a major oil spill offshore Guyana would result in the environmental devastation of Guyana and its neighbouring countries, obliterating the areas fishing industry, aquatic vegetation, including possible lawsuits from neighbouring countries;

AND WHEREAS the Liza 1 Permit signed by the current EPA Head and issued in June 2017, designates as Permit Holder – Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL), a subsidiary Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) of parent companies, ExxonMobil, Hess and CNOOC;

AND WHEREAS following the change in EPA’s Leadership, Liza 2 permit included provisions for unlimited liability for all spills by including a provision requiring EEPGL’s purchase of the maximum available private insurance offered in the market, with all of the remaining liabilities to be covered by EEPGL’s parent companies – Exxon, Hess and CNOOC;

AND WHEREAS EEPGL agreed to the unlimited liability coverage commitment in the Liza 2 Permit and urgent purchase of the maximum available private insurance prior to signing the Permit;

AND WHEREAS EEPGL timely obtained the maximum \$2.5 Billion private insurance available on the market prior to EPA signing and issuing the Liza 2 Permit in April, 2019,

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Government recants its decision to cancel the process already established in 2017 for obtaining unlimited liability coverage by EEPGL’s parent companies – a process that was agreed upon by Exxon and made a condition of the Liza 2 Permit, and was close to being finalised when the current administration took office in 2020;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Government returns to the already well-established process put in place by the previous administration which made a condition of the Liza 2 Permit for guaranteed coverage by EEPGL’s

parent companies, agreed upon by EEPGL, and was nearing completion when the current administration took office;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this Parliament calls on the Government of Guyana, to include full unlimited liability coverage for oil spills and other disasters related to petroleum production as a condition for granting approval for the proposed Yellowtail development and all other future petroleum development;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Government of Guyana, conducts an independent analysis on the possible ill effects of an oil spill, and present this report to the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources to be used as a reference for all other future oil development submissions; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That, if necessary, the Opposition stands ready, able and willing to assist the Government in getting back on track the expeditious acquisition of unlimited liability coverage for an oil spill.

[Mr. Patterson]

Mr. Speaker: Mr. David Patterson, you may proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the surgical mutilation of the original motion on this most critical matter...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, would you like me to read the Standing Orders to you and then spend an hour to show you where are all the inaccuracies we asked you to remove? If you are going to persist with this, then we are going to have to continue to interrupt you. You may proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, maybe chemical dissection, is that acceptable?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members there are several questions and motions which comes from Members that are not in compliance with the rules when read against the Standing Orders. The Speaker has the authority to amend. The Speaker has been lenient in allowing Members after they have

discussed with the technical staff in Parliament where the offending statements or the non-compliance with the Standing Orders are and we have been very lenient with coaching and guiding Members who should know better. Several questions and motions have gone through this process. What is printed in the press by Members is for them and the press. I do not conduct the business of the House in the media. We do it here within the rules that have been established.

8.19 p.m.

If those rules do not suffice, there are established ways of changing them. If Members are going to come to the House, when they are wrong or inaccurate, then I will have to intervene, especially, if they are going to impute on provisions which gives the Speaker the authority to amend. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson and Hon. Members in general, I trust that I do not have to go through this little lecture again. Hon. Member, you may proceed with your surgeries. If you have to get some, we can make arrangements, however, could you stick to the motion before you in its form.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. Notwithstanding that, I said to proceed with the surgery of the original motion on this most critical matter of full liability coverage in the event of an oil spill. This is by the removal of 15 of the 25 whereas clauses. We, nevertheless, say thank you at long last giving us the opportunity to let the people of this country know the truth of the perilous risk it faces, which is caused by the gross neglect of this Government in representing their best interest. As you are aware, this is the fifth motion that I have submitted to this House on oil and gas related matters. All were surgically amended. Those that survived the operating table were defeated by the Government's majority, with abled support from a lone Member of the Opposition. I am under no illusions about the successful outcome of this motion. I mentioned my previous motions for two important issues.

Firstly, to inform you that we on this side of the House will not easily be deterred. Thus, it is our intention on behalf of the people of the country to submit at least another six more motions related to oil and gas. The sixth motion on wastewater management has already been completed and will be submitted early next week. Sir, but based on the infrequency of the holding of Parliamentary meetings, it is unlikely to be debated in this session. That will allow the Parliament Office ample time to perform its customary surgery.

Secondly, it is to highlight that the motion on natural gas flaring was not debated based on a ruling by yourself, which we on the Opposition have accepted. Sir, permit me to quote your ruling of 10th June, 2021.

“Hon. Members, we have a first motion in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson. I am, at this moment, unable to proceed with the debate on this motion because, since this motion has been tabled and put on the Order Paper, an action has been filed in the High Court of the Supreme Court of Judicature. That action is bearing the number 2021-HC-AEM-CIV-FEA-742. Consistent with previous rulings regarding matters that are *sub judice*, I again refer to Standing Orders 26 (g) and 41 (2).”

We on this side of the House are confident that you will continue to stand by your previous rulings that all motions before our courts are *sub judice*.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please do not misquote me when you summarise. I never made a statement in this House that states, all motions. Check back the records.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, you stated:

“...I again refer to Standing Orders 26 (g) and 41 (2).”

We, continue to hold that you will stand true to your previous ruling. Thank you. On the substantive motion, oil production in offshore Guyana is expected to increase rapidly. Tripling what is guessed to be its current rate of about 3000 barrels per day, to close to one million barrels in the next few years. I said, guessed, because unlike the Coalition which adhered to its moral responsibility of full transparency to our people, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C) *modus operandi* is to dodge and hide information that belongs to the people. This is not only coming from me and this side of the House. It also has engendered the frustrations of all Guyanese who are faced with half-truths, misinformation, or nothing at all coming from the Government.

It, therefore, stands to reason that such rapid-fire ramping up of production activities will exponentially increase the probabilities of an oil spill with devastating consequences; especially, considering the inadequacy of our oil response plan to respond to such an emergency; the clean-up and restoration of our oceans and beaches throughout the Caribbean and the South American Coastlands; not to mention the environmental damage to Guyana and its neighbouring countries;

and the obliteration of the country's fishing industries, aquatic vegetation and economic bankruptcy, including possible lawsuits from neighbouring countries. Most noteworthy, it is a way of life for all of us sitting here. In every place else, we should carry insurance and protection for our lives and properties against risk far less than mentioned above. I will wager that all the Members on the other side of this House have insurance protection of some sort for his/her homes, automobiles, health, and so on. Yet, it is mind-boggling, even though not surprising, that our friends on that side of the House are not a wee bit interested in protecting not only the people we serve but the livelihood of the entire nation and region.

The Members on the other side are no doubt ashamed to embrace our sage advice and counsel because of politics. They however remain deaf to the overwhelming daily public outcry – from the most likely affected populations from all walks of life in Guyana, the Caribbean region, and other national and international stakeholders and experts, who are shouting from the rooftop for a guarantee of full liability coverage for the clean-up of any oil spill offshore Guyana. The emergency response and clean-up of the British Petroleum (BP p.l.c.) Macondo Prospect oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has so far cost more than US\$7 billion and it is still counting. Inexplicably, the Vice-President of Guyana has been waffling all over the place and changing his tune from a US\$2 billion insurance from ExxonMobil to parent company assurance. He is now peddling a US\$600 million insurance coverage, which is less than one *per cent* of the Macondo Prospect spill.

It may astound you to learn that all this is happening only because the Government has spinelessly weaselled out of its responsibility to protect the people's interests when it buckled to wavering to ExxonMobil to violate the laws of the land enshrined by the Coalition Administration in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) permit, which required full and unlimited liability coverage comprising of commercial insurance plus parent company guarantees for all costs over and above what the Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL) and that insurance do not cover. We on this side of the House are in no way implying that ExxonMobil and the other operators will not put in place all the required designs and safety mechanisms to prevent the possibility of an oil spill. We are confident that ExxonMobil will be doing everything possible to ensure that there shall be no oil spills. However, we have received those assurances before. During the commissioning of the first floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) vessel, Liza Destiny, the country was assured it was designed to the highest technical standards, capable of

reinjecting all the natural gas, resulting in zero flaring above pilot level. Despite these assurances, some 30 months after the FPSO vessel has come into operations, the issue of excess flaring has yet to be safely resolved.

According to *Statista*, the world's leading provider and market and consumer data, ExxonMobil has been responsible for more than 3000 oil, chemical, and drilling fluid spills, greater than one barrel between 2005 and 2020. In 2020, the last period in which data was available, there were 223 oil spills in ExxonMobil's operations. ExxonMobil's global average is approximately 200 oil spills per year. It is foolhardy for us to believe that Guyana will be spared. Rather, knowing that despite the best efforts of the oil companies, oil spills are a real possibility. Hence, we must ensure that our country is adequately protected. At that rate – that is listed publicly – ExxonMobil has an oil spill every other day. So, as we are debating this motion tonight and statistics show that by tomorrow, somewhere in ExxonMobil's operation there will be an oil spill greater than one barrel of oil. It may not be Guyana; however, it is only a matter of time. The PPP/C Government is playing Russian Roulette with this country by not ensuring that we have full liability coverage.

The general impression provided when discussing oil spill insurance is not normally centred around the clean-up exercises. However, that is only the tip of the sphere. Oil spills will adversely affect deep ocean and coastal fishing and fisheries. The initial effect of toxic and smothering waste is widespread mortality, and contamination of fish and food species, but the long-term ecological effect is worse. Oil spills poison maritime and coastal organic matters which interrupt the food chains of fishes and sea creatures. The domino effect is on reproduction which in turn affects commercial fishing enterprises, in most instances, permanently. Fishes may ingest large quantities of oils through their gills.

8.34 p.m.

Fishes exposed to oil may suffer from changes in heart, respiratory rates, enlarged liver, reduce growth, fin erosion and a variety of effects of biochemical and cellular levels. If this does not kill them, more or less, the oil may affect their reproduction negatively and result in deformed fishes. Currently, even without the effects of oil spills, our fisher folks are complaining of fewer catches. Sir, that is without oil spills right now. With the likelihood of an oil spill, we will be in a state of economic crisis. Sir, what an irony for a blooming oil producing nation. Coastal areas such as

Georgetown which is heavily populated with recreational activities like fishing, boating, swimming beaches and other tourism activities; oil waste invades and pollutes these areas and activities which trickle down to decrease human activities and the long-term effect on the local economy. The property value, Sir, like Pradoville in these areas tend to decrease. Regional businesses decline and future investments are uncertain. These extremities are the real effect on maritime life, human activity and the sustainability of the local economy, an irreparable damage which the meagre insurance coverage we have, cannot begin to repair.

Oil spillages does not only occur in the drilling process. That is what the Government will be addressing, and I am sure they would tell you about the safety features of the Seamen's Provident Fund Organisation (SPFO). Around 80% of oil spills occur during transporting of the oil. Currently, I guess, we are producing 300 barrels per day which means there is a discharge vessel. Every five or six days off the shores of Guyana, a vessel collects 300,000 barrels per day. There is a vessel collecting crude every five or six days. With our oil production projected to increase to almost one million barrels per day in the next few years, there will come a time where every single day, 365 days every year, there will be a vessel collecting at least one million barrels of crude oil every single day for the next 40 years. Sir, I hope you and the Members over there understand the magnitude of the risk in which we are seeking to ensure you have full liability coverage. I know my Friends on the other side have an allergy to the truth. I will spare them the pain and embarrassing denial by reading what is enshrined in Liza Phase 2, Sir. You removed it but it is here now because that was part of the surgery. Enshrined in Liza Phase 2 permit by the Coalition... It was copied into all other Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved permits under the People's Progressive Party/Civic including the just renewed Liza Phase 1 permit. Sir, here we go. There are several clauses, but I will only address Section 12 of the Liability for Population Damage Act. Section 12:1 states:

“The permit Holder shall insurance of such type and in such amount as is customary in the international petroleum industry in accordance with good oil field practices for Petroleum Operations in progress Offshore Guyana.”

Sir, I will skip to Section 12:3 of this permit which states:

“This Permit is issued subject to the fulfilment of the obligations outlined in 12.1 above, and in a correspondence dated March 20, 2019 indicating the commitment of EEPGL to obtain such insurance for coverage of environmental liabilities, in accordance with the requirements of EPA and the Bank of Guyana. Failure to fulfil such obligations or commitments is in breach of this Permit and will result in its immediate cancellation.”

Sir, that is the commitment it signed. The Government and ExxonMobil have been denying the insurance to the sum of US \$5 billion which is the highest insurance available in the market was bought and existed under the Coalition. Here is the proof referenced in a correspondence of 29th March, 2019 and included in the Environmental Protection Agency and it was witnessed and approved by the Bank of Guyana (BoG). Sir, additionally, Section 12:5 states:

“The Permit Holder must, as soon as reasonably practicable, provide from the Parent Company...”

We have always insisted that...Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Ltd (EEPGL) is a local company, it is a liability company in Guyana. The Parent Company of course is the global ExxonMobil.

“...or Affiliate Companies of Permit Holder and its Co-Ventures (“Affiliates”) one or more legally binding agreements to the EPA, undertaking to provide adequate financial resources for Permit Holder and its Co-Ventures to pay or satisfy their respective environmental obligations regarding the Stabroek Block if EEPGL or its Co-Ventures fail to do so...”

Sir, that is the permit and when we issued it the act stated if the EEPGL or local affiliates, the [inaudible] cannot foot the bill, or the parent company, whoever it may be will have to foot the bill. That is what unlimited liability is, Sir. You do not [inaudible] for the company in Guyana but it is liable for the entire global operation of ExxonMobil.

For many months prior to the People’s Progressive Party Civic taking office, several meetings were held between the EPA’s Attorney and the parent company’s attorneys to craft the legally binding agreement enshrined, as I just mentioned, in Section 12:5, as a precondition for the start of Liza Phase 2 and approval for the [inaudible]. It was close to finalisation when the PPP/C took office and it nixed it in totality taking the county down from having full unlimited liability coverage

to having none. Most eye-popping was the termination of the services of the EPA's most brilliant and high performing Attorney handling the agreement for the Government. He was getting in the way of what it was doing. Notwithstanding its negligence in not following the law enshrined in the permit by the Coalition requiring unlimited liability coverage in case a spill occurs. Besides its failure to spend World Bank's US\$2 million loan, obtained by the Coalition Government specifically for the purpose of enhancing the capacity of EPA the PPP/C is also grossly negligent in terminating the capacity building initiative put in place by the Coalition to enhance oversight that would result in reducing the probability of an oil incident. This action caused the World Bank to reduce the country rating for moderately satisfactory to moderately unsatisfactory which is our current rating with regard to oil and gas. The PPP/C dumped the plan conceived by the Coalition and funded by the World Bank.

Sir, it was developed by the World Bank's Brazilian expert, the EPA and Department of Energy. Sir, here is what was for, it was for the EPA to add a new 34-person staffed unit to EPA purely for the oil and gas sector. Sir, this would include 24/7 on sight FPSO coverage. Sir, the World Bank provided US\$1 million grant for this initiative. It went out to tender, hired an expert who came in and worked with the EPA and the Department of Energy to prepare and presented a fully comprehensive plan including organisational charts, for the new unit. Position, description and qualifications of each position including highly specialised and experienced petroleum, geological and environmental engineers. This plan was completed in 2019 and ready to start the recruitment process. However, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) put it on hold, but the PPP/C has scrapped the programme all together and has not yet proposed an alternative. Maybe, when the Minister or his Colleague gets up to speak, they will enlighten the country and the world on what is the alternative. The bottom line is, unlike the Coalition which has institutions in place, the PPP/C does not care one *iota* about preparing and developing our oversight staff to help mitigate incidents such as a spill. At the same time, it is also neglectful and does not care about ensuring provisions of liability coverage to clean up after a spill. The Coalition had both safeguards in place only to be callously torn up and thrown away by the PPP/C.

This is a copy of the permit that I have in my hand which is irrefutable proof that the Government tells untruths when it proclaims that it has improved the permit. How could they have the gall to talk about improving the permit when they removed the Coalition's requirement bringing it down

from full unlimited liability coverage to the measly proposed US \$6 million insurance. Unless, improving must have meant improving in favour of ExxonMobil and the other operators. [Inaudible], even though the Coalition requirements still remains in these permits, this Administration appears to have dumbfoundedly, one, withdrawn the \$2.5 billion insurance put in place by the Coalition in the Bank of Guyana and two, stood helplessly by as ExxonMobil unlawfully started up the Liza Phase 2 and restated Liza Phase 1 without these requirements being met, despite the fact that section 12.3 of this permit dictates that:

8.49 p.m.

“Failure to fulfil such obligations or commitments is in breach of this Permit and will result in its immediate cancellation.”

Even worse is the scary thought that even within the context of the unbelievably miserly \$600 million total coverage that is being waved around by the Vice President, ExxonMobil has now publicly stated that this amount will only cover legitimate and reasonable costs. Despite the callousness of this statement, it is a clear demonstration of the company’s intention to battle in court as to what is a legitimate and reasonable cost. Sadly, we have no grounds to stand on in such an instance of a spill since there is no baseline study of the existing environmental conditions to evaluate damages above that baseline.

I do not see the Deputy Speaker here. The Hon. Member has claimed to represent our Indigenous peoples. The dangers to our Indigenous and other coastal communities by allowing ExxonMobil to insert the words “legitimate” and “reasonable cost” are far reaching. In ExxonMobil’s own environmental impact assessment (EIA) for the Yellowtail development, its handpicked consultant, Environmental Resources Management (ERM), stated that in the worst-case scenario, in the event of a medium scale discharge or spill, there is a 40% chance that the entire coastlines of Regions 1 and 2 will be covered/impacted. While the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) will claim there is US\$600 million, which they have agreed will be adequate to clean up the shorelines, it will not cover the consequential effects of such an event. If such an oil spill occurs, months, years, even decades after such an oil spill, Indigenous riverain villages closest to the Atlantic such as Imbotero, Morawhanna, Almond Beach, Three Brothers, Waramuri, and St. John

will be devastated, their livelihoods destroyed. By the insertion/introduction of those two words, they will be forced to go to court to prove that these damages are legitimate and reasonable.

It is extremely mystifying how the rule of law, put into the permits by the Coalition, could be allowed to be so blatantly violated under the watch of the PPP/C Government. The only mystery lies either in the incompetence of the Administration not even knowing what are in the permits or the cowardliness in not standing up for the best interests of our people, or both of the above. It begs the obvious question: who is really in charge of this country? Is it the oil company or the Government? Right in our own backyard in Peru, a major oil company operating in Guyana, underreported by far a 12,000-barrel oil spill at its operations in Peru. The company then refused to honour its obligations to clean it up, thus causing grave harm to Peru's economy and environment, forcing the Government to fine that company a reported US\$660 million, to date, and institute a US\$4.5 billion lawsuit. As old people used to say, *you cannot wait for candlelight to see things in the dark when you can see them in broad daylight*.

There are four resolved clauses, and the first one is: Be It Resolved that the Government reverses its decision to cancel the process already established in 2019 by the Coalition for the obtaining of full unlimited liability coverage comprising of private insurers carried by the Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL), plus guaranteed coverage of all liabilities over and above EEPGL's insurance to be carried by the EEPGL's parent company, ExxonMobil, CNOOC and Hess. This process was agreed upon by ExxonMobil and was close to being finalised when the PPP/C took Office in 2020 and was already enshrined in all of the approved agreements/permits for the Liza 1, Liza 2, Payara, and the Yellowtail permit. There is also: Be It Further Resolved that in returning to the well-established process put in place by the Coalition Administration, demanding that full unlimited liability coverage and in light of the fact that Liza 1 and 2 operations are operating illegally, in violation of the permits, the Government must give ExxonMobil no more than three months to provide documented proof of insurance policies and parent company guarantees, as pellucidly required by the permits. The penultimate Be It Resolved clause is:

“That this Parliament calls upon the Government of Guyana, to include full unlimited liability coverage for oil spills and other disasters related to petroleum production as a condition for granting approval...”

For all future petroleum developments.

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Government of Guyana, conducts an independent...”

To allow for the objective determination of environmental damages and liabilities should they occur, especially in ExxonMobil showing bad intentions to raise questions to what are legitimate and reasonable costs, and to be used by the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources as a reference for all future oil development submissions.

Finally:

“BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

...the Opposition stands ready, able and willing to assist the Government in getting back on track the expeditious acquisition of unlimited liability coverage...”

In the event of an oil spill. With these few words, I now propose the motion, and I hope it shall find favour with this House. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Question put.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution on the motion in question proposed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson.

We sat and listened to Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, for the last 30 minutes or so. There are a number of inaccuracies that I would like to highlight and correct. A lot was mentioned on the impact and effects of a potential oil spill, or the effects that a potential oil spill will have anywhere in the world, which we quite agree with. We know how devastating an oil spill can be to any country in the world, not only Guyana. Once you are an oil producing nation, there must be precautions and safeguards that are put in place to ensure that if there is any eventuality of such an occurrence, there is protection and there are mechanisms in place to deal with whatever consequences there may be after that.

I am not sure where this document that the Hon. Member spoke of is – the document that was being almost concluded after lengthy negotiations just before they demitted Office. Based on our

checks, there is no such document. Whether it is at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), whether it is at the Ministry of Natural Resources, or whether it is at the Department of Energy at Brickdam, our checks were unsuccessful. We have not found any such document. I will appeal to the Hon. Member that if there is any such document, then it should be shared with us because you expressed a willingness by the Opposition to work with the Government to develop our new oil and gas sector. If the document is with the former Head of the Agency, then we would love to see that document, we would love to see how far the negotiation went, and we would love to see all that took place towards moving to a \$5 billion insurance for oil spill.

I wish to put on record, too, that the programme at the Environmental Protection Agency was never cancelled. As a matter of fact, the department grew from three members of staff to 13, presently, who are dedicated full-time towards monitoring oil and gas activities. The EPA has actually strengthened its capacity through international consultants and satellite monitoring, too. I wish to report that. Maybe the Member was not briefed on what is taking place now but on what occurred when the former Head was there. If you look at the language in the motion, it speaks a lot, or it actually shows a lot as to how the former Head would have crafted his kind of language and statements. I think the information by the Hon. Member is a bit outdated. The programme was never cancelled. I am happy to report that there are 13 staff members, and we also have satellite monitoring. These are staff members who are dedicated towards the monitoring of oil and gas.

What we would have done too was to strengthen capacity. This was another recommendation that was made when the APNU/AFC was in Government, but it was never done – to strengthen the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS). We know that the GNBS plays a major role in terms of monitoring. It is not only in terms of calibration and measurement but in terms of monitoring real time and having a presence on the floating production storage and offloading (FPSO). The Ministry of Natural Resources, along with the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, strengthened the capacity at the GNBS, and there are persons physically present on both FPSOs doing real time monitoring for us. I do not want to go down the road as to getting in a debate on the low fish catch. There have been so many articles and so many debates as to whether the oil and gas activities offshore Guyana is truly affecting the low catch in Guyana. I think we have seen reports, and we have heard from several Caribbean leaders that it is not only a Guyana problem. It is more of a regional problem. I think, it is even extended globally, that there is a

significant decline in the catch by fisher-folk. If I may put it into perspective because a lot of Guyanese may not have a clear picture as to what is happening off-shore Guyana. The Liza 1 and the Liza 2 development and the exploration activities that are occurring offshore Guyana is 100 miles away from the Kingston seawall. The depth is over 5,000 feet (ft) of water. It is hard to fathom that we have the kind of fish we would catch in Guyana swimming and feeding in 5,000 ft depth of water. I think it is almost impossible to do so.

9.04 p.m.

So, to blame the exploration activities on what is happening offshore, I do not think it is quite justified. As a matter of fact and based on my own layman argument, and I often give this argument to people when I am speaking, if the drilling and exploration activities are offshore, 100 miles out and 5,000 feet deep, and you have exploration activities vibration, what should happen based on our common sense, is that it should actually chase the fish closer to shore into the nets, rather than away. I do not see that happening. I am just trying to say Hon. Members that the oil and gas exploration activities should not be blamed for the low catch. There are a number of other reasons. We have had significant rainfall, freshwater mixing into the salt water and a number of other reasons, but we do not want to get into that now. When we took over Office in August, 2020, there was no proper framework to manage the oil and gas sector. I listened to the Hon. Member and he made glowing remarks, as usual, of what happened under the APNU/AFC Government, what was put in place, and what should not have been put in place, but I think it was more of a gaff. The reality is that nothing was there to manage. No framework was in place to manage the oil and gas sector in an efficient and effective manner, so that, one – there would be great transparency and accountability, and two –the benefits from the oil and gas sector would actually flow to the people of Guyana and everybody would benefit.

The Hon. Member spoke about the Liza 1 and Liza 2 permits, but the Hon. Member should tell the people of Guyana too that the APNU/AFC negotiated the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA). Then we heard all sorts of excuses, but the PSA was signed in June, 2016, when the APNU/AFC was in Government. If we are talking about getting better bargains for Guyana, getting more benefits for Guyana, safeguarding Guyanese rights and protecting our rights, it should have started with the PSA. Simply put, it should have started, and we could have gotten a better deal. We, as

the Government, have committed ourselves to ensuring that we develop a model PSA that should there be future production in other blocks, then the PSA would be totally different from the one we have presently. We have already outlined reasons because we have heard the comments and the remarks of renegotiating and why we do not do that. We have to be frank about this. There is no country, no foreign company, and no large company like ExxonMobil, like TotalEnergies, like Shell and the Chevron Corporation, and we know all of the big companies, that would want to invest in a country where there is no predictability, there is no stability, and every time a government changes, there is renegotiation of a contract. In other words, what we are doing by taking that stand is safeguarding the image of Guyana and ensuring that people want to come and invest in Guyana. We are making Guyana an investment destination because we have...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I heard one person shouting the 'L' word twice and loudly, so I just want to caution them.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I continue, there are a few others. For example, the Hon. Member mentioned about the increase production and that the Government is in support of the increase production and increase risk. That is quite true. We, as a Government, are in support of increase production, and we should be. Any sensible government must be in support of increase production, because we know that in the whole context of climate change and moving towards renewable energy, and the impact and effects of climate change as we are experiencing now, there will be a time when the demand for fossil fuel would not be the same as it is today. Ten years or twenty years from now, the demand for fossil fuel will not be the same and we cannot *bury our heads in the sand* and do not admit that. Now, we have the golden opportunity to ensure that we extract as much resources as possible and use that revenue to ensure that Guyanese have a better life. Our people deserve a better life too. I am not saying, and I do not want to be misquoted as saying, 'at the expense of the environment'. I am not saying that. [**An. Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible.)*] I would come to that Comrade. We are not saying that it should be at the expense of the environment. As a matter of fact, the PPP/Civic Government should be the Government that is given a *pat on the back* for safeguarding the environment and cutting emission in Guyana. We are not painting buildings in green, but we are safeguarding the environment all along.

If we may go into some of the details as to the safeguards, since the Hon. Member is a bit anxious for us to move in that direction. We moved from Liza 1 to Liza 2. With regard to Liza 1, the Hon. Member admitted that there was no provision in Liza 1 for insurance. It was only when we amended it, then we included that. I think the excuse was that we were doing a permit for the first time, so it was a trial. Then with Liza 2, yes; Payara, yes; and in Yellowtail, because we had the opportunity to truly negotiate the Yellowtail licence. I say that because the Hon. Member did mention that when we took over, Payara was almost to the end of the negotiation stage. However, we were not satisfied with some of the clauses in that production licence. We took an extra month or so when we came into Government to ensure that we put certain measures in place to bring more benefits to Guyana, and to put more safeguards to the environment, because we introduced the 'fever flaring' as an environmental hazard, and also as waste of gas, the economics in it too. There is for environmental damage and also loss of revenue from gas being flared. We introduced that for Payara, and we put in place a few other measures, but we had the opportunity to truly negotiate the Yellowtail licence.

I want to say that Guyana is one of the few oil producing countries in this part of the world that would have a capping stack in-country and that is included in the Yellowtail licence. Imagine, in Brazil I do not believe it has a capping stack in-country. There is no other oil producing nation around us. Trinidad does not have a capping stack in-country. Most of these countries pay the subscriptions and the capping stack is in Houston, or some other parts of the World. We have been doing that too. We have been paying for subscription for the capping stack too, but we, as a responsible Government, and since the Hon. Member asked what we are doing to safeguard the environment, decided that, regardless that it would cost us a little more than the present subscription that we are paying, we should go the extra mile and bring at least one capping stack in-country. Mr. Speaker, what is a capping stack for the ordinary people who are listening to us? Basically, for everyone to understand, especially the people who are listening to us, it is a big heavy metal, that should there be a blowout in a well or a leakage or whatever the case is, it would be deployed to cover that well until corrective action is taken. In simple terms, that is what a capping stack is. Previously we had it in Houston, Texas. Trinidad has never had, Suriname does not have, and Brazil does not have. What we are doing is that we are establishing Guyana as a hub that this capping stack could be deployed to any one of these countries should there be a spill in those countries too. This is because as the Hon. Member mentioned, and rightly so, a spill in any

one of these countries would not affect that country alone. If there is a spill in Suriname, obviously it would affect us. If there is a spill in Trinidad, obviously we would be affected.

We took that step to ensure that we bring that in-country. If we did not have that in-country it means that if there is a leak or if there is a spill from one of the wells offshore, then it would probably take over 10 days, maybe 15 days, depending on the availability of boats or ships and equipment to get that capping stack from Houston, Texas into Guyana waters. The advantage of having that capping stack in Guyana means that we could deploy almost immediately, and that is the difference. When you speak of safeguard and thinking or saying that the Government is ramping up production and we are not putting safeguards in place, this is one of the major safeguards that we are putting in place as one of the newest oil producing nation in the world. We are taking this step to ensure that we bring a capping stack in-country. As I mentioned, the Hon. Member's information is a bit outdated because he is getting it from a former head and not the current head. Unfortunately, I was told that the previous Administration's concern for oil spills led them to bringing in some oil spill equipment that somehow was packed in containers and stored at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). That is the information I received. We could always check for accuracy if there is any dispute by any Member. I was told that these equipment were brought in the country and were stored at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport for safekeeping. Since then, we have deployed all the equipment to the Civil Defence Commission (CDC). I must say that the Civil Defence Commission, the Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have been doing continuous workshops and continuous training along with our international partners on how to deal with oil spills and the clean up after an oil spill.

There is no country in the world that wants to experience an oil spill. There is no country that wish to experience that. But as the Hon. Member rightly mentioned, if you are an oil producing nation, then you must take precaution. Hence, that is why we are doing this. We, as a Government, ensure that what we are doing to safeguard the citizens of this country is in keeping with best international oil practices. We will continue to do so because we promised that we would keep developing every single permit that is issued, every single licence that is issued, and every single new PSA that is negotiated upon. We will continue to improve the conditions and we will ensure that each one of them bring greater benefits to Guyana, as we continue to grow our oil and gas sector. We are not naive as a Government. We have rightly and quietly admitted that the oil and gas sector is new to

us. We are learning every day too. We are learning from countries that have been in this business for a while now, hence, our good relationship with Ghana, Saudi Arabia, and many other countries, so that we could learn what is best practice and what we should do as a country to manage the oil and gas sector. We are not naive that these things could not happen, but we are ensuring that we work with our partners to put every single measure in place to prevent an occurrence of this.

9.19 p.m.

We must admit. I am not sure where the Hon. Member got his statistics from that tomorrow there would be an oil spill by the ExxonMobil operations. Maybe it is old information because I am not sure if ExxonMobil has so many operations around the world now as before. Maybe it is old information. If the Hon. Member could maybe give us the source, we could always verify that. As the Hon. Member mentioned, with the Liza 1 there was no provision for insurance, there was no provision as to how we deal with an oil spill. We would have moved a long way from where we came from. As I said, we will continue to advance it, we will continue to develop, and we will continue to ensure that we bring best practices to the oil and gas sector. How could you champion the potential oil spill insurance coverage of a permit and not address the credit rating of the required insurance? That is the question I think we need to ask. A credit rating speaks to the selected insurance providers' financial ability to pay policy claims. It is the Yellowtail Environmental Permit that makes an important leap to exquisitely state the required credit rating of the issue.

Section 14.5 of the Yellowtail Environmental Permit requires that the insurance must be procured from an insurance company assigned grade A+ by the Better Business Bureau (BBB) or equivalent as deemed appropriate by the agency. Hence, the defining appropriate credit rating to effective financial coverage for potential pollution damage. These are some of the questions that we need to ask. These are some of the questions we need to examine, as we move forward. It is an important issue. I would not stand here and say that it is not an issue that we should be worried about, it is not an issue that Guyanese should worry about or that we should not take preventative measures. I have already outlined that we are one of the few countries in this hemisphere that is moving towards having a capping stack in-country. The Government also expanded a non-exhaustive list of insurances coverage, areas beyond the Liza 2 Permit. It is an explicit requirement that the cost of removal of wreckage and clean-up operations required as a result of an accident occurring in

the course of permitted activities, be covered by the internationally benchmark environment liability insurance.

As I mentioned, with regards to other measures that we are taking, for example, we are very careful as to how we deal with hazardous and non-hazardous waste management. As you are aware, there are a number of companies that have been established in Guyana to deal with hazardous waste now. We are very careful as to how we move forward with that, also, the chemical handling and management. This is because we know in the oil and gas sector there is a lot of movement of chemicals off-shore and on-shore. Oil spill and Emergency Management states that the permit holder, in the event of a discharge or spill of any contaminant into the water or on land, must comply with the pollutant, pays principle and is therefore responsible for eliminating or controlling the discharge or spill, clean up the extent practicable, remediating any resulting damage and monitoring of the impact, and taking appropriate measures to prevent, reduce and or mitigate impacts consistent with the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, the Oil Spill Response Plan and the Environmental Protection (EPA) Act. It further states that the permit holder should provide finances, equipment and technical capacity to adequately and in accordance with the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association, American Petroleum Institute (API) standards and recommended practices or GIPP, and appropriately respond to any emergency that may occur as a result of the execution of the project. These are negotiations that I know are taking place now. As I mentioned, we could have gone a far way had we been in possession of the documents that the Hon. Member spoke of.

Liza I Permit

If I may come now to Financial Assurance and Liability for Pollution Damage which states clearly that the permit holder is liable for all costs associated with clean-up restoration and compensation of any damages caused by any discharge of any contaminant, including the cost of all investigations into pollution incidents or discharge of contaminants conducted at the insistence of the agency, that is, the EPA. headsThe form of financial assurance shall be guided by an estimate of the sum of the reasonable credible costs, expenses and liabilities that may arise from any breaches of this permit. Liabilities are considered to include cost associated with responding to an incident, clean-up and remediation and monitoring. The estimation is not expected to address the

unidentifiable or un-estimated cost which may be associated with compensation for lost and on-going damage to other parties and which are able to be pursued through civil actions.

There are steps being taken by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Ministry of Natural Resources as this is an important issue for us and for all Guyana. If we are going to manage a modern oil and gas sector, and the Hon. Member rightly mentioned, our production will increase significantly. In another five or six years, we will be close to producing over 1,000,000 barrels of oil per day. This is something that, as a Government, we must take seriously. However, we cannot support the motion as it is, but what we could commit ourselves to is to continue working be it with the EPA or be it with the Opposition since there is the willingness to do so, to ensure that we continue the negotiations, and we move forward to ensure that we have that kind of protection against any possibility of an oil spill in Guyana's waters. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Ms. Ferguson: I rise from this side of the Assembly to contribute to the debate and give support to the motion on the Liability Insurance Coverage of Oil Spills in Guyana” moved by my Colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair]

[Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair]

Before going further, Mr. Speaker, it is sad to hear the speaker before me, the Minister who has responsibility for the oil and gas sector here in our country stating from the beginning that his Government will not be supporting this motion. What a travesty, Hon. Minister. I am aware that the APNU/AFC Government, through the Office of the EPA, commenced putting the framework in place since 2017. Sir, this must not go unnoticed. When the Government took Office albeit installed as they are, in August, 2020, rather than continuing on the good path and the framework that you would have inherited, you decided to abandon every good work put out by the Coalition. This is no surprise.

Firstly, it was the sacking of the Hon. Dr. Vincent Adams, a renowned expert in environment and also in oil and gas. We also had the sacking of Dr. Mark Bynoe, another renowned distinguished Guyanese who has experience and expertise in that area too... and who did a tremendous job at reshaping – that is Dr. Vincent Adams – the EPA, to move the EPA from what we would have

inherited after coming to Office in May, 2015. We have on record here in the National Assembly, the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, who continues to share the state of the EPA when we took Government. What we did, we were able to reshape, remodel and also ensure that the entity was fully outfitted with staff who exercised great professionalism in moving the EPA forward.

What do we have today? We have the return of the old gatekeepers whose tenure and track records cannot be compared with what the APNU/AFC Government had. I do not intend to be long since my Colleagues who came before me and those who will come after me have and will clearly advance arguments relative to the clauses contained in the motion. Not being an expert or trained in the fields of the environment or oil and gas and which I have no intention of professing, if you are to ask me of my opinion on the clauses in the motion, my first reaction after reviewing the clauses, would be that I see no harm in what is being requested. I do believe that once implemented, it will be a *win win* situation for both sides – for the Government of Guyana and also the companies operating in the oil and gas sector. In contributing to the debate, my emphasis will be on a few clauses starting with the second “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED” clause, where the Twelfth Parliament is calling on the Government of Guyana:

“...to include full unlimited liability coverage for oil spills and other disasters related to petroleum production as a condition for granting approval for the proposed Yellowtail development and all other future petroleum development.”

I believe what this particular clause is seeking to advance is quite reasonable. You would know, let us use a typical example, if you are going into a major investment, obviously you would want to ensure that your business is well covered by insurance, in the eventuality of a fire, flood or whatsoever the case may be.

9.34 p.m.

Even at the ordinary level in Guyana, someone who would have taken out a mortgage, whether for a house or for a car or some equipment. Those things are also insured in the event of losses, damage or theft. Requesting of the Government to ensure that we have full or unlimited liability when it comes to the insurance coverage in the operations in our oil and gas sector should not be difficult for the Government to implement. The big question we may have to ask ourselves is, why is it that

the Government is so reluctant to not ensure that we have unlimited liability insurance coverage when it comes to our oil and gas sector in Guyana? While the Government boasts of systems – and we just heard from the other Member, Mr. Vickram Bharrat, who shared with us the mechanisms that they have in place and all the other things that they are doing for any potential oil spills, such as conducting frequent simulation exercises and other mechanisms in place – I do believe that much more is required to protect our environment, waters and species from the harmful effects that are likely to occur from the oil spills.

We heard of the Hon. Member, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, being big on championing the environment or being the Champion of the Earth. The environment is a part of the earth. Sir, do you know what is happening? A motion like this should be supported by the Government. If Mr. Jagdeo is the Champion of the Earth and speaks so highly of the environment, the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and all manner of things, why is it that the Government is so reluctant to ensure that we have the unlimited liability insurance coverage when it comes to oil spills in Guyana? Mr. Speaker, I guess both you and Hon. Members of this House would recall that, in December, 2020, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) responded to several small-scale oil spills. When I tried to read into the information, *via* the EPA's website, I could not find further information. Apparently, the information disappeared. The information is gone. Therefore, the request for the implementation of the liability insurance coverage should not be an uphill battle for this Government or for any future government to come. According to information sourced from an article of the United States (US) Environmental Protection Agency on 20th February, 2016 concerning:

“Threats from Oil Spills

Spilled oil poses serious threats to fresh water and marine environments.”

In the very article, it further reported that oil spills also:

“...affects surface resources and a wide range of subsurface organisms that are...”

These are associated with complex food chains and not escaping human food resources. We have read it all in relation to the experiences our fisherfolks have been experiencing over the past couple of months such as the depletion in their catches on a daily basis. I was taken by surprise when the

Hon. Member cited an example and stated that because of the operations in the river, rather than the fishes swimming away, the fishes are swimming into the nets. I find that so ironic, but it is the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and so they feel they can tell us anything and we will just buy into it.

Additionally, oil spills also influence physical damage to the environment. We may say that private properties may not be affected since operations are way into the seashore. This is where I differ. The reason for this is that lessons learnt are that in relation to private properties, whether buildings, land or vehicles, persons have suffered tremendous losses without compensation. I can cite a particular case that came to my attention and the attention of the former Minister of Public Infrastructure, Mr. Patterson. In Essequibo – I think the area was Johanna Cecilia – apparently, the previous PPP/C Government did some work on the sea defence. Because of the houses being near to the sea defence and the huge equipment having to operate on a daily basis, persons' properties were damaged. It was brought to the attention of the then Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Robeson Benn, that the persons be compensated. Nothing was done. It took the Coalition Government to review and investigate that matter and we were able to pay compensation to the affected property owners for the damage. It was not created by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. It was created during the period of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. As a caring Administration, a wrong was done to our people and it had to be corrected. That is what we did as a caring Administration. When I look at the third be it further resolved clause, this is what this clause is requesting of the Administration:

“That the Government of Guyana, conducts an independent analysis on the possible ill effects of an oil spill, and present this report to the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources to be sued as a reference for all other future oil development submissions...”

We just heard from the Hon. Minister, who made it clear that the Government will not be supporting this motion. Sir, you would also recall that for major projects, whether the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) Expansion Project, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP), the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) project or the fibre optic cable project, no feasibility studies were done to determine the cost benefit of these projects to the Guyanese populace.

We know that this particular Administration does not like to share information. I was taken by surprise when the Hon. Minister mentioned that a model production sharing agreement (PSA) was developed and that mechanisms are in place. It is only known to those folks over on the other side. We are representatives of constituents and constituencies. By right, we must be provided with the adequate information so that when we go into our constituencies and when we hold public meetings and the questions are asked about the potential for oil spills on our environment, we could be able to respond because we were provided with the information. I believe calling for the Committee on Natural Resources to speedily implement or call upon the Government to have a thorough report done is a reasonable request. You have spoken so glowingly about caring for Guyanese and so glowingly about protecting the environment but still... Why? Why, Hon. Kwame McCoy? Why can you not adhere to the request in this motion? The final be it further resolved clause states:

“That, if necessary, the Opposition stands ready, able and willing to assist the Government in getting back on track the expeditious acquisition of unlimited liability coverage for an oil spill.”

Mr. Speaker, you have heard from my honourable colleague who stated quite clearly that before we left Government, we had started to put the necessary framework in place since 2015. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? We have seen the mismanagement of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) situation in Guyana. We have seen the procurement of the Sputnik V vaccine for COVID-19. We have seen how the Government mishandled the distribution of the \$25,000 COVID-19 cash grants and many other infractions. I believe that we, on this side of the House, have the experience, we have the know-how, and we have the knowledge to manage the oil and gas sector in this country. To my colleagues on that side of the House, I invite you to invite us to sit at the table so that we can bring... You heard what Mr. David Patterson shared earlier. We have the information. We are willing to help the Government because we know they are a bunch of incompetents across there.

In concluding my contribution to the debate on this critical and timely motion before the National Assembly, I appeal to my beautiful and wonderful friends on the opposite side of the Assembly to let us look beyond politics and let us work towards the interest of our nation and protecting our nation's patrimony, gifted to us by Almighty God, our Creator. Let us demonstrate to our people,

whether home or abroad, that with maturity we can work collectively and consensually on matters and issues which can affect and impact future generations. We must and should set the framework. Finally, history will judge us. The time to act is now. Let us not delay. Let us put Guyana first. Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I thank you very much and may God richly bless us all. *[Applause]*

9.49 p.m.

Mr. Datadin: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. I thank the previous speaker, my colleague, for her farewell presentation to this House. In dealing with the matter at hand, we have a rather curious motion before this House. Among the things it seeks is a resolution that:

“...an already well-established process put in place by the previous administration which made a condition for the Liza 2 permit for guaranteed coverage by EEPGL’s parent companies, agreed upon by EEPGL, and was nearing completion when the current administration took office;”

With the greatest of respect, an agreement that is nearing in completion is incomplete. Simple. A well-established process must mean that it was completed. It could not have been well established if it was incomplete. It could not have been well established if it was not agreed on what was established. These are very simple things. Regrettably, it would not make sense even if we wanted to agree to this resolution. The other be it resolved clauses that are mentioned, which I will come back to, all seem to relate...If we go a little earlier, it reads:

“WHEREAS following the change in EPA’s Leadership, the Liza 2 permit included provisions for unlimited liability for all spills...”

Regrettably, that is simply not true. There was no agreement as it relates to unlimited liability coverage. Insurance – and this is important for us to understand – are by contracts. Contracts are by agreement. When there is an agreement, then both parties sign. If both parties have not agreed, there is no agreement; there is no contract; and there is nothing to bind the parties. What is consistently referred to is the doom and gloom that is possible. Reference was made to the British Petroleum Macondo oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which cost is stated in the motion to be US\$70 billion. Perhaps, we can be enlightened about where that record is and how that figure came about. A \$70 billion figure is apparently unknown to the rest of the world, including the people who are

paying for it and including the judges who are dealing with the litigation that is involved. Perhaps, as with most things in the petroleum sector, the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, has information no one else has.

It is important that we consider for a moment a few of the basic things that would relate to unlimited insurance. Unlimited insurance is, for example...If we are to think of it and to equate so that the citizens might be able to appreciate how it works, there is comprehensive insurance for one's car, there is third party insurance, and lesser insurances depending on circumstances. Even comprehensive insurance has a limit beyond which one would not receive coverage. Unlimited insurance presupposes that it matters not what takes place, the insurance coverage will exist. Whether it is \$1, \$1 billion or \$100 billion, there would be that coverage. Perhaps, the Hon. Member could look into what would be the cost. Can you imagine going to an insurance company for coverage that you do not know how much it is likely to be? This becomes an assessment of risk – risk that is unlimited. Can you imagine what would be the cost of such coverage? Half of the cost of such coverage, as with all cost from the contract signed by my friends in the Opposition in the year 2016, would have to be paid for by the Guyanese people. This is because, as with everything else, that is the contract that was signed and that is the contract we must honour. This unlimited coverage would have two very undesirable side effects. It would make the project itself expensive. It is likely to slow down the pace of growth, thereby affecting jobs and revenue to the country. Not only would it cost us revenue to pay for this policy, this unlimited insurance, we would actually lose revenue because we are going to go slower. It would make projects that would otherwise be acceptable and financially viable no longer financially viable. The other side effect is it would take small companies, small operators, out of the equation because they would never be able to afford such insurance. We are speaking of only the super majors of the world being able to afford that. It means any hope of an indigenous industry is dead. It will not happen if that is done.

We have asked and what has been said is that it is about internationally accepted standards. Perhaps, my friend could indicate to this House how many present fields under development have unlimited insurance. If he can tell us of any field on planet Earth that has unlimited insurance, then, again, he would have information not in the possession of any of the petroleum journals or that has

been declared by any of the petroleum companies. Again, Mr. Patterson is the holder of secrets. It is the little things, I am told.

We were told, in great and graphic detail, about how much damage is likely to occur. Make no mistake, oil spills are unpleasant things. The damage does not only last in the immediate aftermath. The damage, as you have heard from the speakers before me, could be longer lasting and it can change an environment permanently. But we have to take care against fearmongering. We must cater for risk that is reasonable. We must cater for risk based on a percentage of likelihood. We do not need to cater for risk where there has been one on planet Earth of that magnitude. There was the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. It was unique circumstances and relatively close to the shore; very deep water. There was no equipment. Equipment actually had to be manufactured to be able to go down to the depths that it was. That took time. There was damage. It was not the worse spill on planet Earth. There had been worse ones in 1910/1911 off of California, but, of course, the world was a different place then.

In assessing risk, it would be a fair consideration as to the cost when there is an oil spill and what is involved in recovering from that. Insurance companies assess this around the world. What would be the cost in every region per barrel? If you look at the average clean-up cost per ton of spilled petroleum, it is about \$1,078 in Africa. In South America, where we are incidentally, it averages \$2,158. The Exxon Valdez oil spill, which was in Alaska, the cost of that was \$24,000 per barrel, which is on the high end, and which is, in fact, the highest. In Canada, it is \$6,146; in Russia, it is \$2,929; in Asia, principally China, and India it is \$16,000; and in Australia, it is \$2,000. Unlimited coverage must be a component of what one perceives and what one expects. It is public knowledge, and it has been published repeatedly in our newspapers, in at least two of the three, the value of Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL), the local entity. The valuation is about \$11 billion.

What I understand being required by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, is an assurance not only from the local operating company, but an assurance from the parent company, and he refers to that assurance as unlimited insurance coverage. That is not unlimited insurance coverage. That is a simple obligation. If one is a tortfeasor, a wrongdoer of any kind, one is obliged to make good on whatever loss one caused. That is not based on insurance law and that not is not based on insurance. It is not helpful to require unlimited insurance coverage if really what one wants to do is vicariously

have access to the larger company. As a matter of what is being sought, there is much confusion. What will perhaps solve the issue is whether the parent company agrees to underwrite or to foot the bill in the case of damage. We must consider where our production is, what is the value of the local company, and whether we ought to have cause for concern. These are not unusual matters. These are matters considered in the sector quite frequently. These are matters that are addressed by people in the sector quite frequently. This is how risk is assessed, the value of the company being an important component. If one wants insurance, then one should ask for insurance. If what one wants is for the parent company to underwrite whatever damage there are, then that is a different thing; they are entirely different matters.

10.04 p.m.

Now, we are referring to what would be the largest possible... The Exxon Valdez oil spill was large. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill was large. They were between \$5 billion and \$7 billion. The largest oil spill was the Gulf War in 1991 and that was entirely man-made. We also have to look at how these things were caused. Now, insurance would cover if something happened with the Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) itself. If it was rigged, it is treated that way. It would not apply, as it did with Exxon Valdez, where the tanker ran aground. This is the boat that is carrying the cargo of petroleum. It would not happen like in the Gulf War where, as an act of war, someone decided to set alight all of the rigs. These are different issues. Again, if one was to try and obtain insurance for all of those matters, it would pretty much be near impossible. Those matters are usually covered by other considerations, namely if it was a tanker, it would be third party. The other was, of course, an act of war. There is a curious part about what is being sought in this motion. The first be it resolved states:

“...the Government recants ...”

This is the elected Government and this Government that this motion is asking that it:

“...recants its decision to cancel the process already established in 2017 for obtaining unlimited liability coverage ...”

Herein lies the problem. There was no established process in 2017. There was no unlimited liability coverage in 2017. There could have been nothing to recant. Respectfully, what the motion seeks to say is simply factually inaccurate. The motion also states:

“...process ... agreed upon by Exxon and made a condition of the Liza 2 Permit ...”

There is no contract and there is agreement. Perhaps, again, it is the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, who has knowledge and information that the rest of the planet is not blessed with. If he had shared those, as the Hon. Minister, my colleague, has repeatedly asked, both in the press and today in this House for the umpteenth time, we may all be better off. Again, the motion states:

“...was close to being finalised when the current administration...”

This is playing games with words. It is all designed to conceal that (a) there was no agreement before, (b) there were no previous unlimited assignment, and (c) while it might hold lofty ideas and ideals, there were no agreement to this effect. It is not to reinstate or to go back to what the previous Administration did because it did not do it. There is a severe misconception when what is thought of as written into – if it was written into, in those terms – in a licence to be a binding contract. That is whole other presentation of law but suffice to say, that is also not in agreement. The part about calling on the Government of Guyana to include full unlimited liability coverage for oil spills and disasters... We signed a contract. This is not disputed. This production sharing agreement is really the relationship between the two parties. One cannot go about inserting clauses into its licencing part that defeats or impinges upon the principal agreement. That would be trite and simple law. One could express one’s ideals and lofty hopes, but if one does not get an agreement, one cannot set about impinging upon the rights of the principal agreement. Now, the part in the further resolution states:

“...the Government of Guyana conducts an independent analysis on the possible ill effects of an oil spill, and present this report to the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Resources to be used as a reference for all other future oil development submissions ...”

My only comment on that is: why did you not do it? You were there for five years. If you want to produce some detailed report about what happens with oil spills and you want an independent analysis of what it is and the effects of an oil spills... [**An. Hon. Member:** (*inaudible*)] Forgive

me, Mr. Speaker, but the way the Hon. Member was speaking earlier tonight, I thought he had that report. I thought he knew what would happen. I also thought he knew all of the doom and gloom that would be visited upon our country, our neighbours and the planet as a whole. Apparently, he still needs an independent analysis. Again, I fear he might have this independent analysis that the rest of us on the planet do not have.

Now, it is a strange thing that the Hon. Member had policies and implemented those policies when in Government. Having been put out of government by the electorate, he is now saying to this House that he wants us, notwithstanding that we are the lawful and elected Government of the nation, to ignore what we are doing and to do what he was doing. I think there is a fundamental misunderstanding as to what the effect of elections and governance is. When a party goes to an election and loses, the side that wins the elections, in our parliamentary democracy, has the right to determine policies and chart the course forward. You lose that right when you lose the elections, especially, when what you seek to impose is disadvantageous to the country as a whole, based on documentation and facts in your peculiar possession only, which you would not share, and most of all, does not fit the policy of the government of the day. As the Hon. Minister, my friend, said, reference has been permitted to documents that have not been produced in this House [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Have 35 minutes not finished as yet?] It is only 25 minutes. Again, the poor Member does not understand that none of those documents are in the permit. There is a substantial difference, Mr. Patterson, from when you say that a document is referred to in another document, that is, the permit and when you actually present the said document that you stated is referred to. Now, Mr. Patterson, the position is quite simple.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I think that the Standing Orders are clear that when you are referring to Members in this Assembly, it is either Comrade or Hon. Member.

Mr. Datadin: I am guided, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Hon. Member misunderstands the reading of what he is seeing as a permit and misunderstands what the documents are. Again, these documents are there. The position is this: the resolution that is being sought in this House seeks to impose upon the nation some sort of a policy that is unfounded, unhelpful and not in keeping with international standards. It would be a travesty to support such a motion. It could not in... [**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** Your time is up.] You could never tell time. Now, in relation to unlimited coverage, this issue has arisen in other jurisdictions. For example, following the Deepwater

Horizon oil spill, in the United States of America (USA), they wanted to change the legislation that allowed for a cap on liability and wanted to increase it. It was pointed out that requiring an unattainable level of insurance for domestic energy producers would have forced the vast majority of companies out of that area and out of doing business in that jurisdiction. It would have also removed the number of possible insurers that could exist for legitimate risk. It would have cut domestic production. It would have killed jobs, slowed economic growth and ended up costing the Government billions in revenues from lost business.

Now, considerations have been made about whether there should be unlimited coverage in the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia. None of those jurisdictions thought that unlimited coverage was appropriate for the same reasons. It limited the field of people who would be able to do business in their country. Regrettably, I cannot support this motion. *[Applause]*

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Vincent Henry to make his contribution.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *Ha li Ka ja ko ba*. That is a greeting in Arawak. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the APNU/AFC Coalition and the Guyana Action Party (GAP), I rise to suppose the motion submitted by the Hon. David Patterson on the Liability Insurance Coverage for Oil Spills in Guyana. Sometimes, when I listen to some presenters, they believe that only they have all the information, but it is not difficult to get the information.

10.19 p.m.

For example, we were just hearing that the billions of dollars to look after an oil spill cannot reach \$70 billion. When you look on the internet, in *Wikipedia*, *Deepwater Horizon oil spill*, the Mexico oil spill took 87 days to be capped. From 20th April, 2010, to 15th July, 2010, and some four million barrels of oil flowed. Look at that amount. To make it sound as if an oil spill is something that would be negligible, that would not cause major problems for Guyana is to really be selling the whole of Guyana short. Mr. Speaker, for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, some \$65 billion was spent, and this was written by National News, the writer Ms. Alexa Lardieri, on 16th January, 2018 at 8.46 p.m. [**An Hon. Member (Government:** *(Inaudible)*)] Do you want to hear the second it was written? Information is there, and we have to give the information correctly. This motion

proposes that there be unlimited liability coverage for oil spills and other disasters related to petroleum production, God forbid, should this ever happen in Guyana. It is well documented in our history books that my ancestors, the ancestors of the Indigenous peoples of Guyana, were the first known people to live in the archipelago of the Caribbean and mainland of South America. As they moved from island to island, they ensured that whatever activities in which they engaged were of no detriment to the environment or the oceans, the islands, the mainland of Guyana, and the continent of what is now known as South America.

The Indigenous peoples of Guyana, and the world at large, have cultures and traditions that speak volumes to using only what is needed for sustenance and survival. Today, even though there is an avalanche of encroaching cosmopolitan cultures, our peoples continue to practice sustainable development and preservation of the environment. No one can disagree that, when Christopher Columbus, in 1492, got lost on his way to the East Indies, and was found by my ancestors near Watlings Island, the continent of South America, which includes what we now know as Guyana, inclusive of the adjoining ocean, was in a pristine state with its flora, fauna, and an abundance of natural resources. The custodians of this gift to the world were the Indigenous peoples whose descendants continue to safeguard the environment of their villages, their lands and utilised the environment in sustainable ways for their survival.

Mr. Speaker, for the sake of clarity, please allow me to explain that, although there are different theories emerging on who were the first peoples to inhabit portions of North and South America, it is not a theory but a fact that the peoples, whom Mr. Christopher Columbus met in the Caribbean and the mainland of what is now known as South America, were the Arawaks, Caribs, Warraus, and other known and unknown Indigenous nations, including the Akawois, Patamonas, Arecunas, Macushis, Wapishanas and Wai Wais. I wish to also let it be known that these Indigenous groups inhabited the Caribbean and the South American mainland which includes what is now known as Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, Brazil and other countries. Like other Indigenous groups in the world, they were nomadic and would move without limitations to what we now know as country borders. Indeed, they fiercely defended their territories and there were tribal wars but, as a big lesson to Guyana and the world, we the Indigenous peoples of Guyana, today, see ourselves as one. This is a lesson that our modern country called Guyana should copy.

Over the years, since 1492, Guyana has metamorphosed; it has changed. Today, we have a nation that has six races. Also, today, we have a contract with ExxonMobil Corporation via its subsidiary Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL) to conduct floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) of our petroleum. Most Guyanese, inclusive of the Indigenous peoples, were euphoric when this news first hit us. Today, we are more worried than ever. In Guyana's quest to harvest untold wealth via the extractive petroleum industry, our current Government, in its political agenda, seems not to care about Guyana's environment and its people. Our top gas and oil person in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Dr. Vincent Adams, contract was unceremoniously terminated. Most Guyanese knew that Dr. Adams stood as a guardian of our environment and wanted the best for Guyana. Should there be an oil spill, the entire coast of the Barima-Waini will suffer the consequences. When this happens, our people, who depend on the resources of the environment, will suffer. This includes our fisherfolks and their families. This will even domino into the non-availability of seafood in our kitchens, and illnesses may very well increase in our population. Sadly, it is the Indigenous peoples who experience the worst when the effects of the abuse of the environment by others are felt. In this instance, it would be the Indigenous people of Imbotero and the other peoples of Region 1, who depend on resources in the Shell Beach Protected Area for their survival.

It is established by the United Nations (UN), and recognised as a special right, that free, prior and informed consent must be practiced whenever policies and activities are to be done that can impact the lives of the Indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, the Indigenous peoples, who inhabit and utilise the resources of the area under possible threat, have not been consulted or allowed to give their consent to allow oil exploration and mining to happen in their front yard. Our original thoughts were that the Government of Guyana would have included our Indigenous representatives when doing consultations on the petroleum industry. Also, it was our hope that mitigation against the negative aspects such as flaring, and the possibility of an oil spill, would have been top of the agenda in discussions with the Indigenous peoples and their representatives. I have searched for information related to structured benefits to be made available directly to the Indigenous stakeholders, including those on the first line of defense and the Indigenous population as a whole, but have found nothing of substance. This is typical. Throughout history, my peoples have been subjected to disrespect and abuse, including trinkets in exchange for our lands and our resources. Please allow me to propose to the Government and ExxonMobil Corporation that special

consultations be done to ensure that a modicum of free, prior and informed consent be granted by the Indigenous peoples of Guyana. Also, that a strategy be developed to allow a flow of direct resources to the Indigenous population of Guyana.

I say this directly to the Indigenous peoples and not to the Government of the day, or the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs because, to date, the status of the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) remains an unsolved mystery. I wish to recommend that the consultations on our petroleum activities in Guyana be financed by ExxonMobil Corporation and its partners and done in consultation with the National Toshias Council (NTC), the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA), the Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP), the South Rupununi District Council (SRDC) and the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB). These are all genuine organisations which represent the Indigenous peoples of Guyana. I also request that the Indigenous Members of Parliament be allowed to participate in the deliberations. The possibility of an oil spill on the coast of Guyana is real. We have listened to some who try to convince us that the chance of an oil spill is remote and that they are adequately prepared to respond if this should happen. But according to a Floodlight article:

“Exxon’s oil drilling gamble off Guyana coast ‘poses major environmental risk’ - dated 17th August 2021.”

It is misleading information and an oil spill is very realistic. From this article:

“In particular, Bea is worried about a loss of well control, or blowout – which could cause a catastrophic oil spill. He finds that Exxon has not kept the risks of such events as low as “reasonably practicable”, based on the documents he reviewed. Bea cites numerous problems with Exxon’s plans.

In addition Exxon’s plans for a potential oil spill response rely on methods that were heavily criticized when deployed in previous disasters. Exxon intends to use Corexit 9500, a chemical dispersant banned in the UK and faulted for severe human and environmental harms when used in the Exxon Valdez and BP oil spills. Exxon also intends to burn oil on the ocean surface even though it is drilling in the Amazon-Orinoco Influence Zone, an area rich in marine biodiversity, with rare and threatened species on which local Indigenous and other fishers depend.

Even with these measures, Exxon estimates a spill could send oil throughout the Caribbean Sea, across Trinidad and Venezuela, and as far as Jamaica.”

The article further stated that, according to former EPA Chief Mr. Adams,

“Exxon is relying on Guyana’s recently drafted national oil spill response plan; yet there remains a wide chasm between what’s written on paper and the government’s ability to implement it...”

He further stated that:

“Guyana has insufficient equipment, personnel, expertise, funding and clear lines of responsibility to respond in a disaster. Adams also worries that the government will be forced to foot the bill if there is a disaster, because Exxon is placing liability for the project with a subsidiary.”

According to Mr. Adams:

“Exxon would not deliberately cause an accident... are taking a chance and hoping that nothing happens...”

Mr. Speaker, according to Murphy’s law:

“Anything that can go wrong will go wrong.”

This is why we are requesting that there be a full liability insurance coverage for any eventualities to safeguard Guyana. Already, we are seeing signs that the fishing industry is facing a massive under production in their output. This industry, according to Mrs. Annette Arjune, normally achieves some 3% to 5% of our GDP. It brings in some US\$145 million annually and employs 20,000 persons. It is also a main source of protein for our population. Should we get an oil spill this industry will be destroyed and the effects would last for ten years or more even after a cleaning exercise. Another of the effects of an oil spill would be the destruction of the mangrove forests. Mangrove is known to sequester carbon more than even tropical forests. Mangroves are not found abundantly throughout the world. The Indigenous people of Imbotero depend on the mangrove forest for their survival. They catch crabs and fishes for their survival.

“The Imbotero Mangrove Reserve forms part of the 50,000 hectares of Barima Mora Passage, which has the largest most intact ecosystem and mangrove forest in the country.”

10.34 p.m.

I got this from *The Climate Test of Guyana's Mangroves* by David Papannah – 02nd July, 2022. Another negative effect would be the destruction of the Shell Beach protected area which, according to *Wikipedia* is:

“...located on the Atlantic coast of Guyana in the Barima-Waini Region, near the Venezuelan border, is a nesting site for four of the eight sea turtle species – the Green, Hawksbill turtle, Leatherback, and the Olive Ridley.”

Its land cover includes the largest and most intact mangrove forest in Guyana with seasonally flooded savannahs and sandy beaches. The vast mangrove forests serve as nurseries for some 59 species of fishes and invertebrates, thereby replenishing the fish stock in the ocean. It also hosts Caribbean Flamingoes, West Indian Manatees, Guyana Dolphins, Jaguars, and the Scarlet Ibis. Of course, the neighbouring Indigenous communities of Region 1 depend on this area for lots of their livelihoods. Shell Beach extends for approximately 120 kilometres (km). This came from the Protected Areas Trust (Guyana). One major worry that we have is that the resources from the oil may not trickle down and benefit the men, women, and children in the villages and towns of Guyana. This is why the Guyana Action Party (GAP) is in support of our colleagues who favour direct payments for the population of Guyana. These direct payment for families in Guyana would help them prepare for the negative effects that will be experienced if or when an oil spill occurs. More so, direct cash grants of some \$200 000 paid quarterly to families, as proposed by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), will help our people to cushion the tsunami effects of the trickle-down economic policy of the current People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government.

We also have in our manifesto that a portion of our oil revenues should be utilised to build a city away from the lowlands of Guyana. We cannot, with sureness, say that the last major historical flooding was caused by the flaring of gas by ExxonMobil Corporation, but we all know that Georgetown, as our administrative centre, is becoming a lose-lose and unsustainable option for our future generations.

The Natural Resource Fund (NRF), also known as the Sovereign Wealth Fund, has among its objectives that natural resource wealth will be used to finance national development priorities, including any initiative aimed at realising an inclusive green economy. With this, in mind, I wish to propose that a comprehensive developmental strategy for the hinterland be developed. It is in the hinterland that there are people who have, for thousands of years, kept this environment intact and remain a valuable asset to Guyana and the world at large. The natural resource sector of Guyana, which includes the oil and gas industry, is a very important facet of our country's future development, but it is sad to note that the parliamentary sub-committee known as the Natural Resource Committee has not convened a single meeting since the advent of this Twelfth Parliament. One can ask the PPP/C Government what it is trying to hide from the Guyanese people.

The hinterland people of Guyana are demanding that the policy developed and promoted by APNU/AFC be continued. This policy advocated that the hinterland of Guyana be given its fair share of the national patrimony and opportunities for well-rounded developments. We also demand that the hinterland youths be given opportunities to get specialised training so that they can participate and benefit from the oil and gas industry. Whilst it is good that Guyana strives to become a modern developed nation, it would be a catastrophe for us to not be cognizant that we cannot live without a healthy environment. Mr. Speaker, just imagine a Guyana in which only a few persons control the majority of the riches and the majority live in poverty. Imagine an oil spill in the ocean which is contiguous to our coast. Imagine that the flaring of gas continues in our quest to harvest our petroleum and the concomitant environmental and social degradation becomes institutionalised. In other words, let us imagine a Guyana that has allowed the resource curse to overcome and destroy our beautiful Guyana.

We the Indigenous people are not against development, but we want to be part of it and we want to, indeed, have a meaningful say in such big businesses that will affect us one way or another. Mr. Speaker, the safe and happy future of Guyana and all Guyanese are in our hands; let it be safe hands. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Benn, to make his contribution.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members, I am pleased somehow to give a few remarks on this motion, Liability Insurance Coverage for Oil Spills in Guyana, in respect of the developments offshore by the consortium, ExxonMobil Corporation, Hess Guyana Exploration Limited, and CNOOC Petroleum Guyana Limited. As was averred by previous speakers, this is a rather strange motion. It is particularly strange coming from the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, who had much to do with the arrangements after the actual discovery and after much time and effort in exploration for oil and gas in Guyana... There was discovery towards the end of the PPP/C's term in Government, which ended in 2015, and then the advent of the APNU/AFC in power. Seemingly, based on what is here, having completely lost the plot in respect of what was needed and what had to be done in terms of developing and putting on strong footing, the new oil and gas petroleum industry for the country...

To cut to the chase, I would like, perhaps, to refer to the fact that, over many decades, we came to the point where we recognised when we had a visit from the United States Geographical Survey... Then, I was the Commissioner of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and we recognised that we were in a position to eventually, within less than a decade, find oil offshore. It was certain and it required continued work in the sense of permitting offshore concessions. We had the arrangements with Esso Exploration & Production Guyana Limited. There were the difficulties which it was having then too – ExxonMobil Corporation in Venezuela – and the delays with it coming to advance development in the country with the concession it had already had. There were difficulties and visits Houston, Texas, to urge ExxonMobil Corporation to push the exploration to the point where we knew there would be a discovery based on the number of holes which were drilled; but, more particularly, on the doing of three-dimensional seismic.

This all happened. We had the discovery, and we had a change of Government then in 2015. As I said, it seemed to have gone to people's heads. Everybody became an oil expert. Everybody, particularly on the new Government's side in 2015, became an instant expert in respect of what would happen in developing the industry. We had a change again. After, thinking they learned and settled down in respect of what was required for the continuous stable development of the oil and gas sector, we have the astonishing submission here. It is the astonishing submission of a motion in this House to have unlimited liability coverage insurance for the oil and gas sector, for the developments out there. I thought that, in the simplest of terms, the fact of knowing and having

some discussion and understanding with the experts – the insurance experts, the assessors, all those much-vaunted persons who were on in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and so on – that such a motion would never come to the floor of this House. It should never have come to the floor of this House.

These considerations – the acceptance of this motion, the creation and writing of it – have been properly derided by the speakers on this side of the House who spoke before I came to speak. The reason the investment has been made in the basin is because it has been completely de-risked in respect of the possibility of the developments which are underway already. Moving from 100,000 barrels to one million barrels per day by 2026 or whenever, speaks to the fact that all the experts, economists, and the specialists in the field – Geologists, Geophysicists, and technicians – have all come to an understanding that this is a premiere basin for the development of the oil and gas sector on the northern coast of South America. It is fanciful. It is a large flight of fancy for anyone to sit and think that not only must you have complete liability coverage in respect of the development by the consortium here, but also by the parent companies beyond that. Why would anyone bring such a motion to this honourable House? Why would anyone, who was a Minister in Government and has a genuine interest in the stability and development of this country, bring such a motion to this House? Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, in my view, I have to take the position that Mark Anthony took in William Shakespeare's, Julius Caesar:

“Mischief thou art afoot. Take thou what course thou wilt!”

10.49 p.m.

It could not have been anything else but that – to create a discussion over what is a palpable, non-issue, to create frivolous seemingly intellectual, well delivered, well adumbrated on the floor of this House. This is only an effort to continue the risky risible discussion in the media on the question of the development, safe and sustainable... for the country. The problem is that the APNU/AFC does not want the country to develop. You do not want the country to have stability, you do not want the poor you talk about to rise to the level where they would have the ‘good life’ you spoke about and, perhaps, are living. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*inaudible*)] You... the reason they are putting this out. On the other side of the coin, every day, in this country, a particular newspaper attacks development, particularly oil and gas with respect to investments into the country. [**Mr.**

Ramjattan: (*inaudible*) No, you do not want it. You want to have to be back here carrying the development, but you are incapable of doing it. You had your chances. You are completely incapable. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** Give me the moneys now.] You do not want the development.

[*Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, this honourable gentleman, a Vice-President of this country, sat amongst those, agreed and went along with the shutting down of the sugar estates and with the firing of the workers. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*inaudible*)] Yes, rightsizing it out of existence. That is what you did. You worked at rightsizing, too, on the Berbice river too. You encouraged the blocking of the river to close down the bauxite industry there, but you love the people in Hururu, in Maple Town, in Kwakwani, Linden and Ituni; right sizing, that is what you have been doing. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] Sir, your record is clear. You talked about rightsizing at Skeldon when new lands were being developed. When there was a factory which had difficulties to be worked at, when there was mechanisation being put into it, you closed it down; you right sized it. This is a traditional pattern with those who have been associated with the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R), with the APNU/AFC in whatever form or fashion that it is done and with its [*inaudible*] partner the AFC.

There is no real interest in partnership in this House, from that side of the House, in respect of developing the country. All the discussions and motions which come here are trite, irrelevant, useless and saps up everyone's energy. I heard the Member before me talking about the protection of the environment, the flaring of gas and all those things which are considerations which have to fall into a general pattern, into a matrix which relates to the continuous sustainable development of a country. We do not need continuous naysaying. Yes, we need critique; we need useful criticism; we need proper founded debates, but we cannot spend all of our energies when we come here to debate motions like these in respect of the major and major industries and the ones which we have to give to our young people so that they could thrive and have a better life than we ourselves are having. I continue to be extremely disappointed at the continuous mischief which resides in these types of motions which particularly comes from Mr. David Patterson. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Hon. Member Mr. Patterson] Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, of course, by convention of this House.

It is normal in any development for there to be risks. It is normal for any undertaken for those risks to be assessed. It is normal for an assessment of those risks to bring any investor, or any person involved in that undertaking to make a decision as to whether to go ahead with the enterprise. It is normal for the commercial or insurance industry beyond that to consider whether or not they would provide insurance for the undertaking. It could not be. It could only be arising out of this type of motion that one would think that no insurance company, anywhere in the world, would give unlimited liability insurance for an undertaking as is suggested in this motion. It is completely impossible. In fact, the entire discussion is a complete waste of time. The Hon. Member, Patterson, should be ashamed of himself. All the pontification and *pampazetting* put people in the position to think that they are hearing really intelligent, and intellectual properly-founded discussion, but it is not. It is trash. I can never, I will never, and I will not support this motion as put forward in this House by the Hon. Member, David Patterson. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I will now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir to make her contribution. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I am on my feet, I want to start off by thanking the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, who was kind enough, today, to point out, albeit in his usual bombastic manner, that I erred in some on the computations which I made when I was speaking. My intention was to indicate ‘monthly’, but I said ‘weekly’. I had a little bit of comic relief during the tea break because I smiled, and I thought that I was in good company. I mean, no less of a person than the highest office holder of the land had said to our people that five times five is 20 and the Minister of Education said ‘she’ is a preposition. I think, at this rate, if we continue like this, you may have to call Mr. Lee and Ms. Fung and have classes for all of us in this National Assembly.

Mr. Dharamlall’s quip was quite funny, and I thank him for bringing that to my attention. What is not funny, however, is the Minister of Natural Resources’ lack of understanding of the marine environment and of fish. I sat there in consternation when he made certain statements. Mr. Speaker, that is what happens when one takes a computer technician and put him in charge of the Ministry of Natural Resources. They do not know what they do not know. The entire Government, the entire Administration.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you imputing that the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources is a computer technician? As far as I know, from reading a lot of the Members' Curriculum Vitae (CV), he has a Degree in Computer Technology.

Ms. Walton-Desire: Mr. Speaker, I did not use the term 'technician' in the context of his level of qualification. It was merely to connote the fact that he was a technical expert. However, it does not detract from the point that I am making that his area of expertise is computer science and not the management of natural resources, which is why he can stand here and talk about fish and not operating at a certain depth and so forth – completely misunderstanding the issue.

We have a situation in the sector where, like I said before, this Government does not know what it does not know, and that is dangerous. It is dangerous for the people of Guyana; it is dangerous for our nation. I was quite disappointed to hear the Hon. Member, Minister Benn, suggests that debates of nature in this National Assembly are a waste of time. It is regrettable because I would want to draw to their attention... I believe that the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, might have alluded to the fact that no less of an organisation in the United States Congress deliberated on this question and, irrespective of whether it became law or not, there was merit in discussing it, merit in looking at the pros and the cons and it is so disappointing to hear an experienced Minister say that such discussion is a waste of time. That is completely unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. I sat and listened to the Hon. Minister, Mr. Vickram Bharrat, when he spoke about the 'capping stack', not the fish. The way he said it suggested that this was some novel requirement by the Government of Guyana when the truth is that capping stack became mandatory after the 2010 oil spill. It became mandatory that there was one, as close as possible to operations, on shore. Do not come here like this is a novel idea that you came up with. The reality is that, since 2010, subscription or not, one is required by law to do it. Do not come here to tell the people of Guyana that you have come up with some novel idea.

11.04 p.m.

Reading is fundamental; researching is important. The other thing that I sat and listened to in consternation, Mr. speaker, was the admission by the Hon. Minister that they knew at the time they said to the people of Guyana that they would renegotiate the contract, that they had no intention of so doing. The Hon. Member said that they could not do it because big businesses require

stability, and we must eschew uncertainty. He said it. This means, just as they promised to make sugar great again, and we cannot find sugar in the shops, they lied. I cannot say, ‘lie’, Sir. My apologies. They mislead. Their mendacity was on full display when they said to the people of Guyana that they would renegotiate the oil contract. We cannot expect better from the PPP/C Administration; they continue to mislead the people of Guyana, our people. They continue to mislead the people. I wanted to make those interventions before I turn my attention to the substantive motion.

Having established that these types of debates are necessary in the National Assembly – I will not be before you for long – I propose to look at the international legal framework for this type of thing. Notwithstanding that oil production is a sector that has been around for some time, the legal framework continues to be crystallised, it continues to be negotiated, and it continues to be in metamorphosis. I think my Colleague, Mr. Patterson, has outlined in very stark terms the possibilities that could arise or eventuate from an oil spill. And we agree; the speakers on the other side agree that it is a serious matter. I want to look at Guyana’s obligations as a nation state. What are our obligations in the context of the international legal framework? In this context, the position is clear: States are liable for claims arising from loss or damage, resulting in a breach of its obligations in international law, including pollution damage and damage to the environment. This is notably codified in Principle 2 of the *Rio Declaration On Environment and Development* (Rio Declaration), which states that states have this important duty. I want to quote:

“States have... responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.”

They have a responsibility to ensure against this. There is also a case law in this regard. In 2010, at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the Pulp Mills case was instructive. In that case, the Corfu Channel case was cited as well as the Nuclear Weapons, Advisory Opinion. They reaffirmed, and I want to quote again:

“A State is thus obliged to use all the means at its disposal in order to avoid activities which take place in its territory, or in any area under its jurisdiction, causing significant damage to the environment of another State.”

So, we are seeing this issue in a number of contexts. We are seeing it in the context of the people of Guyana being affected, and we are also seeing it in the context of transnational pollution. There was an article in the *Guardian* where our sister Caribbean Community (CARICOM) states registered their concerns about oil spill pollution and how it could adversely affect their economy, given their dependence on tourism. This is not a matter to be taken lightly. I reiterate that it is in this House that we must come and ventilate these matters to the betterment of the people of Guyana. We seem to have a disposition to quip about things that are not important. What is important is that we understand that if disaster occurs, somebody will be held liable for the damage—all of the damage. Somebody will have to pay for it. This House must preoccupy itself with the important matter of making sure that the State of Guyana is not burdened, or if we are burdened we have the capacity to meet those claims. That is what we must be discussing in this honourable House, because it is entirely possible that an oil spill could wipe out our entire gross domestic product (GDP). This is not a matter for playing; we need to be serious about this. If the Members on the other side of the House want to have meaningful discourse on this they should, with alacrity, convene the Committee on Natural Resources so that we, as an Assembly, could get together, speak on these matters, and come out of that room with the best possible solution for Guyanese.

This industry, as we all know, is very new to Guyana. I want to caution us that this Ostrich-like approach that the Government has of *burying its head in the sand* will be to all of our detriment. We are still focusing on tit-for-tat when the reality is that, for the people of Guyana to benefit from the patrimony this oil resource represents, it will require a bipartisan effort to deliver that to Guyanese. It will require us to stop being petty and get together and deliver for the people of Guyana. We have to work together. I want to say that we ought to be concerned that the World Bank recently downgraded our capacity as it relates to the legal and institutional framework and the strengthening of our capacity to key institutions to manage the oil and gas sector. It moved from ‘moderately satisfactory’ to ‘moderately unsatisfactory’. And Hon. Member Mr. Bharrat comes to this honourable House to say to us that they are doing the most, when the World Bank is clearly indicating that they are probably doing the most in the wrong direction. Like everything else, we continue to fail. We have fallen on the transparency index, we have fallen on the corruption index, and now we have been downgraded to ‘moderately unsatisfactory’. The people of Guyana do not have time for a moderately unsatisfactory grading in the oil and gas sector. It is

unacceptable. To hear Hon. Member Mr. Benn come to say that such debate is not necessary and is a non-issue is appalling.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, I will not be before you for long. I just believe that it was important for me to bring those matters to the attention of the House. Irrespective of what you want to call it, the people of Guyana only care about the fact that if something happens, we, our children, and our children's children will not be faced with a debt to pay because this Government refuses to address this matter with the diligence it requires. At a bare minimum, whatever the form it must take, we must, at least, have some kind of backing from Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited's (EEPGL's) parent company to say that it will indemnify and insure against all of the risks involved, and will not just leave it on the Guyana subsidiary, which will not have the capacity to address that. At the bare minimum, that is what the people of Guyana deserve. I acknowledge that it could be a little more technical than that, but I am putting it in the lowest possible terms, so we understand that that is the bare minimum that the people of Guyana deserve.

So, I support this motion; I support the discussion on this motion; and I would like to commend this motion for consideration by this House, not just for us but for the benefit of the people of Guyana and for our future generations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause.*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Ms. Walton-Desir. We have a change. The Hon. Attorney General will not be speaking but, instead, Hon. Deodat Indar will be making a contribution. Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Public Works, you may make your contribution.

Mr. Indar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I heard some presentations tonight in respect of the motion by Hon. David Patterson on unlimited insurance coverage. There was a point when I became ear-blind to some of the comments that were coming from the presenters from the other side. I have perused this document word for word that the Hon. Member has put before this House. One of the first things that I picked up was the cost that he put in the Whereas clause of \$70 billion for the British Petroleum Macondo Deepwater Horizon spill. The Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, said she researched, but if a person would simply put in *Google* the cost for the British Petroleum spill, it will not amount to \$70 billion. So far, only \$14 billion has been paid between fines and claims. What is stated in the article by *Reuters.com* is that the analysts themselves said that it can amount to around US\$65 billion. The analysts are saying that it can amount only if gross

negligence is proved. That is an analyst's perspective about gross negligence. Hon. Member Vincent Henry quoted time and so on. Please allow me, Mr. Speaker, to quote *Reuters.com*, 3rd March, 2012, 10.52p.m. That was the release of the article. I direct everyone to go and check that, and they will see specifically/exactly the cost breakdown of the damages.

Before I go into the context of this motion, I want to respond to some of the comments made by Hon. Member Ms. Walton-Desir. The PPP/C never, ever said it was going to negotiate the contract. It was in the manifesto that the PPP/C will have better contract management.

11.19 p.m.

It is the APNU/AFC that put the stability clause in the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA). It is the APNU/AFC that signed the 2016 PSA that has a stability clause. The stability clause in that contract, even Houdini cannot come out of it because of how it is designed. It is that stability clause that the APNU/AFC Government [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] Mr. Ramjattan, you were a part of that Government too. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** You got too much of (*inaudible*).] You were a part of that Government too. I will supply you with the manifesto that we were elected upon and you will see it in there. [**Ms. Walton-Desir:** (*Inaudible*) a promotional campaign.] This document... I am glad that all of you all have woken up because everyone was sleeping on the other side just now.

I want to come back to this document that the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, has put before this House. This document is superfluous. This document is an outlier. What this document tends to do is show you the extremes of what could happen. What it has drawn is the example of the extremes. My Colleague, the Hon. Minister Benn, said that 'mischief is afoot'. I suspect and I believe that this motion is designed to literally chase people out of this country. Mr. Speaker, I will tell you why it is designed to do that. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*.)]. Hold on. I listened to all of you quietly. I did not disturb you. You listen to me now, Sir. Thank you. I want to bring to the attention that this motion brought here speaks about the transnational effects of oil spills. There is a Whereas paragraph here that speaks to transnational. It speaks to the risk of Caribbean countries being affected by an oil spill. It speaks to the cost of about \$70 billion. It speaks to a whole host of things, but what it also speaks about is, unlimited liability.

Any person who runs a business in their right mind, frame and sense, would never commit to an unlimited liability. The reason being, how do you calculate unidentifiable cost? How does someone

calculate inestimable cost of future claims? How in the world does a company do that, to calculate those costs? How does it account for that in its books on a yearly basis? How does it find what is the liability of cost that cannot be identified and cost that cannot be estimated? How does it put that into its financial records as provision? There is no accounting standard under the International Financial Reporting Standard or even the United States of America (USA) Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) or other GAAPS? There is no accounting standard that would assist a person in this, yet the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, said to this House that they were at a closing position on getting a company such as ExxonMobil to sign an unlimited liability coverage. Because he has no document to show for that, it is just rum shop *gyaff*.

Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to your attention what the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been doing. In fact, before I go there, the manner in which the presentation was made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, seemed like we have a ‘wild west’ operation going on here and we do not have systems in place, or we do not have laws in place to deal with environmental liability issues. I point to the Environmental Protection Act, sections 19, 27 and 39, that speaks to liability, and it is enshrined in the permits that we have granted for Liza 1, Liza 2, Payara and Yellow Tail. As we are going by, we are getting better at it. I want to bring to your attention that this motion speaks about clean-up cost and damage to the environment’s marine life. The Hon. Minister spoke about the depth and the distance where this operation is taking place. The fishing vessels that we have do not go to those grounds. The boats that we have do not go as far as these grounds, but yet, we are hearing that it is affecting the marine life.

Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to your attention that in Karnataka and in Goa, India, the sardines represented 30% to 40% of the catch. That was from 2016. It went down to 15% and now it is 5%. That is a place that is far away from Guyana, yet it is experiencing fishing catch issues. How could we say that this is just a problem in Guyana? In the Caribbean, different nations are affected by climate change issues because biodiversity systems are being eroded. How could we say it is just in Guyana? Acidification of the ocean as well is causing marine life and reefs to disappear. How could we say it is only in Guyana? It is designed to rile up feelings in the fisher folks’ mind. That is what these comments are for. This document, this motion, is designed, I believe, to chase investors and chase people out of Guyana so that we would be left bare. Guyana and the citizens of Guyana deserve the legitimate right to develop their oil, so that the country could benefit from

it. Let me draw an example. When I was in the private sector, I took a trip to Newfoundland with a team of private sector leaders. When I was there, they had four platforms. They had the White Rose, they had the Hibernia, the Terra Nova and lastly, they had the Hebron platform. The Hebron platform or the Hebron field was discovered since 1981. They only started production in 2007. The reason for that long delay in realising the resources of that province is because of a lot of environmental permits that were required. It took ExxonMobil and their partners very long to start production.

I have to ask the question: Is it that the Hon. Member is putting a structure in place for liability to do the same for Guyana, to stymie development, to make development, from the time the oil is found to start producing, a long-drawn-out process, so that Guyanese cannot benefit? Is this the intention? Is that the reasoning for this motion before this House? I hope not. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to you and this House about the APNU/AFC's Green State Development Strategy. A lot of us seem to forget that. We, on this side of the House, have the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), a formidable strategy adopted. We got financing for it as well. They had a Green State Development Strategy and it never moved past a draft. Nothing in it speaks about the environment; nothing in it speaks about spill and so on, that the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, now claims to do.

When they were in Government, it took them years to get the document from conceptualisation to draft. Never did it make it to a document with a signature that says, 'we have to implement'. If you look at the document, Mr. Speaker, there is no initiative in the document and there is no deliverable in the document. The document was just *fluff* and that is their record. I have that document and I will lay it over to you, Mr. Speaker, so that you will see for yourself, and you can share it with the newer Members of this House, who do not know about that document. I want to speak about some of the safeguards there are currently. ExxonMobil and their partners, either Repsol or Tullow Oil plc, or whoever are the operators offshore, are not new in the game. These are seasoned oil and gas companies; they have good systems. They hire tier one contactors who are world class. With regard to the umbilicals on the sea floor, TechnipFMC does that; a world class company. With regard to the manifold, the risers and the jumper fabrication, Saipem does that; a world class company. With regard to the inspection and so on, when they do the welding, they use non-destructive testing (NDT). It is an x-ray that shows if there is any crack in the welding. A world class company does that. The technology is world class.

When they would hook up the floating production storage offloading (FPSO) vessel and they would commission it, the movement of crude from the FPSO into the cargo vessel carrier, the very large crew carriers (VLCCs), there would be systems in place, hook ups in place and tugs around the FPSO that would allow for the transfer of crude from the FPSO into these crude carriers, in a very secure manner. Nobody said oil spills do not happen. It happens all the time. What this tends to do is tell about the worse one in the history of the country. Let us talk about the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Trinidad) that is right next door. Since the Hon. Member wants to impose these requirements on Guyana and the companies operating in Guyana, let us talk about right in our neighbourhood, Trinidad. Trinidad has been in operation and producing oil for 110 years. It produced around 8.77 billion barrels in those 110 years. I cannot remember of any significant spill there. I cannot tell you if the companies that operate there have unlimited liability imposed upon them, because the minute one tries to do things like that one is literally telling the companies that one does not want them, and they should head out. That is what effectively is being done; and I draw a comparison right next door to us. Mr. Speaker, I say to you, I believe that it is a mischievous thing to bring a motion with these kinds of WHEREAS clauses inside.

I want to talk a little about fabrication and fabrication technology that is used right now offshore. This is world class fabrication technology that is used offshore. It was not born yesterday, and it was not born last year. It has been happening since the beginning of the oil and gas industry, and it gets better, because what we have offshore, as the Hon. Minister said earlier, is 5,000 feet down. It is ultra-deep waters. The technology is new and is world class. Nobody said that there cannot be an oil spill, but the systems are there to... No company in this world would have a system in place and not think about the health and safety impact of it and the environmental impact. I want to talk a little about the American Petroleum Institute (API) and the standards that it has. It has partnered with the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS). That Institute has inspection standards so that underwater flow lines, underwater manifolds, underwater umbilicals, all of the risers, the jumpers, would normally have remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), rovers, to go down and do the inspection, because of wear and tear, build-up of mud, sand and whatever soil is around the pipes. The Institute has to go and do inspection and there are inspection standards.

In the permit that the Ministry of Natural Resources issued to the operator, are those requirements to do inspection. The American Petroleum Institute is the standard bearer on those kinds of

inspections. The flowlines, the risers, the jumpers, the manifolds, the umbilicals, all of those, have safety systems around them. People do not put down stuff just like, bring up oil at a particular pressure, and do not have these systems in there. They do have them. I want to say that this motion, in its current form, asking companies to have unlimited liability for spills that may or may not happen in the future, and we do not know when, is superfluous. No one is saying here that the event of an oil spill is not possible, but it has to be measured and make sure that it is done in a proper manner and not like this. These are my contributions towards this motion, and I say, in its current form, it is not acceptable and it should not even be in this House. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, to conclude the debate.

11.34 p.m.

Mr. Patterson (replying): Thank you very much. I would like to thank the Members on both sides who contributed to this motion. I must say, as usual, I am extremely astonished by some of the assertions that came from the other side, from the Government side. I do think that sometimes we are living in an alternate universe. I do think that their internet is obviously encrypted so that whenever they *Google* something, it goes to the Vice-President, who vets it and sends it back to them and they then regurgitate it, because it is absolutely mind-boggling to hear some of the comments.

I will start with the gentleman that is leaving here now, Mr. Indar. He got up to say that the PPP/C never, ever said that they will renegotiate with the contract. Could you imagine that, Sir? I will refer to a document that you are very well acquainted with or should be or may be – *the PPP/C Manifesto 2020*. I have heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Vickram Bharrat say that he is in possession of documents that they do not have. I am assuming none of them who spoke were in possession of their own manifesto because that is the only way they could make such utterances with such straight faces and believe that and want the citizens of Guyana to believe it. I will quote, and this is 2020. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Which page, paragraph and colour?] The colour is obviously red. Sorry, Sir. I am trying to get the page. Page 23 of 56 states:

“Immediately engage the oil and gas companies in better contract administration/re-negotiation”.

I know that they will say that we, somehow or the other, plagiarised this. Yet they have the temerity and the gall to get up here and tell this nation that they never said that.

“To ensure that our oil resource is managed responsibly, the PPP/C will:

Immediately engage the oil and gas companies...”

In 2020, we only had one company.

“... in better contract administration/re-negotiation...”

In black and white. Maybe Sir, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, made it up, or the Leader of the Opposition, because that is what they like to go and tell their constituencies. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** (*Inaudible*)] He would not understand if I do anyway. [**An Hon. Member:** It is a non-issue] It is a non-issue; I am coming to that. The reason we, on this side, bring motions like this is for the exact reason that we just heard there – so that we can have it enshrined in our records, so that the *Hansard* can record our position, so that in the unfortunate event that there is ever an oil spill we can recall and replay that the Minister and his Government said that it is a non-issue, it is trash and it is nonsense bringing a motion. The Minister questioned what is... Let me get it right – that is mischief, continued mischief he said. That is why we brought this motion here. I will tell you upfront, that we will continue to do it and we will continue to let the *Hansard* record the misinformation, the untruths and the backpedaling on their promises. They are the party that love to get up and say that ‘Our Manifesto is our Bible. We went to the people, and this is what we promised them and that is why they voted us in’. That is why we come here, Sir. [**An Hon. Member:** They will edit it.] Yes, they will edit it.

Time is longer than twine. The Hon. Minister, who is in charge of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), and whom you would have thought would have the environment and the geological safeguards at heart, said that this is an astonishing submission – a motion to protect our environment. It is a palpable non-issue. I would like them to ask all of the Members over there, when did protecting our livelihood and environment become a palpable non-issue? When has that become anti-developmental? This environment, this country that we have here, before oil and gas

brought us to where we are, if we did not protect our environment, protect our livelihood, we would not have been here to benefit from the oil and gas industry. You cannot come now because oil and gas have been discovered and push everything down and negate everything. The Hon. Member said that these motions are continued mischief. And he was cheered on, Sir, as I always say, by the bobbing heads at the time; they just bob. Let me say, let me assure you, Minister Benn, let it be known, that this continued mischief is my duty. It is my duty to my country and my people. I will continue to bring motions like this. You, Sir, can continue to call them anti-developmental. *The Hansard* will reflect that the Member said that protecting our environment from future hazards is trash. We are stating our position for the record. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] You did, Sir. You could get up and object if you like. You did.

Mr. Benn: Point of Order, Mr. Speaker. I said that the unlimited liability position of the motion was trash. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Patterson: Sir, we heard comments about the fish being one hundred miles off and the drilling is five thousand feet away under the seafloor and things like that. The question of if the oil-drilling operations were affecting the fish, instead of going away they would be swimming to shore and jumping into our nets. That is what the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources said here. However, I would like to refer this House to the budget debate of the budget that was passed. The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance included \$200 million to build fish traps. Could you remember that, Sir? Glowingly, Sir, I think the Hon. Member – it comes under the Ministry of Agriculture – stated quite clearly that they will put these traps in the middle of the ocean and drop them down to catch fish. They have not started as yet. [**Hon. Members:** (*Inaudible*)] You see, Sir, they have no idea. They are building fish traps. Why would you need fish traps with \$200 million when the fishes are eager to come ashore, based on the assumptions of the Minister of Natural Resources?

It is a pity, and I have said this before, notwithstanding him being a computer expert – I would not say a technician, and I like him – I find that he is one of the most straightforward and approachable Ministers. However, he is being *given a basket to fetch water*. Sometimes, I reckon that he may wake up just like the rest of us when the Vice-President has announced something and then say, ‘Mr. Vickram Bharrat, you should deal with it’. He does not even know what it is. I think his response to the motion today is probably just evidence of that. The Vice-President said that he is

the Minister of Natural Resources, he should go and talk on it. The Minister spoke nothing, absolutely nothing, on the limits, nothing on what the insurance should cover. He provided the country and the National Assembly with absolutely no assurance whatsoever that he has a plan. He then made the astonishing claim, as they normally do when their backs are against the wall, to blame the APNU/AFC for the problems. He said that when the APNU/AFC negotiated the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA), why did they not put unlimited insurance coverage? He is implying that if there was a better contractual deal, we could now ask for unlimited insurance. Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Vickram Bharrat, even if we had the best deal possible, and we could have gotten royalties of 95%, that has nothing to do with our insurance coverage that we are asking here about and the protection of our environment. All that means is it is more money for all of you to squander. Sometimes there are small mercies in certain things.

He then made a claim that they have introduced fees for flaring. He said that it is a good thing. You will allow someone to pollute your environment and cause untold damage. I explained all the toxins that will be found in the flaring of natural gas in a previous presentation. Here is what they have done: they have charged a paltry US\$45.00 for a metric ton. They are saying that it is quite all right, that they could destroy our environment. They could condemn our future generations – because of course climate change is a big issue – to untold environmental hazards. Once he and the Government's collects the paltry sum, it is quite all right for the companies to flare. You collected the money and almost... [**Mr. Nandlall:** *(Inaudible)*] That is the learned Attorney General. He made reference to Payara. They came in and asked for two or three weeks extra because they were not satisfied. He had to lay and make public the *Alison Redford Report*.

11.49 p.m.

He is yet to lay or make these things public. [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] The website. *Yeah, yeah, yeah*. We will get it. It is not there. As my Colleague, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, made up that he got up and made the thing. It is a capping stack. As though there was never any capping stack and until he got the job, there is a capping stack. In an article dated 4th May, 2019, the then Head of the Department of Energy of the Ministry of the Presidency, states:

“Capping stack, decommissioning pact among Liza 2 requirements – Dr. Bynoe”

He said that one of the requirements for ExxonMobil Corporation for its permit to be... [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)]. This is sourced from OilNOW. You should know this well. You preach it quite often in there. The article is dated 4th May, 2019. The article continues to read:

“The establishment of a Regional Capping Stack or other solution to ensure that a Capping Stack can be deployed within 5 days of a well control event with loss of containment.”

[**Mr. Seeraj:** Sole sourced? Who sourced (*inaudible*)?] Did I not just tell you, Sir? Did you not hear? Thank you. He gets up and says *Eureka!* Then the newspapers will say that the capping stack was something invented and thought about by the Minister and his Colleagues. He is trying to say that we have reduced three days to one day. We told him one must have it within three days to the well site. It is now the greatest achievement that you have accomplished, so congratulations, Hon. Minister. He then made a statement. I want to say that even under the APNU/AFCs Administration, oil spills were always on oil spill containment or always on the perusal of the Civil Defence Commission (CDC). He got up and laughed. He said that the Civil Defence Commission is now looking after it. The whole oil spill, and the oil spill in its embryonic stage started with the Civil Defence Commission and it continued. We made no big hullabaloo about it. It is obviously a great achievement for him to figure it out after we have left, that the Civil Defence Commission is responsible for oil spill responses.

We then had a potential aspirant for the Attorney General’s position. Until tonight, he had my vote if I had a choice – until tonight and that is unfortunately. He has several opportunities to reclaim it. I do not judge. One cannot judge a batsman by one innings. He made the statement that the reason we should not have unlimited liability coverage. I will come to that whole definition there. The reason was because small companies would not be able to operate. He is making a distinction. It is quite all right. In other words, he is saying it is quite all right for a small, indigenous companies to have an oil spill – and as my Friend, Mr. Vincent Henry, said – to destroy the environment for Indigenous people because they are small. That is his reasoning on we cannot have limited liability coverage. Mr. Speaker, when I started off this rebuttal, I was telling you that there is a different internet connection between this side of the House and that side of the House. I would like to refer to two articles because the last speaker... [**Mr. McCoy:** You are rambling as usual.] Yes. I am rambling but if you... Anyway, do not let me worry with you. I would like to quote from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deepwater_Horizon_oil_spill and it states:

“As of 2018, cleanup costs, charges and penalties had cost the company...”

The British Petroleum Company Limited (BP) for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. This is 2018.

“...more than US\$65 billion.”

Once again, it is not Mr. Ramjattan making up these numbers. I know that he is a favourite *whipping boy* of the PPP/C. I know that they will say that we cannot do Mathematics. This is *Reuters* and the *Financial Times*. The Hon. Member is using a different internet access point has said that it has only cost \$14 billion. That is up to 2018. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)]. No. Of course not. I know that they are not educated. You could talk. Mr. Speaker, the honourable aspirant of the AG asked about the cost. I just told you about the Deepwater Horizon. Where did they get these costs from? *Reuters*, and *Financial Times*. The Exxon Valdez oil spill – I do not know if there is a difference between Exxon Valdez. The sum of \$59 billion... The Hon. Member asked the question. He said if I have the information, kindly provide it. Those were his exact words. I am providing it. You asked for it, we have it. The internet at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) is free. The Hon. Member also said that my Motion is fear mongering. I took my time to explain and go down step by step that we should not only be ensuring against the most obvious which is the clean-up of an oil spill. I made it quite clear that after an oil spill there is residual damage which can last, and I quote myself again – months, years or decades. That is where the question of unlimited liability comes in. Limited insurance just addresses the immediate peril. The object of insurance is to get insured back to a position one was prior to a peril. Cleaning up the oil spill would not get the Guyanese people back to the position prior to the peril. That is the definition of insurance for all of you there. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)]. Yes, Hon. Member. I do a lot of work for insurance companies.

That is why the request has been for it. It is because some of these damages are not immediately apparent. Therefore, and obviously, what is asked for is the highest amount available as is said in my motion. Insurance coverage can be obtained locally because of local content law, *et cetera* is \$2.5 billion. Over and above that, someone is responsible. That is why we are saying that we need the commitment from the parent companies to, in the event that they exceed the \$2.5 billion, stand the expenses and the obligations. That is all; That is all, Sir. I am wrapping up but I still have some gems. This, once again, is the honourable aspirant of the AG. Why do we need an independent

analysis? He looked at whereas clause and asked why do you need an independent baseline, *et cetera*? It is just because of future perils. Just because of the exact same thing that I said – one wants to return the country and all the affected inhabitants to where they were before the peril and one wants to restore them to what they had before the unfortunate event of an oil spill or any petroleum related incidents. If one does not know what one has now, one cannot know what one is losing.

All we are saying is... **[Mr. Datadin:** If you say that you are compensating for it (*inaudible*)). I am coming to that, Sir. I am coming to that, Sir. **[Mr. Datadin:** (*Inaudible*)). I am coming to that, Sir. You still have an opportunity. You are a cricket fan. **[Mr. Datadin:** (*Inaudible*)). I would not judge you by one innings. You failed this one but I know you would make a glorious hundred in the next time you come and put the current AG under threat once again. That is why we said we wanted an independent study. We would like the independent study and we want you to lay it here in the National Assembly, in the Committee on Natural Resources. Should there be a peril in Morawhanna, Itabo, St. John's, they could say, listen to me this is what we have lost. We have done the environmental studies; we have done the assessment; and this is what we have lost. Therefore, there will be no disputation and the question as to what is legitimate and reasonable would not be an issue.

Finally, the last two issues. How could one calculate unlimited liability? I want to refer the House to the settlement of Philip Morris International Incorporated tobacco company. The four major tobacco companies. They were able to come up with a figure, not only for past damages of cigarette smoking, but present and the future. They also have a rider so one can do it. One can do it, Sir. **[An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)). No. There was a settlement. It was damages. You asked how one could calculate it so I am telling you that. The last speaker... **[Mr. Datadin:** Check the internet you have (*inaudible*)). Not at all. It does not give anything right, not even your own manifesto. ...made a claim that the BP, ExxonMobil Corporation, Repsol and Tullow Oil are world-class. They are, Sir. They are world leaders, but every one of these world-class companies were part of the worst oil spills in the last 15 years. Being world-class does not insulate one from the risk of an oil spill. We are fortunate to have them but we have to ensure to protect our environment for now and in the future. That is the reason we are bringing it.

For all records, I rest and I commend this Motion to you with these words that the APNU/AFC have made and laid our marker in the sand. Those who feel it is trash, those who feel that it is fear mongering, those who feel it is antidevelopment, soon, maybe at some time, the world and the country will have to judge them by their words and actions. With those few words, I commend this Motion to the House. *[Applause]*

12.04 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, that concludes the debate on the Motion moved by the Hon. Member. Hon. Members, I now put the question.

Motion put and negatived.

Hon. Members, please, just give me one moment to find the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, this is in connection with the *[inaudible]* some of the Members.

Mr. Speaker: Right now, we are supposed to be at Government's Business.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I am being muted all the time. I was cut off and I could not hear, then, when I got on, I could not get to speak. I am not sure if you were calling on me or something else.

Mr. Speaker: Just to let you know that the last presenter spoke about the different internets and, apparently, I probably have a different internet because I went on the blink too. We are at Government's Business. Hon. Minister, my apologies, for the internet.

Ms. Teixeira: Then, the issue of the Bills have to be presented and the Ministers have to respond.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS – SECOND READINGS

Industrial Hemp Bill 2022 – Bill No.10/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the cultivating and manufacturing of industrial hemp related products for the conducting of research on industrial hemp or any other activity concerning or related to industrial hemp; to establish the Guyana Industrial Hemp Regulatory Authority; and other related matters.”

[Minister of Agriculture]

Reading of the Bill was deferred

Mental Health Protection and Promotion Bill 2022 – Bill No. 7/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide mental health care and treatment for persons with mental illness and to protect, promote and fulfil the human rights of those persons during the delivery of mental health care; to provide for the establishment of Mental Health Board; to repeal the Mental Hospital Ordinance and for related matters.”

[Minister of Health]

Reading of the Bill was deferred

COMMITTEES BUSINESS

MOTION

Adoption of the Report of the Parliamentary Sessional Select Committee of Privileges

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Report of the Parliamentary Sessional Select Committee of Privileges, be adopted.

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip]

Mr. Ramjattan: Could I, on a Point of Order?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, proceed.

Mr. Ramjattan: I had earlier attempted it, but you said you are just laying it. It is in accordance with the Standing Order 104, Reports from Committees. Standing Order 104 (4) indicates:

“A Report or Special Report together with the minutes of any evidence taken before the Committee shall be presented to the Assembly by the Chairperson or any other Member deputed...”

In relation to this Report on the Parliamentary Sessional Select Committee of Privileges, this aspect seems clearly to be a deficit. There were no minutes of any evidence taken before the Committee which is attached here. I can clearly see what we have on page five at 8.0 FINDINGS OF THE COMMITTEE. At 8.1 states:

“The Committee’s findings were based on video recordings, statements by staff of the Parliament Office... eyewitness accounts...”

All of that which it is indicating. In this Report, I do not see video recordings attached or minutes. I am making the point that before one could even go to debate it has a deficit that violates the Standing Order 104 (4). In the Standing Order 26 (g) and 41 (2).

Mr. Speaker: The first order you quoted was Standing Order 104.

Mr. Ramjattan: It is Standing Order 104 (4).

Mr. Speaker: Okay, Standing Order 104 (4).

Mr. Ramjattan: Standing Orders 26 (g) and 41 (2), this should not move further because of the fact that there have been court actions filed. In keeping with your ruling – I do not need to go back to all of your rulings, Mr. Speaker – you have made it quite clear in the Standing Order 41(2), once in a court of law it becomes *sub judice*. [Inaudible] motion and, I think, the Henry boys’ motion. There was no order as it were in the Henry boys’ matter nor in the flaring and once in court one cannot. The *sub judice* rule as indicated by you in two very comprehensive rulings would indicate that this is a *sub judice* matter which we should not even move forward. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, for that intervention. Hon. Members, with respect to the observation of the Hon. Member, regarding the Report, there was a Committee. We circulated the Draft Report that was adopted. As far as I remember seeing, all the documents available for that particular Committee were provided. I now move to the second observation made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan. This deals with him calling for consistency with respect to my previous rulings. Hon. Members, I am not a wise man but, over my many years, I have become an experience man. I have not only learnt but, by experience, I do subscribe to the comment that experience teaches wisdom. We have had two rulings on the issue of *sub judice*.

The first one, I ruled that charges had been laid. On the second one, it was not only a filing but the matter was assigned to a judge. I have the records of 21st May, 2022, which indicates that it was not only a filing but had gone a further way towards fixing dates for hearings, *et cetera*. In all of that, I do have, as I have said on many occasions, the services of one of the most experience Clerks in the Commonwealth. I do confess also that our Library Department has an enormous ability to provide information to the Speaker. Many times, when I make a ruling it is out of experience, information, sound advice and advice also of counsel. I remember the previous Leader of the Opposition, at one time during my ruling, saying that the Speaker pulls up precedence from 200 years ago and so forth. In that same vain, I will quote a few examples to justify how I am about to rule. In the United Kingdom (UK), *Standing Orders in force on 2nd December, 2021. Appendix, Orders and Resolutions. Matters sub judice*.

“(b) (i) Civil proceedings are active when arrangements for the hearing, such as setting down a case for trial, have been made, until the proceedings are ended by judgment or discontinuance.”

In New Zealand, they recognise in the Standing Order 111, that we must regard to the comity between the Parliament and the Courts. I raised that because article 165 (1) of the Constitution gives the Parliament the power to make its own rules. This Constitution principle apply. I went to the Republic of Kenya and the *Republic of Kenya Parliament, The National Assembly, Standing Orders* at Standing Order 89, matters of *sub judice* or secret, rule as follows:

“(1) ...no Member shall refer to any particular matter which is *sub judice* or which, by the operation of any written law, is secret.

(2) A matter shall be considered to be *sub judice* when it refers to active criminal or civil proceedings and the discussion of such matter is likely to prejudice its fair determination.”

12.19 a.m.

I will skip the rest and go to (3) (c) which states:

“civil proceedings shall be deemed to be active when arrangements for hearing, such as setting down a case for trial, have been made, until the proceedings are ended by judgment or discontinuance;”

As the Attorney General said, ‘the law is a living thing’. I have learned a lot from our lawyers here. Even as we speak, there continues to be reviews of this *sub judice* rule. For me, my rulings have been very consistent with the practices across other commonwealth jurisdictions. In this case, we were presented with a filing, yesterday afternoon, and not as the previous flaring resolution where a judge was assigned on 21st May and my ruling was on 10th June. In all of this, throughout all the jurisdictions, in the end also, it comes down to the discretion of the Speaker. I am happy to say, in this case, my discretion is founded in constitutions, in conventions and in commonwealth practices. While I have listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, I now have to disagree with him and ask that we proceed with the matter before us.

Mr. Ramjattan: I find it is a distinction without a difference, absolutely. I am a lawyer of some experience even if I am not wise. It is important to understand that once it is filed, it engages the court and it becomes very much active and alive. It is not as if the precedence set... Even in this House, the precedence was set in relation to other matters in which you cannot... A charge is brought before the court and the matter is brought before the court and then it becomes active. The man has not been convicted or acquitted yet. Once the charge is brought and it is sent into the court, it comes active.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. I have cited and you are free to go and do the research as I have done on several occasions. I want to admire the ingenuity of some of the persons who have a contrary view. In fact, when the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, quoted from my speech on 10th June, he added. I said, ‘all matter *sub judice*’. Before my hands, I have not seen that in the verbatim. I have just seen the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, also make

some references which I am very honoured by but, which I cannot accept your platitudes. Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the matter before us. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.

[The Opposition left the Dome.]

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Speaker, who cannot present a motion and debate a motion in the House, as a Member of the Committee of Privileges, I will move the motion.

The matter relates to, the Report relates to and they are consumed by one issue alone, which is, the Sitting on 29th December, 2021. The Committee of Privileges met on five occasions. A motion had been brought to the House by me and an extension was sought by the Committee which I took to the House, and which the House gave us. When we, the Committee, went through the various information that we knew... We cannot pretend in this House. All of us in this House tonight were present on 29th December, 2021, except for one person and that is Mr. Norton. He was not a Member of the House at the time. He is the only one who is an exception. Everyone else in the House tonight was in the House on 29th December, 2021. We were all witnesses to what happened.

The Committee recognised and went through all the various arguments in regard to what were positions raised by Members of the Opposition who attended three of the five meetings. They did not attend the last two meetings. The issue is of such great magnitude that what transpired on 29th December, 2021, will go down in the history of our Parliament as one of the worst images and reflection of the integrity and behaviour of our elected officials in the National Assembly. This level of collective vulgarity by the Members on the Opposition, in the APNU/AFC, in this case, cannot be treated lightly. The Committee went through discussions and decided that it would ask the eight Members who were named to show cause as to why disciplinary actions should not be taken against them. They all denied. The problem was that we are all Members of the House; we all witnessed. Every Member of the House cannot say that they did not see what they saw, what was captured on video and on audio that day by not only the official media of the Government but the private medias, social media and other persons who had their cameras in the House. The Committee went through a drafted report and did a redraft. The redraft was circulated to all Members and was finally adopted.

The Committee felt that it could not condoned such behaviour, which is if it did not do something, it would allow for future events that could be worse than what happened on 29th December, 2021. This was a terrible reflection of the National Assembly of Guyana. It was a terrible example to the younger generation. This was one that we had to, as a Committee, take seriously and make a decision. The sad thing about it – I speak personally here – is that the eight Members who were named in the Motion and examined by the Committee, I did not think that any suspension order would have been coming here today if any of the eight Members had been contrived and apologised for their behaviours. The eight persons held a position that they did nothing wrong, nothing happened and, therefore, might was right. They did not have to account to anybody – not the Committee of Privilege, not the National Assembly and not the people of our country.

This event on 29th December, 2021, endangered the lives of people in the National Assembly; the Members of Parliament, the staff of the Parliament Office. It damaged Government property and a very important symbol of the Assembly which is the Mace. It was not done by people running off the road and behaving wild. It was done in an orchestrated, organised and choreographed manner by the Members with their whistles and all the noise makers who they brought. This was all done by elected Members of the House and this is what make it so reprehensible. The behaviour also treated the Speaker, the authority of the Speaker and the authority of the National Assembly. Therefore, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House, I asked all of you to look at page six at the recommendation of the Committee, paragraph 9.1 which makes it clear that the Committee made the following decisions and are making these recommendations now to the House with a view that they be adopted. It states:

“a) The following Members who attempted to prevent the second and third readings of the Natural Resources Fund Bill No. 20 of 2021, and had conducted themselves in a gross disorderly, contumacious, and disrespectful manner, and repeatedly ignoring the authority of the Assembly and that of the Speaker, and thereby committing contempt and breaches of privileges, for four (4) consecutive Sitzings of the National Assembly:”

Name of Member	Duration of suspension
Mr. Christopher Jones, M.P.	Four consecutive Sitzings

Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, M.P.	Four consecutive Sittings
Mr. Sherod Duncan, M.P.	Four consecutive Sittings
Mrs. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.	Four consecutive Sittings

b) The following Members who attempted to prevent the second and third readings of the Natural Resources Fund Bill No. 20 of 2021 ...”

It goes on to use the same language as paragraph 9.1 (a). It also states:

“The Committee concurred that the Members had committed serious violations which were severe and egregious by unauthorizedly removing the Parliamentary Mace from its rightful position in a disorderly fashion, causing damage to the Mace, injuring and assaulting a staff of the Parliament Office, while attempting to remove the Mace from the Chamber, for six (6) consecutive Sittings of the National Assembly:

Name of Member	Duration of suspension
Ms. Annette Ferguson, M.P.	Six consecutive Sittings
Mr. Vinceroy Jordan, M.P.	Six consecutive Sittings

”

Paragraph 9.1 (c) begins, again, just like the other two paragraphs with the same preambles which is:

“The following Member who attempted to prevent the second and third readings of the Natural Resources Fund Bill No. 20 of 2021 and had conducted herself in a gross disorderly ... and disrespectful manner, and repeatedly ignored the authority of the Assembly and that of the Speaker, thereby committing contempt and breaches of privilege. The Committee also concurred that her violations were severe and egregious with regard to unauthorizedly entering the communication control room of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) and destroying several pieces of audio-visual equipment, being public property, for six (6) consecutive Sittings of the National Assembly:

Name of Member	Duration of suspension
Mrs. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, M.P.	Six consecutive Sitzings

(d) The following Member who attempted to prevent the second and third readings of the Natural Resources Fund Bill No. 20 of 2021, and had conducted herself in a gross disorderly, contumacious, and disrespectful manner, repeatedly ignored the authority of the Assembly and that of the Speaker, thereby committing contempt and breaches of privileges. The Committee concurred, that her violations were severe and egregious, whereby the Member verbally assaulted a staff of the Parliament Office within the precincts of the National Assembly, for six (6) consecutive Sitzings of the National Assembly:

Name of Member	Duration of suspension
Ms. Maureen Philadelphia, M.P.	Six consecutive Sitzings

10.1 The Parliamentary Sessional Select Committee of Privileges wishes to draw Members' attention to **Standing Order 47** which speaks to "***Order in the Assembly and in Committee***".

10.2 The Parliamentary Sessional Select Committee of Privileges of the Twelfth Parliament now, therefore, submits its Report and Motion for consideration and adoption by the National Assembly."

The Report was signed by Mr. Manzoor Nadir, Speaker of the National Assembly.

12.34 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure there will be many speakers on this motion, but I think it would be remiss of me, to personally not say for whatever it is worth, and it may be made fun of later on by the other speakers. For whatever it is worth Mr. Speaker and maybe it does not even need to be said but I will say it for the future. At this point Mr. Speaker and Members of the House, I am the longest serving Member of Parliament (MP) –from 1992, October to now. I have never witnessed any behaviour like this as I saw on 29th December, 2021. I used to come and sit in this House from

1977 to 1992. I sat in the House many times, sitting behind the Opposition seats which were filled by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, Ms. Janet Jagan, Boysie Ramkarran, Isahak Basir, Mr. Nokta, Mr. Collymore and a number of other people and I have never seen such behaviour, mayhem and gross disrespect for the Speaker and the National Assembly. I say this to explain, as younger MPs in this National Assembly particularly those who are coming from the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change, your political career depends on your integrity and your behaviour on how you carry yourselves as leaders. If you want to last as long as I have in the House maybe, you may want to take some advice.

However, as a Parliamentarian, I am proud to have served my country as an elected Member and I am proud as a Member of Parliament to have carried myself and behaved in this Parliament with dignity even in the worst debates, the angriest debates and the worst situations. Therefore, 29th December was totally uncalled for, unnecessary and it revealed a level of disrespect for everything that we have in our Assembly, our symbol, our Speaker, the actual Assembly, the staff at Parliament and each other as MP's and therefore I solidly and totally support the suspension of the eight Members. I hope they will take it seriously and not be caught up in grandstanding in a court of action where the Parliament and the judiciary are separated but I hope that the Opposition will not see this as just another battle to win but to sit and think quietly, was it all worth it? What badge of honour have you got out of this behaviour? What example have you given to the Guyanese people and to the Guyanese young people and the children who saw that day? I totally support the recommendations of the Committee of which I was a part of, of which you chaired, and I want to ask the Members of the Opposition to please accept the recommendations with dignity and remorse and let us get on with the business of this House. Thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Deputy Speaker, the Hon. Member Mr. Lenox Shuman to make his contributions.

Mr. Shuman: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to leave my views before this honourable House. I am drawing from a variety of sources of which none of them greater than the Buddha who speaks about the Yin and Yang and the balance of society. Parliaments across the world have developed a variety of instruments. Some called the Standing Orders, some called the Constitution, some of them common law and a variety of things that stands to maintain that balance.

In society, we look at the law as part of that balancing mechanism. We expect that our citizens be as part of that balancing mechanism. We expect that our citizens will conduct themselves in a manner that is befitting, what we call 'civil society or civilisation' *per se*. I will share something with this honourable House, and I am quite disappointed that my Opposition Colleagues are not here to at least to draw or if not maybe consider it. When the explorers first landed on these shores, they saw Indigenous Peoples and they termed them as uncivilised but yet my Hon. Colleague across the hall there, Dr. Frank Anthony at the recent launch of the archaeology of Guyana stated that the Berbice mounds dated 6000 Before Christ (BC) and that in itself speaks of a civilisation that existed here before conquest and explorers even got their feet on this soil. I say that to offer the lesson to my Colleagues who are absent which is they should draw from the long rich, sometimes, undocumented history of what civilisation speaks to, not only within this Parliament but within this country.

We expect our citizens, the people that we are to be leaders of to conduct themselves in a law-abiding manner, yet we display the vulgarity that is unbecoming of these hallowed halls. The *modus operandi* of my Colleagues and I say my Colleagues because we sit on this side. I do not think that anyone have any disagreement for say that we do not share the same ideology. What transpired in 2020, one would hope that they parted ways with that and that they would have found maybe a different level and elevate themselves to say that we have been caught red-handedly and it is time that we literally lift ourselves and in turn our people to a new level, to take that moral high ground if there is such a thing. To my dismay, what I have thought would have materialised has not materialised. There has been no moral high ground and what I am extremely disappointed in, you know I remembered sitting in the chair of the Speaker this very night, when the Hon. Amanza Walton-Desir stood in this very same position and spoke about stifling debate. Well, there are more ways than one to stifle debate. What they did that night was exactly what stifling debate was about. I say that because I was also lined up to speak on the very Bill and they denied me my right as a sitting Member of this House to represent the people that voted for me and to share those views with this House whether considered or not.

It is my sincere hope that after we have gone through this process that my Colleagues would picked themselves up and think like our Hon. Colleague Ms. Teixeira said that we all have to think about the politicians that we want to be and the kind of leaders that we want to be if we think of ourselves

as leaders. I remember standing in this very House also and it was a budget debate, and I asked a question about what many people quote the 'Bible' what happens to people when the leader is visionless? I asked the question, what happens to people when they have no leader? What I have seen is exactly the outcome of those two questions. It is disheartening to have to stand here in this House to be part of that support of structure that is meant to bring order here. We have Standing Orders and I stand behind it. I will not say that it is perfect because I myself would see in many places where I conflict with the Standing Orders. However, they are built within the confines of a structure that all of us in this House subscribed to, the minute we took our oath.

I will say unequivocally say that I support this motion and I hope that all the Members in this House and whatever future membership comes after us, draw from this and take the positive from it that we as Parliamentarians cannot and should not condone behaviours of such. I, thank you.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Deputy Speaker. I now call on the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, very much, Sir. Sir, I am mindful of the hour, and I will be as brief as I possibly can. First of all, for the record I support the motion. I had the privilege of being part of the Committee of Privileges and obviously, I am part of the report but Mr. Speaker the matter is already in court, and I have no doubt that the record of tonight's proceedings will become part of those court proceedings and I wanted to speak quickly to put on the record certain matters that should be there.

Sir, the first thing that we have to establish and put on the record is that in Guyana we have a constitutional democracy where the Constitution is supreme, that Constitution is built upon the doctrine of separation of powers and that doctrine divides constitutional responsibility mainly into three organs, the Parliament, the Judiciary and the Executive. Each of these institutions have certain core functions to perform. For example, in the executive lies the financial affairs of the state and matters of security and that is why when the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the land makes an executive decision in relation to security, the court ought to defer because that is a matter of executive policy. The executive is answerable to the constituency for that domain of affairs and

that matter is before the court. Parliament as empowered by the Constitution has the power to regulate its own affairs.

12.49 a.m.

Among the affairs that Parliament is to regulate are the discipline of Members, the conduct of Members in the National Assembly, the process of the Assembly, and the protection of the integrity of that process. Those are intrinsically, inherently, and innately parliamentary functions. When the Parliament exercises its powers to discipline its officers, those are innately and intrinsically parliamentary functions. If another agency or organ of the State wants to be part of those functions, it is that other agency that must be careful that it will not trespass upon the province of Parliament. Transposing that principle to the case at hand, Parliament in the exercise of the inherent, expressed, and authorised constitutional power is proceeding to discipline Members of Parliament. The Parliament established the requisite and authorised agency to carry out that function. That function was carried out in accordance with the Standing Orders of the National Assembly and the Parliament is now proceeding to complete that parliamentary function.

Proceedings have been filed in another arm – the judiciary – that seeks to challenge what the Parliament is seeking to do. Now, right there is an apparent conflict because this is a parliamentary function. It is my respectful submission, that in this particular situation, it is the judiciary that must exercise vigilance, circumspection, caution, and care so that it does not exceed and trespass into the provincial responsibility of this Parliament. It is not the other way around. That brings me to the two motions to which reference has been made. One is related to discussing the killings of the Henry boys and the other person. Now, that is a matter that transgresses the criminal laws of our country. The agency in the separation of powers, endowed with the jurisdictional power and responsibility to deal with that matter, is the judiciary. Charges are to be instituted by the police and that matter is to go before the court. It becomes an intrinsically and inherently judicial matter.

The *gravamen* of the contention in the Natural Gas Flaring at the Esso Exploration and Production Guyana motion was that flaring – the activity which is the subject of the motion – was going to violate our environmental laws and constitutional ethos. The motion cites certain parts of that. The issue was whether flaring would be environmentally hazardous, having regard to the laws. That makes it again, a question for the judiciary. If this Parliament is going to deal with a matter that is

already in the judiciary, then it must be vigilant. It is against that backdrop because constitutionally, there must be some intersection for there to be civilised conduct in the three arms of Government. Executives who sit in this House. I am a Member of the Executive Arm, but I sit in this legislature because there are agreed grounds for the intersection. Out of that was birthed the *sub judice* principle. This is where there is a certain cut-off point and both sides have to draw their lines.

If we do not have that cut-off line and understanding, and the *sub judice* rule is to be applied as rigidly as Mr. Ramjattan, for example, would like us to, even in a purely judicial matter – I want to distinguish this again, this is a parliamentary matter – then anytime any matter of Parliament is put on the Order Paper, someone can merely file the proceedings in the court irrespective of how specious and frivolous it is. The mere filing of that matter will halt the business of Parliament. Common sense would tell you that cannot be right. That cannot be grounded in rationality and principle. That is why the Parliament has evolved the rules and fleshed them out properly. Your Honour made a fleeting reference to it. I want to just read it a little more into the record. It is in recognition of that very principle, that the court and court proceedings cannot be allowed to frustrate the business of Parliament, that the Parliament and the courts together have agreed on how they would approach the situation. We are following the *Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice*. We must always recognise that in England there are two houses – the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The House of Lords, until recently used to be the highest court in England. Therefore, this resolution of that principle involved both the House of Commons and the most preeminent gathering of Judges in England– the House of Lords. They came up with this resolution. They stated that it applies to debates in both houses because of the same rules they wish to apply. They went in depth with the different types of proceedings. They dealt with first, criminal proceedings. Remember that our Standing Order speaks about a matter under adjudication. They are now defining what a matter under adjudication means. In relation to criminal proceedings, they state:

“i. Criminal proceedings are active when a charge has been made or a summons to appear has been issued, or, ... a warrant to cite has been granted.”

This states if a charge has been instituted or a warrant or a summons has been issued. In the Henry boys’ case, there was a charge. So, the Hon. Speaker was perfectly in order when he disallowed that motion. Let us go to civil proceedings. It states:

“i. Civil proceedings are active when arrangements for the hearing, such as setting down a case for trial, have been made, ...”

That lasts until the proceedings are ended by judgment or discontinuance. The proceedings are active when arrangements are made for a hearing, such as setting down a case for trial. That last until the judgment and discontinuance of the matter. I have the proceedings here. We are given our normal conventional standard of process and time. We are nearly two months away from this matter even being set down before a Judge. We are far away from trial. I am reading verbatim. The flaring matter – Your Honour – was filed a couple of months before and already assigned to a Judge for hearing. This matter was filed on 20th July, 2022. If we are to go with what is on the record, it has simply been filed at the registry. It has not gone from the Registrar to a Judge. When it goes to a Judge, there is another process. It has to be entered in the Judge’s record; the Judge’s name is imprinted, and it is served on the other side. This was served upon its issue at the Registry. This is far away from the factual scenario contemplated by the *sub judice* rule, as explained in Erskine May.

I conclude by saying that your ruling is well grounded, and well founded in the law. It is the judiciary that should be vigilant in ensuring that it does not trespass upon the province of the legislature in this case. It is not the other way around. Thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I see no other persons wishing to contribute to this debate. I will now put that the motion as proposed by the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and the recommendations of the Report of the Parliamentary Sessional Select Committee of Privileges, be adopted. Maybe the Hon. Minister may want to put it herself and then I will put the question.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I think you did it very well but if you so desire, I, therefore call that the Motion and the Report be adopted by this National Assembly at this hour, after 1.00 a.m.

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

Report adopted by the National Assembly.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 8th August, 2022.”

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance]

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to call for the adjournment of this sitting. The next sitting will be on Monday, 8th August. Thank you, Sir. We will adjourn to that date.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House is now adjourned to Monday, 8th August. Have a good morning.

Adjourned accordingly at 1.02 a.m.