



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

49TH Sitting

Monday, 8TH August, 2022

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.12 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

[Absent – on leave]

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (17)

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

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

[Virtual Participation]

+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
Ministry of Finance,
Main & Urquhart Streets,
Georgetown.

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

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

[Virtual Participation]

Junior Ministers (4)

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

Other Members (14)

Hon. Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,
Lot 71 BB Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,
(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
148 Lethem,
Central Rupununi,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.

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

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

Hon. Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,
Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,
Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.

Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,
Lot 340 East Street,
South Cummingsburg,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,
55 AA Victoria Avenue,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,
(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),
Lot 16-30 New Street,
New Amsterdam.
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.

Hon. Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Lot 290 Area 'J',
Tuschen, North,
East Bank Essequibo.

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

* Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

[Absent – on leave]

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

[Absent – on leave]

Hon. Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,
Lot 32 Crown Dam,
Industry,
East Coast Demerara.

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

Hon. Mr. Aubrey Norton, M.P.,
Leader of the Opposition

[Absent]

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

[Absent]

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

[Absent]

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

[Absent]

*** Non-Elected Minister**

Hon. Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P., <i>Lot 3202 Pricese 3,</i> <i>Providence,</i> <i>East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P., <i>Lot 48 Atlantic Ville,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P., <i>Lot 151 Durbana Square,</i> <i>Lamaha Gardens,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P., <i>Lot 7 Freeman Street,</i> <i>Castello Housing Scheme,</i> <i>La-Penitence,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P., <i>Lot 933 Block 1,</i> <i>Eccles,</i> <i>East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P., <i>Opposition Chief Whip,</i> <i>Lot 609 Conciliation Street,</i> <i>Tucville,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Suspended]</i>
Hon. Mr. Vinceroy H. Jordan, M.P., <i>(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),</i> <i>Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,</i> <i>West Coast Berbice.</i> <i>C/o Christopher Jones</i>	<i>[Suspended]</i>
Hon. Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P., <i>Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field,</i> <i>East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P., <i>Lot 202 N, Fourth Street,</i> <i>Alexander Village,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),</i> <i>Lot 13 A, New Providence,</i> <i>East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P., <i>(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),</i> <i>Shulidnab Village,</i> <i>South Central,</i> <i>Rupununi.</i> <i>(Culvert City Lethem)</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>

Hon. Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P., <i>Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme, East Coast Demerara.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P., <i>Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue, South Ruimveldt Park, Georgetown.</i>	[Suspended]
Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P., <i>Lot 1110 Plot 'B', Herstelling, East Bank Demerara.</i>	[Suspended]
Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P., <i>Lot 842 Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	[Suspended]
Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P., <i>Lot 1282 Block EE, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P., <i>Lot 590 Good Hope, East Coast Demerara.</i>	[Suspended]
Hon. Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P., <i>(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini), Mabaruma Compound.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P., <i>(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice), Lot 136 2nd Street, Silvertown, Wismar, Linden.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P., <i>Lot 14 Plantain Walk, West Bank Demerara.</i>	[Suspended]
Hon. Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P., <i>Lot 18 Public Road, Johanna Cecilia, (Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 88 Nelson Street, Mocha Village, East Bank Demerara.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P., <i>Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne), Lot 80 Babu John Road, Haswell, Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 17 Block 1, Section F, Plantation Belfield, East Coast Demerara.</i>	[Suspended]

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

[Absent]

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

[Absent]

Hon. Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 90, Section C,
Wismar, Linden.

[Absent]

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

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

Officers (2)

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

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

Hansard Division Officers (20)

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Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
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Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
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Reporter (a.g.)
Ms. Shabana Chiraunjie,
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Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following Reports were laid:

- (1) Report of the Special Select Committee on the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) (Amendment) Bill 2021 – Bill No.2/2021.

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip on behalf of the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira again, I just want to put on the record that we have four persons who are signed in online. We have a quorum. Those persons are Ministers Parag, Manickchand, Ramson and Todd.

- (2) Sixth Report of the Committee on Appointments in relation to the Appointment of Members of the Rights of the Child Commission.

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

- (3) Report of the Special Select Committee on the Hire Purchase Bill 2020 – Bill No.14/2020

[Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce - Chairperson]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Written Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are only two questions on today's Order Paper and these questions are for written replies. These two questions are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, and they are for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The answers to these questions have been received and have, in accordance with our Standing Orders, been circulated.

- (1) **Allowance for Employment costs of persons employed at the Guyana Consulate in New York, United States of America**

Ms. Walton-Desir: Can the Honourable Minister advise whether allowance for these 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 Guyana Consulate in New York, United States of America?

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]: The Ministry, in its 2022 budget, made the requisite provision for the payment of employment costs for the staff at the Consulate General in New York. Line Items used to pay persons employed/engaged on contract are as follows: -

- 6113 - Other Technical Craft Skilled
- 6115 - Semiskilled Operatives and Unskilled
- 6133 - Benefits and Allowances
- 6284 - Other

- (2) **Positions Filled at the Guyana Consulate in New York, United States of America**

Ms. Walton-Desir: Can the Honourable Minister advise whether the positions filled at the Guyana Consulate in New York, United States of America since August 2, 2020 were publicly or internally advertised and if so, provide a copy of the advertisement?

Mr. Todd: Internal recruitment process employed for the filling of some vacancies; additionally, applicants seeking to filled available posts at the Consulate are interviewed and shortlisted before approval is sought from Headquarters.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bills were introduced and read the first time:

Constitution Reform Commission Bill 2022 – Bill No. 18/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to establish a Constitution Reform Commission and to provide for its membership, its terms of reference and for other connected purposes.”

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2022 – Bill No. 19/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act.”

Intoxicating Liquor Licensing (Amendment) Bill 2022 – Bill No. 20/2022

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Intoxicating Liquor Licensing Act.”

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip on behalf of the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

Consideration of Financial Paper No. 1/2022 - Current and Capital Estimates

Be It RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves of the proposal set out in 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]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply to consider Financial Paper No. 1/2022.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]: Mr. Chairman, in accordance with article 171 (2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended for consideration by the Assembly the motion for the approval of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 1 of 2022 Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$44,794,011,175 for the period ended 31st December, 2022. I now move the motion.

Motion proposed.

Current Expenditure

Item 1: 02-022 Office of the Prime Minister – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – Other - \$50,000,000

Item 1: 02-022 Office of the Prime Minister – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – Other - \$50,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 2: 03-031 Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Electricity Charges - \$4,000,000,000

Minister within the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask a question on this particular item.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Indar: Could the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance tell this honourable House what represents this \$4 billion for the Guyana Power and Light Inc (GPL)?

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, sir. It would be recalled that I had on a previous occasion in this House, indicated that at the time this People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government assumed Office in August, 2020, we inherited a state of affairs in a number of the entities in the public sector, in particular, amongst the several state-owned enterprises, which reflected very dire financial circumstances. Sir, indeed, a number of these agencies were found, effectively, to be bankrupt. To give one example, the Guyana Power and Light Inc., had accumulated, only from its public sector entities, receivables in excess of \$12 billion – amounts that were due to GPL and were not being paid, which resulted in a tremendous liquidity and cash flow crisis at the company. In fact, this was a cascading problem because amongst the entities that owed GPL were, in turn, a number of agencies which were in similar states of financial distress. The Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) for example, had owed GPL in excess of \$9 billion and were incapable of discharging that liability. The Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) is another example of an entity that had accumulated tremendous indebtedness and did not have the wherewithal to discharge that indebtedness. So, Sir, we have been faced with the task of addressing this chronic problem and we have set about doing so diligently.

10.27 a.m.

Of course, the challenges at the GPL Inc. have been further compounded by the fact that the fuel price on the global market has increased tremendously, moving from just about \$40 per barrel, when we assumed Office, to more than \$100 per barrel. We have, as a matter of policy, given a commitment that we will absorb this fuel price increase and

not pass it on to the consumer. It is a matter of widespread public awareness that, notwithstanding the fuel prices, we have not made any adjustment to electricity prices. This has itself imposed a grave cash flow pressure on the GPL Inc. This \$4 billion represents a further effort to liquidate the longstanding liabilities that are owed to the GPL Inc. and ease the cashflow challenges that the company is currently facing.

Item 2: 03-031 Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Electricity Charges - \$4,000,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 2: 03-031 Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Subsidies & Contributions to Local Organisations - \$2,059,233,000

Item 2: 03-031 Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Subsidies & Contributions to Local Organisations \$2,059,233,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 2: 03-031 Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Buildings - \$40,592,461

Item 2: 03-031 Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Buildings - \$40,592,461 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 3: 13-134 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – Local Government Development – Community Infrastructure Improvement Project - \$600,000,000

Item 3: 13-134 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – Local Government Development – Community Infrastructure Improvement Project - \$600,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 3: 13-134 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – Local Government Development – Regional Economic Transformation - \$696,000,000

Item 3: 13-134 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – Local Government Development – Regional Economic Transformation - \$696,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 4: 14-142 Ministry of Public Service – Human Resource Development – Training (Including Scholarships) - \$250,000,000

Item 4: 14-142 Ministry of Public Service – Human Resource Development – Training (Including Scholarships) - \$250,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 5: 16-162 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – Community Development and Empowerment – Amerindian Development Fund - \$3,116,000,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Deputy Speaker, proceed.

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Would the Hon. Minister inform this Committee whether or not the quantum for every community is fixed? As we know, many indigenous communities do not have the same population, size, geography or resources. I think it is important to know if every community would benefit equally or equitably from this fund. Thank you.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Good morning and thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the question raised by the Hon. Deputy Speaker and Member on the other side of the House, I am very pleased to announce that this allocation, which is the supplemental allocation, is in support of addressing the requests and needs of and complementing the efforts that our Government has been making towards ensuring that development does not only occur on the coast but that hinterland and Amerindian development is equitably addressed.

I also want to say, immediately, that this was a major and significant commitment which came out of the recently held National Toshias Council (NTC) Council Conference meeting, where, after two years and some months, the Amerindian leaders, who are the legally elected leaders of a number of villages and communities across the hinterland and on the coast, also, held a working session. Out of that working session, a master plan of action was derived. The master plan of action is supported by the announcement that \$3 billion would be allocated towards the plan of action. With respect to the direct question, I wish to say that every community will be equitably addressed in terms of their developmental intervention necessary. A number of priorities or, more or less, a long list of requests was

generated towards ensuring that the plan of action manifests itself in stimulating development, employment, and increase of income.

So yes, every community and village will be afforded the additional financial resources from this allocation. Currently, we are working to ensure that the villages identify their immediate priorities from among the list in the master plan of action. As soon as this matter is approved, we will be so guided by the villages on their priorities. Our Government demonstrates, very willingly, that it is an engaging Government, that it consults, and that it does not dictate to the Amerindian village councils and their people. Therefore, as partners, we are going to ensure, first and foremost, that every community across the spectrum of our country is addressed and that the development intervention, which is critical in moving their communities forward in this very initial period, or to benefit from the \$3 billion, will be adequately addressed. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Could I ask a follow-up, Minister?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister Teixeira, proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Just for clarity, as I was at the National Toshias Council Conference, was the \$3 billion the total that came out and was approved at the Conference arise from the Toshias presenting their priorities and decisions being made as to which ones should go forward? Is this, one, a reflection of the submissions of the Toshias and the Community Development Councils (CDCs)?

Secondly, in the \$3 billion, are there the main priorities for these communities?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, I will address the first part, but I will ask the Hon. Member to repeat the second aspect because it was very muffled by the mask. I am sorry I did not get clearly what the second part of the inquiry or question was.

Ms. Teixeira: The second part had to do with if the \$3 billion reflect the priorities presented by the Toshias at the Conference, at which they sat down with the Ministry of Finance and everything else and came up with this \$3 billion, which they approved at the Conference as well.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Hon. Member. The answer to the first part of the question is yes. The recommended intervention that will be funded came out as a result of the Toshias deliberating during the sessions they held with the respective sector ministries being present. Many of the issues that are in the master plan of action revolve around a number of sectors and issues. In this area, we will have attention, focus, and priority being placed to agriculture and food security, women's affairs, youth and children, facilities, services, infrastructure and eco-tourism. These are some of the areas that the priority focus would be placed.

10.42 a.m.

The answer is yes and no for the other part of the question. Some communities, in fact, the majority of communities did not list their request and intervention support that they required in any particular priority, but they listed it under the priority categories. We still have some additional refining of the direct priorities for some of the villages. Thank you.

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, through you, could the Hon. Minister say if this sum would be used for agricultural programmes in the communities that were raised at the National Toshias Council Conference? From what I just heard, the amounts came out of priorities from the National Toshias Council. I would like to know if the Hon. Minister, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, could say if some of these moneys would go into some of the agricultural development programmes in the riverine communities.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Indeed, the national position of the PPP/C Government is that there is a national priority for ensuring that we support and build a strong agricultural sector, and that the focus will be on food security. Similarly, in the villages that also translates to what we would like to see secured, in collaboration with the Amerindian Village Councils and the villages. We would be paying some additional...and probably and more importantly, we would be focused on agriculture and food security, first and foremost, for the villages.

Secondly, there would also be focus on developing of the agro-processing sector in the villages, and, of course, marketing. It is important for Amerindians to be supported in a similar fashion as our national commitment and priority, in terms of the agricultural sector. So, yes, there is an allocation in this subvention towards the agricultural sector in the villages to ensure food security.

Item 5: 16-162 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – Community Development and Empowerment – Amerindian Development Fund - \$3,116,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 6: 21-211 Ministry of Agriculture – Ministry Administration – National & Other Events - \$40,000,000

Item 6: 21-211 Ministry of Agriculture – Ministry Administration – National & Other Events - \$40,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations - \$3,541,614,235

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally, you have the floor.

Mr. Jaffarally: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Chairman: You could borrow another microphone. That one is not working. Just use the next microphone to your left.

Mr. Jaffarally: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Chairman: Try again. While he is borrowing the microphone from Mr. Seeraj – and I am allowing him to speak from outside of his seat – I want to ask the technicians to fix the microphones in that row. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Jaffarally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister of Agriculture inform this House and the nation as a whole what would be done to remove the financial burden from the farmers within the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary (MMA) scheme?

Secondly, in terms of infrastructure development within the MMA, what is the present state and what is being done to improve this?

In terms of farm-to-market roads, Hon. Minister, what are the plans of your Ministry to improve farm-to-market roads across our country? Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Are you directing the Minister to some specific sums for those items?

Mr. Jaffarally: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Minister of Agriculture, you have the floor.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and let me thank the Hon. Member for those questions. The MMA is one of the most important agriculture schemes in our country. We cultivated the largest amount of land in terms of rice and cash crop production in the MMA scheme. Also, we have the largest block of land for livestock development in the MMA scheme.

Also, when one looks at the whole contribution that the MMA has been making to the agriculture sector, it is tremendous. As a result of that, we saw, not so long ago, burdens placed on the backs of the farmers in that scheme, where land rental and drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges was increased from \$3,500 to \$15,000. However, as a Government and a Government that promotes agriculture and wants to ensure that there is food security in our country, and when one looks at this important scheme and the contribution that it has been making to the development of our country, we made a commitment, when we were in Opposition, that we would have reversed that land rental and D&I charges. We assumed Government in August, 2020. I am happy to say that in, October, 2020, we brought a motion to this House, and we have reversed the D&I charges and land rental from \$15,000 to \$3,500, once again, per acre. This has helped the farmers in those areas to save approximately \$1.8 billion in their pockets. That money has now become disposable income.

Also, when one looks at infrastructure in the MMA scheme, what we have done is procured machinery. We have a fleet of machinery. From zero, there are now six excavators in that scheme. We have a number of other machineries working to develop infrastructure. We were able to maintain almost 730 miles of drains and canals. The dams in the area have been repaired at regular intervals and almost all of the infrastructure, the intake structure and the sluices, we were able to maintain during the last two years. I could share that when one looks at the intervention that we have made over the last two years in the MMA scheme, it amounts to approximately \$1.6 billion in terms of development, in terms of rehabilitation of infrastructure, and in terms of building this MMA scheme. Thank you.

Item 6: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations - \$3,541,614,235 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 6: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Guyana Livestock Development Authority - \$177,752,000

Mr. Indar: Could the Hon. Minister of Agriculture explain this spending of \$177.7 million for the Blackbelly Sheep Project? Could you tell this Committee what this project is about? Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and let me thank the Hon. Member for that question. Mr. Chairman, you know for a fact that Guyana is now leading the agriculture food system in the Caribbean, and our President is the driving force behind food security in the Caribbean. As a matter of fact, the entire Caribbean is looking forward, now, for Guyana to lead the system and is also looking for leadership and guidance. Since the Member has asked questions on the Blackbelly Sheep Project, we have an agreement with Barbados that we would start working with them to develop the Blackbelly sheep industry. Barbados would be contributing approximately 1,000 Blackbelly sheep to Guyana. We have the land, we have the climate, and we have all the necessary conditions to increase production in Blackbelly sheep.

Also, what we will be looking at is creating a Caribbean brand and that is an honour to Guyana because Guyana is now involved in leading to create a brand for the Caribbean to replace the New Zealand lamb and the Australian lamb coming to the Caribbean. This is so that we could have food security in the Caribbean, and at the same time, reduce the food import bill by 25% or contribute to *Vision 25 by 2025*. The President, when he launched this project in MMA, Region 5, said that 50% would be going to farmers around the country, 30% to women and another 20% to young people. Also, we are looking to give a portion of this production to the differently abled group, so that we could have all the groups in this country being represented to develop this brand.

What we would be doing is developing 50 acres each of land where these Blackbelly sheep...We have already received the first batch from Barbados, 132, and hopefully during the course of the month, we could receive the others. I want to tell you that this would be a tremendous boost to our food security, and this would be a tremendous boost to Guyana's economy where we would be bringing in foreign exchange. This money that is budgeted, in the supplementary budget,

would go towards developing the Blackbelly sheep industry. Thank you.

10.57 a.m.

Mr. Shuman: Let me compliment the Minister of Agriculture and the Government for taking a bit more of a holistic approach to food security. I want to ask the Hon. Minister, we have had this discussion several times, if he could indicate to this House how many of these Blackbelly Sheep will be going to Indigenous communities. I am sure that there are plans in the works. I think it is important that the people in Indigenous communities understand when they will be receiving Blackbelly Sheep. Thank you.

Mr. Mustapha: I would like to inform the Hon. Member that the Indigenous community is made up of women. We will have women from the Indigenous community; we will have young people from the Indigenous community; we will have farmers from the Indigenous community; and we will have differently able persons from the Indigenous community. There are a number of groups that would be coming... When I talk about young people, and when I talk about women and farmers, it does not mean coastal people, or it does not mean people from one group. It means the entire country – the 'One Guyana' that President Irfaan Ali is talking about. Thank you.

Item 6: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Guyana Livestock Development Authority – \$177,752,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services - Contribution to Local Corporation - (GuySuCo) - \$1,431,000,000

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, through you, the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) currently employs some \$7,447 persons, which means that families have been fed from this institution. Could the Hon. Minister of Agriculture please explain to this honourable House on what this money will be spent?

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This money will be expended to continue the recapitalisation of GuySuCo. When we took Government in August of 2020, I have already said it and I have alluded to it a number of times in this honourable House, these factories were performing at almost just between 45% to 49% capacity. What we have seen over the last two years is a number of critical parts that were missing or were almost running at the end of its life.

We have seen it now rehabilitated and factories moving to make sure that we have it at 100%. This is a continuation of the recapitalisation that we have started in August, 2020. We will continue to ensure that we make these factories more efficient, more modernised and, at the same time, reduce the cost of production. Thank you.

Mr. Narine: Could the Hon. Minister of Agriculture say how many workers have been employed, to date, at the Rose Hall Estate? Could the Hon. Minister update this honourable House as to the progress with respect to the re-opening of the Rose Hall Estate which was closed by the APNU/AFC Administration?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, are you asking if some of this money is going towards that programme?

Mr. Narine: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Mustapha: Let me thank the Hon. Member for raising that question. As a result of that, I am glad that we are having the question coming from the head of a union where, now, the workers realised that Rose Hall Estate will be reopened. That is a commitment of this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. As it stands today, we have reemployed approximately 700 persons. As a matter of fact, 692 persons out of 1,038 persons have already been reemployed. A number of works have already been carried out. For example, to date, 582 hectares of land was tilled, 527.5 hectares have been planted, two of the 10.9 kilometers of all-weather road was rehabilitated, 8 kilometers of eastern access dam was rehabilitated, 16 of the 39 timber bridges were repaired, 17 of the 31 kilometers of drainage channel were cleaned and excavated, three of the six access dam rebuilding were completed, and 4.1 of the 26 kilometers of the navigational canals were rehabilitated. The factory rehabilitation programme is 58% completed. There are a number of works that have already been done – replacing of cane knife, turbines, no.3 and no. 4 mill rollers, carrier chains, structure and a number of other works, which I will submit to the Hon. Member.

We are on track to reopen this Estate. As a matter of fact, many persons in this country have realised and have known that that area was made into a 'ghost town', with the entire village economy in East Canje, Rose Hall Estate, coming to a halt. As a result of that, many persons had to leave the area. We are seeing now, once again, that the area is moving up. We are seeing life once again in the area and we are seeing lots of economic activities under this PPP/Civic Government. Thank you.

Item 6: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Contribution to Local Corporation – (GuySuCo) \$1,431,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services -Integrated Agriculture Development Programme - \$300,000,000

Mr. Jaffarally: Could the Hon. Minister of Agriculture inform this House, and the nation as a whole, what level of support of this sum would be given to the fisher folks?

Mr. Chairman: Did you hear properly, Hon. Minister?

Mr. Mustapha: I was listening for the Hon. Member to complete his question. As I said, \$300,000,000 is allocated here for a supplementary budget. As a matter of fact, every *bona fide* fisher folk in this country will be receiving, shortly, \$150,000 from the Government of Guyana. We have the lists with approximately 8,000 persons already. Those lists are posted out in different landing sites and various prominent sites in the communities, and the people are now verifying. Hopefully, by the end of this week, we could have a verifiable list which I will send to the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance for moneys to pay to the fisher folks.

Also, this \$300,000,000 will be used to do a lot of works in the landing sites. We have 72 landing sites in the country. Many of those landing sites need a lot of work to be done, for example: lights, proper wharfage and other infrastructure. You would recall, not so long ago, about three weeks ago, the President himself went to the Meadow Bank Wharf at about 4.00 a.m. to look at conditions there. He has instructed that the Ministry of Agriculture prepare a work plan for that wharf and, also, for wharves around the country. What we will be doing is that, for all 72 landing sites around the country, we will be installing lights and proper walkways, and we will ensure that there are better conditions so that our fisher folks could have easier access whenever they go out to take out their catch. This money here will rehabilitate and improve these landing sites around the country.

Mr. Chairman: The Clerk has asked me because that is his community, to say thank you very much. Also, from the people on the East Bank of Demerara, thanks.

Mr. Shuman: I want to thank the Hon. Minister for the allocation to support the fisher folks. I was in my community during the weekend, and, at 8.00 a.m., I was offered fish, by a fisherman in the community, for sale. It was not a

tremendous amount; it was not a massive catch. I also ordered fish for the next day and the person returned with four pounds of fish for sale. It is a family that depends on fishing for their livelihood. I would like for the Hon. Minister to say how much of this allocation will go to those fisher folks in Indigenous communities who depend on the very same industry, on which the coastal folks depend, for their livelihood?

Mr. Mustapha: A number of persons in the Indigenous communities have already submitted their names to be on the list. Their names are on the list. As the President rightly said, and myself would have alluded, those fisher folks who depend on fishing for a livelihood will be given the grant of \$150,000.

Mr. Seeraj: Chart of Account 4503400, there is a request being made here for the amount of \$2.5 billion. I have two questions for the Hon. Minister. Firstly, the Pomeroon area floods annually and sometimes, bi-annually. What is being done to help the farmers and residents of this area?

Mr. Chairman: Do you want to ask both questions?

Mr. Seeraj: Secondly, as it relates to this particular programme, I know the Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally, had asked some similar questions, but that was related to the Mahaica/Mahaicony Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA), farmers throughout the country often complain about poor access to farmlands. Could the Hon. Minister say what plans are being put in place to address this serious problem?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I think one applies to the allocation. The other one might be generic.

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I want to say that the Pomeroon, which is a very important agricultural area... Two years ago, when I became the Minister of Agriculture, the entire Pomeroon was under threat – a number of areas were flooded out and there were no works being done there. I am happy to report, today, that, from that time to now, from two years ago, we did a number of block drainage.

11.12 a.m.

Block drainage is impoldering farmlands and, at the same time, it creates drainage structures to drain the water in the Pomeroon. This area has become a very important area for us in terms of production. As a matter of fact, we are looking to restart the cultivation of coffee in the Pomeroon, but we

need proper drainage systems. As a result of that, we have made a commitment that we will procure two excavators and a pontoon. I am happy to say that, one month ago, I commissioned the two excavators and the pontoon at a cost of \$150 million. The pontoon and the two excavators are stationed permanently in the Pomeroon River. This equipment will help the farmers there with drainage and, at the same time, help to do other canal work in the Pomeroon River.

When His Excellency the President was in the Pomeroon, the farmers raised a number of issues about the dredging of the Pomeroon River. As a result, the President made a commitment to look into it and look at the technical report and see what he can do. As a result of that representation, we now have a contract at a value of \$590 million where the Pomeroon River is being dredged. I am hoping that, at the end of this dredging exercise, the entire Pomeroon will have good access, good drainage, and thousands of farmers and thousands of livelihoods will be created in the Pomeroon area. That area will, once again, become productive. As I said, we have the Export Credit Agency (ECA) and Katy Institute for Sustainable Energy University working with us to develop coffee production in the Pomeroon, once again. We are hoping that, in another three years, the Pomeroon will give us all the coffee and we will be supplying the needs of the entire country.

For the farm-to-market roads that the Hon. Member mentioned, we know for a fact that, almost every year, we have been spending millions of dollars to rehabilitate access dams and get the dams in shape for the farmers to bring out their produce. We are also looking to do permanent structures. Over the next two years, there are a number of roads that we will be building. For example, in the Takama Savannah, we will be building 47.2 kilometres of road which will amount to almost \$500 million. We will be opening thousands of acres of virgin land there, and there our corn and soya cultivation have started. Last year, we started at 125 acres and, this year, we will increase that to 4000 acres and, hopefully, in another 3 years to 25,000 acres where we will become self-sufficient.

On the right bank of the Mahaicony River, in the Mahaica, Mahaicony, Abary (MMA) scheme, and in Onderneeming in the Essequibo, we will open up another 12,000 acres of land there. In Number 58 on the Corentyne, there is another farm-to-market road where thousands of acres of land will be opened. That is the way our Government looks at development because agriculture is one of the most important sectors in our country. When one's agriculture

grows, the country grows and when agriculture develops, we can have food security. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Item 6: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Integrated Agriculture Development Programme – \$300,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Demerara Harbour Bridge – \$233,088,368

Mr. Seeraj: In relation to project code 1101100, Demerara Harbour Bridge, I have two questions. Could the Hon. Minister of Public Works explain and expound on the reasons this additional amount of just over \$233 million is needed, at this time, for the rehabilitation of these pontoons? Secondly, could the Hon. Minister of Public Works give an update to this honourable House on the ongoing maintenance of the Demerara Harbour Bridge and what the Ministry is doing to ensure that the bridge continues to serve the travelling public? Thank you.

Minister of Public Works [Mr. Edghill]: I thank the Hon. Member for the questions. If I am to deal with the pontoons and the additional sums that are being sought, the simple fact is one word – neglect. The condition of those pontoons when they are retrieved for maintenance and repairs – the structural condition – is unbelievable. If pictures and videos were allowed to be used, according to our Standing Orders, I would have arranged for some to be on public display here. The reality is that some of these pontoons have not kept their maintenance schedule over the last five or six years. One may know that we have been in Office for two years. It would appear that, during the 2015-2020 period, maintenance of the Demerara Harbour Bridge was something that was either non-existent or was not a priority. Apart from pontoons, we have had major problems with spans 9 and 10. We came to this National Assembly, and we sought sums to ensure that we kept that bridge afloat. The sums that we are asking for the pontoons is basically to allow us to do a proper job and not just for, the colloquial term, *a patch job*. Once those pontoons get back into the water, they must be able to remain there for the prescribed period and we must be able to take out others to continue the maintenance programme. The terrible state of deterioration of the pontoons have led us to seek additional sums to fulfil our contractual obligation with the contractor who is engaging in this exercise.

Concerning the second part of this question, I would like to use this opportunity to assure all Guyanese, more particularly those who live on the West Side of Demerara and those who traverse from the East Side to the West Side of the Demerara on a daily basis, that the Government of Guyana and the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation are doing everything within their power to carry out adequate maintenance to ensure that the structural integrity of the bridge is not compromised and that, while we await the completion of the new four-lane, high span crossing, this bridge will continue to serve the people of Guyana. Mr. Chairman, I could indicate to you that you would have seen that we have put out public notices because, what we are seeking to do is one, we have practically ceased – only when absolutely necessary – having daylight openings. Most of the openings of the bridge to facilitate marine traffic is being done during the nighttime when the traffic is not at its peak. So, the commute across the river in the morning hours is much easier and we have less congestion. The afternoon 4.00 p.m., 5.00 p.m., three to four miles backup of traffic is something that is being carefully managed and there is a constant flow. There is excellent collaboration with my colleague, the Minister of Home Affairs and the Guyana Police Force. I would like to put on record, our deep appreciation for that coordination.

Mr. Chairman, what is important, and you would have seen, is that there are times when we would have scheduled openings for an hour or an hour and a half, but there are times, in the wee hours of the morning, when we would have had openings which lasted up to three hours and some up to four hours, and we would have given the public notice ahead of time. The reason we would have had that opening is because, when we have the bridge closed to vehicular traffic and open to marine traffic, it is the period that we use to carry out maintenance. There is an ongoing conversation about the night work that needs to be concluded because there is some push back from the union that represents the workers. I think the time has come in Guyana when – whether it be roads, bridges, or construction in general – we have to start learning to work at nights when there is no peak traffic so that the travelling public will have less inconvenience. At the Demerara Harbour Bridge, the General Manager and his team, practically, at every opening at night, are out there for several hours preparing for the opening, doing maintenance during the opening and whatever else could be done while traffic is flowing. Everything is being done to keep that bridge afloat.

We have a situation where we have done extensive repairs to spans 9 and 10, I think. A new span 9 has already been built and needs to be installed. The discussion is ongoing about when we will install the new span 9, as span 9 is so badly damaged that it was beyond repair. We actually have it propped up. As a matter of fact, the bridge cannot open to its full width to allow for vehicular traffic right now because of the pontoons that we have underneath. It has restricted the width of vessels passing through. We want to be able to get all of that corrected. We are engaged and every effort is being made to ensure that is done with minimum inconvenience to the travelling public. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Item 7: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Demerara Harbour Bridge – \$233,088,368 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – East Bank - East Coast Demerara Road Linkage – \$525,000,000

11.27 a.m.

Mr. Datadin: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister say why this amount is required and what benefits are expected to be derived by the Guyanese public with the construction of this new road link? Secondly, with your permission, Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister indicate when is the project expected to be completed and why is it only now being implemented?

Mr. Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Hon. Member for asking that question. If I could answer from the last question coming forward it would be very interesting. This project is only being implemented now because nothing was done to facilitate its implementation in the years 2015 to 2020 which was a situation that was unacceptable. We should all be reminded that this line of credit was available to the Government of Guyana since 2014 for us to get this road link. The now President of Guyana, at that time, was the Minister of Housing and Water and the President of Guyana, at that time, was Mr. Ramotar. It was while President Ramotar had visited India that the line of credit for the ferry and for the road came in place. Lots of – I am not sure if this would be Parliamentary word – *fandangling* – it might be a new word that I am introducing into the parliamentary lexicon – took place during that period. This was something that was not moving forward. When we came into Office in the August, 2020, this was one of the first projects that His Excellency, President Irfaan Ali, revised. Myself and my

colleague Minister Indar along with His Excellency the High Commission of India to Guyana engaged in long hours of consultations and discussions along with the engineers at the Ministry of Public Works and our design team. We were able to make an agreement and it went out to tender.

The line of credit that we got from India was \$50 million. When we went out to tender the cost of the project, due to all those years of delay, came in much more than the line of credit which was available to us. The moneys being sought is to facilitate our contractual obligations to the contractor to add to what is available from the Government of India through the India Exim Bank with the contribution from the Government of Guyana to fulfil our contractual obligations.

The benefits, which were asked for by the Hon. Member... this road would be a four-lane highway. It starts at the Rupert Craig Highway and Ogle road head, which is the exact spot where we had with signing of the contract with the contractor. In this phase, it goes all the way to Eccles. This road would mean that persons traversing along the East Coast Demerara corridor heading to the Airport or heading to the upper East Bank Demerara or heading to the interior to get to the Linden Soesdyke Highway would not have to go through the congested traffic of Georgetown. The intent of this road is that it should continue from Eccles to Diamond and all the way to Silica City and onto the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), Timehri. Ultimately, this road would link the Ogle International Airport with the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. It will support what we are doing in positioning Guyana through the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce to promote our eco-tourism brand and to expand it. The long haulers will be able to fly into the Cheddi International Airport and we could have a bus transit 15 to 20 minutes to Ogle to distribute those passengers to the destinations in the Caribbean as well into the South America.

This road would also open new lands for housing and industrial development. As matter of fact, the plans which I am sure would be unveiled overtime by my colleague, the Minister of Housing, as well as the people from Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC). The land use allocated for those lands will show massive development at the back of Diamond, Eccles and Coverden, going all the way to the Linden Soesdyke Highway and then connecting into Timehri. This is to facilitate that new wave of development and ultimately getting into Silica City and connecting our two international airports. This is something of which we should all be proud, and we should keep working to advance. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Minister. The Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, you have the floor.

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The question on the \$50 million loan for the Ogle bypass and for the ferry for the Northwest District, both of which were solely needed at the point of time, in 2013, when I think we started the discussions. The Hon. Minister of Public Works is not a man to be known for having a loss of words, and I do not think the word *fandangling* is an adequate answer as to why this money was not activated towards doing this project. He may find himself, perhaps, in the invidious position of having to be the one to answer the question, but I think we all need an answer, and it needs to be stated here. Why this money, which was available, was not activated over the years to push these solely needed infrastructural projects forward? I am upset about the issue because I was the Minister at the time when these projects were conceptualised. I do not want to give the answer. I think the Minister who is resident in the position now should give the answer.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, while we want to hear some explanations, I think that we will put the question.

Item 7: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – East Bank – East Coast Demerara Road Linkage – \$525,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works- Public Works – Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage - \$3,000,000,000

Mr. Seeraj: In relation to the Chart of Account 1404100, can the Hon. Minister of Public Works say to this honourable House why the amount of \$3 billion is required at this time for the upgrade of roads? How are the citizens of the various communities benefiting from these and other interventions by the Ministry? Secondly, Can the Hon. Minister advise this House on what developmental plans, relating to our road networks, are being developed and executed by the Ministry to bring relief to the Guyanese travelling public? Thank you.

Mr. Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I want to begin my answer by expressing gratitude to my colleague, the Minister of Finance, and our planning team at the Ministry of Finance for this allocation, for finding the fiscal space to give us \$3 billion towards miscellaneous roads/drainage. There is a particular reason why I am starting there. The Minister of

Finance and his budgeting team would be fully aware that, even with this \$3 billion that is being added to what was allocated in the 2022 Budget, we still need more resources to fulfil the demands that exist in our villages and in our communities. This particular programme – Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage – is the programme where we make interventions in the villages and in the communities, where we get the *WhatsApp* messages, the pictures, the letters of complaints and the sign petitions from various local authority areas asking us to please look into this street or to please look into this or please look into that. I can tell you at this time that, apart from the hundreds if not the thousands or more roads that we have already done, since we came into Office in August 2020 the backlog is great.

Basically, what we are trying to do here now is to do what should have been done in some of those communities during the period of 2015 to 2020. Selective communities had works done during that period. In this dispensation, all communities are benefiting. That is the different. We have had the complaints, we have had the criticisms and I acknowledge and accept that, as the team leader at the Minister of Public Works, we have to have broad enough shoulders to carry that burden of receiving the peoples' complaints and their frustrations. The Government of Guyana, I can announce today, wants to fix every road in every community, and my mandate is to ensure that it happens. I can tell you upfront that it costs approximately \$80 million per kilometre of road. This is what we call asphaltic concrete road. I know a number of people have asked me for crusher run. They have asked me to just put a little crusher run and let them get to pass

11.42 a.m.

The Ministry of Public Works does not throw crusher run; crusher run is part of the construction of an asphalted concrete road. I need to say this, Mr. Chairman: with the help of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and all the local authorities across Guyana, we have engaged in a countrywide exercise where we have basically measured, mapped, designed and costed what it will take to fix every road in every village. It is what we call the 'road bible'. I do not know if it is because I am a Bishop, they put the term 'bible', but I did not baptise it as the 'road bible'. I think it is other people who are more eloquent in the use of language who called it the 'road bible'. In that era, there were community roads that were double bituminous surface treatment (DBST); some community roads existed since the burnt earth era, and we are bringing all up. I must say that the Ministry of Public Works takes note of the

sometimes unfair reporting by the media. I am not picking a fight with the media. The media are so *Georgetownised*, centralised and urbanised, that their reporting often only reflects what happens in Georgetown. They would write a story about a hole in a street somewhere in Corentyne or in Essequibo, but they never report the tens and dozens of roads in a particular community that are being fixed. For example, in the Corentyne area, in Region 6, now we are literally taking people out of the mud by giving them footpaths to bring them out to the main road so that they could be able to get to their schools, work and the rest of it. I invite the media to go visit those areas and see what is taking place.

I did hear a comment being made by a colleague from this honourable House, *albeit* under suspension at this time, about the quality of roads being done in one area and the quality being done in another area. Let me make this very clear: all roads that are being done by the Ministry of Public Works are done to the same quality in every community, every time and in every place. The only difference is that it is being done by different contractors. If we are putting an inch and a half of asphalt or two inches of asphalt, it is across the board. The design department of the Ministry of Public Works does not deal with politics. These are professional engineers whose task is to deliver engineering solutions to benefit the development of Guyana. I think that criticism that is being made is not only a political attack on the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration, but it is also an attack on the professionalism of the engineers at the Ministry of Public Works, many of whom worked under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Administration. It is the same group of engineers. It is the same technical team at the Work Services Group (WSG). For a law maker, a legislator, to be saying that there is different quality of roads for different communities is an attack on the professional integrity of these engineers.

The other thing that I want to add on these miscellaneous roads is that we had a great task. For example, if we go into an area like Little Indian, we have to decide if we would do the entire network of roads or would just do two roads with the moneys that are available. Sometimes doing two roads does not make any sense, because even if we do two roads the people are not benefiting in terms of access; so sometimes we have to do the entire network. There are other places where we could do the main access road and go back and do the cross street, the third street, the sixth street or the seventh street but, by and large, our policy as a Government is that our initial interventions – and this is where this \$3

billion is being added to support that policy... We are fixing main thoroughfares – roads that lead to schools, hospitals, health centres, places of worship, markets and high-traffic areas – and we are paying attention to areas that have been neglected, where nothing was done for persons over the last five years because of politics. This intervention is to allow for accelerated developments in the 70 local authority areas. The Miscellaneous Road's programme is in the 70 local authority areas. The urban road programme is in the 10 municipal areas. That is funding under a different programme, but this sum is to take care of the local authority areas across the length and breadth of Guyana. This is what we are doing; accelerating it. We look forward to when the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his team are budgeting, that they could find more fiscal space; make more moneys available. We have the roads already designed and ready. All we need to do is to advertise, engage the contractors and get accelerated development. Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Before I call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Veerasammy, to ask her question, I am happy to hear that all these *WhatsApp* messages are now included in the 'bible'. But my pastor, Brother Vantull, when I was small, said that faith in the Bible is one thing, but one has to deliver good works too. The two messages I sent about James Street, Albouystown, and the section of Ketley Street between Sussex Street and Broad Street, I trust that they are in the 'bible' also. Hon. Member Ms. Veerasammy, you have the floor.

Ms. Veerasammy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister to share with this House information on some of the roads that were identified for upgrading under this item. In our works in the communities, a lot of people would like to know if their roads are identified for upgrading.

Mr. Chairman: In this \$3 billion, Hon. Minister, do you want to layover this list?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, for the avoidance of confusion and not to interrupt social cohesion in the country, it would be advisable that we do not, at this time, name first street versus second street, third street versus fourth street, and back street versus eight street. What we are doing when we go into a community with an allocation that is available to that community, as much as can be done before we leave that community, we get done. For example, some streets just need sectional repairs, and rather than doing the whole 500

metres, we would do the sectional repair of 300 metres and have moneys to do be able to do 200 metres in another street in the same area. We are getting those things done. As it relates to the messages that you spoke about, some of them are not only in the 'bible' but they have chapters and verses. On the Hon. Member's question about naming the streets, let me just say that the works being done in local authority areas is not a unilateral decision of the Ministry of Public Works. It is in consultation with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development as well as the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) themselves.

While I am on the floor, we have been advocating a programme to get the NDCs more involved in the monitoring of these projects, when they are being executed in their areas, so as to ensure that people get value for money. We have hundreds of roads that are designed and we are phasing them out. Once decisions have been made, communities are aware of the roads that will be constructed or rehabilitated because we go out to public tender. The roads are listed in the newspapers. When we get an award, we would go to the communities and state that at this time we are doing this street, this is the contractor, this is the unpriced bill and they are able to monitor those areas. From community to community, we would be able to engage. All of those details will become available in the areas once we get that process through. Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

Ms. Veerasammy: I just have a follow-up comment. I just would like to take the opportunity to thank the Ministry of Public Works, because I am totally aware that Minister Indar and a team of persons have traversed the communities and met with residents. I am actually concurring with Minister Bishop Edghill that, with the help of the people in the communities, projects have been identified to upgrade roads for the betterment of people. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, let us hear which chapter and verse the Deputy Speaker will be reading from.

Mr. Shuman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. At the National Tshaos Council Conference, the Hon. Minister had committed to give the village of Pakuri \$1 million to maybe address a chapter and verse in that 'bible'. I am well aware that, under the previous Administration, a contract was awarded to a contractor for \$99 million to do the road, which

contract was cancelled due to what I would probably think was poor workmanship and poor performance amongst a variety *poors*. I recall having this conversation with the Hon. Minister, Mr. Indar, also, about the possibility of awarding that contract to the community. I want to first say thank you to the Hon. Minister for his commitment to giving the community \$1 million plus some fuel to fix its road. I also want to ask the Hon. Minister if within this budgetary allocation there are finances for the retendering of the contract to fix that road?

Bishop Edghill: The road to St. Cuthbert's Mission or Pakuri is part of the Ministry's Miscellaneous Roads programme. When we took Office, it was clear that the contractor was awarded this contract on 31st December, 2019, as we were approaching the February, 2020 elections, after a no confidence motion.

11.57 a.m.

That contractor was unable, incapable and ill-equipped to execute those works. The Hon. Deputy Speaker would be able to concur that I went to Pakuri, met with the community, sought to resolve some of the issues, engaged the contractor to hire some of the local people who know the area, and know where the washouts are, so that they could be involved in the project, so that we could get it moving. The reality is that we had to terminate this contract.

At the National Tshaos Council Conference, when this matter was raised, I offered an apology to the Tshaos and to the community for our inability to get this road fixed. The \$1 million contract that was awarded to the community was for the purchase of fuel for the community to use to do certain maintenance work along the road while we engage the new contractor to carry out these works. This is a project of \$100 million or more for that road. Based upon our procurement laws, community contracts could only be up to about \$5 million. So, this is not a contract that we could award to a community because of the size of the contract. But, certainly, what we are seeking to do, when we get a contractor engaged, is to ensure that the community is involved in the executing of the works, whether by way of subcontracting or by way of being employed by the contractor. That is because, when we went into the area and we discussed this project while it was failing, we discovered that they had their operators for the machines – graders, roller and everything – living in the area; they have the capacity in the area, but we still have to follow the laws of Guyana. Our commitment is that the St. Cuthbert's or the Pakuri road will be done. We are going back out to

advertise; we will engage a contractor and we will ensure that the community is engaged in participating to get this road done. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Item 7: 31-312 – Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage – \$3,000,000,000 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 31-312 – Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Sea and River Defence Works – \$550,000,000

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

Mr. Datadin: Mr. Chairman, from the \$550 million being requested additionally, could the Minister say, which are some of the critical sea defence structures being rehabilitated, how is this impacting on the residents of the areas and whether there is in any effect from climate change? Mr. Chairman, if I may, could the Hon. Minister tell this House, what are some of the interventions being done to defend our shorelines in the ever-changing weather conditions?

Bishop Edghill: Thank you Hon. Member for that question. Mr. Chairman, if my brother and colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, would be able to realise Guyana's agricultural potential and bring about food security and provide that leadership that we are talking about, we have to protect our farmlands from saline water. It is mandatory. If there is a success story that the Dr. Irfaan Ali-lead Administration could report to this National Assembly, it is a success story as it relates to our sea and river defences.

The sums being sought are to add to what is already being done. We are doing work in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. As it relates to specific interventions – rip-rap, sea defence works; and we are not just responding to breaches – this is what is important: we have improved our surveillance mechanism, not just using the technology of drones but with *boots on the ground*; there is no substitute. All the farmers and the people in the Ministry of Agriculture and my colleague, who was at the Ministry of Public Works before, Minister Robeson Benn, will tell you that the local people can traverse the sea and river defences, they can see the cracks and the movement, and they can tell you ahead of time what is happening so that we will be able to go in and make the necessary interventions. I am pleased, Sir, that our sea and river defence department at the Ministry of Public Works has been advancing its work in a very satisfactory manner. Major interventions, when we came to Office, had to deal

with Region 5 in that Dantzig area. Just a few days ago, while His Excellency was making his trip back from Region 6 in the company of my colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, they were inspecting sea defences from the air. I received messages about what they were seeing. Suffice it to say that we had already detected those conditions and we had *boots on the ground* already fixing. While there were some 'boots in the air', there were also some *boots on the ground*.

Mr. Chairman, this I call a modest amount because one of the things we do not want is to overdesign and just splurge. We understand the realities of the national pot; we understand the limitations. Some people are fooling the public that there is oil money so that they could get everything that they ask for. I think sooner or later people would like us to buy for them hair dye – that is just being humorous, Sir – because people want everything. But we have to protect our arable lands, we have to protect the households. In the Pomeroon – that my colleague spoke about, we are making interventions with some areas, with some of the box sluices along the main coastline. Whether it is Essequibo or Berbice or Corentyne or on the East Bank, you are seeing the visible work that is being done. These sums are just to add to that list and to ensure we are not caught lagging behind and then we have to rush into emergency mode. Because of the effective implementation of our programmes, we could come here and ask for more to do more. I thank you very much, Sir.

Item 7: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Sea and River Defence Works – \$550,000,000 – agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Reconditioning of Ferry Vessels – \$131,510,561

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Chairman, on this chart of account, 2700500, I have two questions for the Hon. Minister with your permission. Could the Minister say why these vessels require such constant maintenance at this time? Secondly, could the Hon. Minister say what are some of the initiatives being taken by the Ministry to strengthen maritime safety and passengers' comfort? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, my understanding is that the standard is, a vessel should go into dry dock at least every two years. Suffice it to say that what we are doing now is like what is happening with the pontoons, we are *playing catch-up* because of one word, neglect. Our resources were not made available by the previous Administration for this

exercise. Mr. Chairman, for this year alone, we have already put into dry dock and taken out the MV Barima, that traverses the Region 1 area; we have put into dry dock and taken out the MV Kimbia, which goes into the Region 1 area; we have put into dry dock and taken out the MV Malali, which is the vessel that goes to Bartica sometimes, Wakenaam, Leguan and supports what is happening in the Essequibo.

Sir, while there has been some criticism because of a little hitch here and there, we have had to make the tough decision and put both the MV Kanawan and the MV Sabanto into dry dock, which we have successfully done and returned to the Region 2 route. Mr. Chairman, in seven months, five vessels were in and out of the dry dock – history for the Transport and Harbours Department. The commitment that we now have from the Transport and Harbours Department – and I will be enforcing that as a team leader – is that we have to maintain a proper schedule to ensure that when these vessels go into dry dock, we do not meet some of the challenges that we had. I could give you one explanation, Sir; and the public needs to know. When we took the MV Sabanto into dry dock, the propeller was in such a bad condition that when we contacted Brass Aluminium & Cast Iron Foundry Ltd. (BACIF), the company wanted six weeks to fix it. And you know what it is to have a vessel of the nature of the MV Kanawan or the MV Sabanto off the Essequibo for six weeks waiting on a propeller.

12.12 p.m.

That job had to be subcontracted to a company in the Republic of Suriname. To get it back to meet a deadline, we were even prepared to put on a special crossing on the Corentyne River because of the importance. I am happy that by the 1st August we were able to have both vessels back and in operation in Essequibo. I noticed in the newspapers over the last few days, a whole, middle-paged article about ‘touch and go’. The Transport and Harbours Department advertises its scheduled departure time from both Parika and Supenaam, as well as Parika and Bartica. There is a volume of traffic that exists at certain times, particularly when there are holidays, weekends and things of that nature, thus there would be a build-up of traffic. If we do a 5.00 a.m. crossing and the next scheduled crossing is 10.00 a.m., when we get back at 7.00 a.m. or 7.30 a.m. if there are vehicles and passengers we load and go, to keep things moving. What was supposed to be good is being criticised in the media, as if ‘touch and go’ is something bad. It is doing more; it is doing more than is advertised, to bring relief to the waiting and travelling public. So, ‘touch and go’ are not bad words.

‘Touch and go’ is a good thing to bring benefits to the people.

Mr. Chairman, we at the Ministry of Public Works have received letters, phone calls and text messages of commendations, gratefulness, and gratitude, about simple interventions that we would have done, such as putting the last ferry at 6.00 p.m. rather than 4.00 p.m. People are so relieved. There are some days, rather than those vessels making four round trips – which are their scheduled trips – they do up to six or seven. This is because of the volume of traffic. Essequibians have rice that they have to get to millers; they have produces that they have to get to markets. We facilitate that to ensure that we support what the Ministry of Agriculture is doing. For these vessels, apart from the dry docking, we also have to maintain the engines and other components. This allocation is not only for dry docking but also for spares. Just the other day we had engine failure as a result of some injectors on the MV Malali. We had to be able to get that quickly resolved. We have to get spares in stock to be able to deal with these things expeditiously. Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Ministry of Finance for understanding the importance of making this allocation to ensure that the Transport and Harbours Department is able to deliver.

One of the things that I need to mention as well, is that we have restored the crossing at Rosignol to New Amsterdam. It is being subsidised by the Government of Guyana to move school children and pensioners. When we came to Government, that was already stopped by the APNU/AFC. The Berbice people were suffering. The Vice President had an outreach there; I was present. The people requested it. We went into mode and repaired the stelling. We did the necessary work on the vessels, made sure that the engines were serviced, and we put that system back into operation. Do you know why? We came to Government with a promise that we will not take away benefits, but we will add benefits. Whatever people benefitted from, they will continue to enjoy. We will continue to add benefits. That is what we are doing here at the Transport and Harbours Department – improving people’s lives, making it easier to travel and ensuring that farmers, commuters and businesspeople are going. The last thing that I want to say on this matter is that we are working very hard on the 1st October deadline for online booking. There will be online booking for the ferries, so that no one has to go there at 8.00 p.m. and line up to get a number to board at 5.00 a.m. in the morning. One will be able to book; one will pay and know when to show up. If one does not show up, that is it. One cannot get full refunds

because we have to cater to that. The Transport and Harbours Advisory Council is working very hard for the implementation of online booking. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Be careful with the online booking because you know what has been happening with the playoffs and the finals for the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) – all the online bookings have gone offline.

Item 7: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Reconditioning of Ferry Vessels –\$131,510,561 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we will go until 12.30 p.m. and then we will take the break.

Current Expenditure

Item 8: 39-392 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Social Services – Old Age Pensions and Social Assistance – \$700,000,000

Dr. Mahadeo: Could the Hon. Minister advise us? She has the “provision of additional resources for public assistance for citizens living with permanent disabilities”. Could the Hon. Minister advise us of what difference this \$700 million is going to make from what services they are currently receiving and what additional service do we expect them to receive? Thank you.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]:

Thank you, Hon. Member for that question. As you know, the PPP/C Government has, with laser focus, addressed many concerns for persons living with disabilities. This population has been addressed from the time the PPP/C Government got into Office. From then to now – within two years – a number of initiatives and programmes have started to cater to some of the specific needs of persons living with disabilities, both in the adult and child categories. For example, currently, we are training persons living with disabilities at no cost to them. We are providing every amenity to ensure that they can benefit from varied or diverse training programmes, including garment construction and information and communications technology (ICT) – receiving specialised software loaded on tablets – so that they can in time be integrated into the workforce. That is the kind of impact that we are making, Mr. Chair. With all those training programmes, we are hoping to achieve a target of 600 persons living with disabilities trained before the end of the year.

In addition to that, there are a number of other critical areas that have emerged through dialogues, conversations, consultations and engagements with persons living with disabilities, including the National Commission on Disability (NCD) and parents who have children living with disabilities. In fact, there was one such excellent engagement hosted at the State House by His Excellency the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali. Coming out of that engagement, a number of areas were addressed. At that engagement, the President was able to declare that every child with a permanent disability will benefit from \$100,000 as a one-off cash grant. I am happy to say that this distribution process will commence next week. We will be going to every region; it is an inclusive distribution. It is one that caters to the needs of our children who are living with disabilities and provides the necessary relief to the parents who are the caregivers providing the level of care that the children need.

Adding \$700 million to those persons who are living with permanent disabilities, is a pivotal move by this Government, spearheaded by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. Currently, as it stands, 8,000 persons who are living with disabilities benefit from the public assistance system. We are projecting that 7,700 more persons, inclusive of children and adults in all the regions of Guyana, will benefit from over \$646 million. That is actual money that is going into the hands of persons living with disabilities to cater to the kind of needs they will require. Whatever they need to make their lives better and improve their quality of life, is the nature of this significant – I would say – allotment to what the Ministry of Social Services and Human Services currently has. In essence, what we are doing, is almost doubling the number of persons living with permanent disabilities who will benefit from public assistance. Following the President’s announcement, I did make an announcement that persons living with disabilities will be able to access public assistance through a much easier method. It is a simple establishment of their permanent disability by having a medical report. It will be one medical report and one complete application, and they will never need to apply for this. This is what this Government has been doing: reducing the frustration, reducing the hassle, reducing the bureaucracy and really encouraging people to access the services that we are providing. So, for the \$700 million, in addition to putting the more than \$646 million in the hands of those persons who are living with permanent disabilities, the remainder will be used towards the printing of those books and stickers and administrative costs.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that it is very important for the nation to know that people living with disabilities have been occupying the front burner on the agenda of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. In addition to all the innovative programmes that we are doing right now through this Ministry, a wonderful institution is currently being constructed on the East Coast of Demerara. The name of that institution will be the Learning Lab. That is what will happen there. Persons across this country can benefit from so many opportunities to learn, be educated, be upskilled and be given technical vocational training at no cost to them at the hub. Of course, we will be continuing with our ongoing programme of outreach, where we are providing free supportive aids. This Government, under the current budget, has been providing free, supportive or system aids to persons all over the country – wheelchairs, walkers, canes, and white canes. We are continuing with our movement across this country to cater to the many needs of persons living with disabilities because we understand that they would like to access all the opportunities, equally so. They would like to be integrated, justifiably so. They would like to have the opportunity to develop their own inherent potential so that they can enjoy all the opportunities that the President speaks of when he says, ‘One Guyana’. We are including all these people with permanent disabilities. Thank you.

Item 8: 39-392 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Social Services – Old Age Pensions and Social Assistance – \$700,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

12.27 p.m.

Capital Expenditure

Item 9: 40–404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Primary Schools – \$27,232,550

Mr. Chairman: I know that Minister Manickchand is online.

Dr. Smith: Could the Hon. Minister of Education tell this House of the additional \$27 million required for “the construction of a primary school in Arthurville – Wakenaam? How many students are expected to benefit from this new infrastructure?

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Thank you, for the question. Arthurville is located on the island of Wakenaam. Earlier this year, we discovered that the school was in such poor physical condition. It threatened the lives and safety of the people who were occupying the school every

day – the teachers, students and parents. We took a decision to remove the students from this location to various schools on the island. They are being transported daily to and from. It is extremely inconvenient be it space wise, distance wise and expenses wise. The parents of Arthurville and I had a meeting, and they were very clear that they would like their children to return to school in Arthurville. However, the school is physically shaky and has been determined by engineers to be in need of pulling down and full repair. This sum would allow us to begin the repairs of the Arthurville Primary School which we are hoping to finish by next September. It will cater for 100 students. At this moment, it does not have 100 students but we are going to build it to cater for 100 students.

Item 9: 40–404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Primary Schools – \$27,232,550 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 40–405 Ministry of Education – Secondary Education – School Furniture and Equipment – \$279,794,500

Item 9: 40–405 Ministry of Education – Secondary Education – School Furniture and Equipment – \$279,794,500 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: It is now 12.30 p.m., on both clocks, my clock and the one on the wall. Let us take a suspension for one hour for lunch and come back here at 1.30 p.m.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 12.30 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.58 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please be seated.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Item 10: 44-443 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport - Youth – Youth – \$16,000,000

Mr. Charlie: Could the Hon. Minister tell this Committee of Supply how many hinterland community grounds would be upgraded using the Supplementary Provision?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Mr. Chairman, first of all, on behalf on the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), I would like to thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, for asking the question. I could not have helped

but to notice that on a day where an important area of parliamentary life, on behalf of the people of the country, has to be performed and executed, the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), on behalf of the Opposition of Guyana, have chosen to neglect their representative's capacity. Once again, they betray the principles of leadership and patriotism that is required for this House on an issue which found its genesis that occurred in this very House with the stealing of the Mace. I cannot help but make these precatory remarks, as we have been going into the segment, where additional moneys are being sought – as we are required to do – for the provision of goods and services for the people of the country who they have neglected and betrayed. Their requirement as Parliamentarians originating on an issue which finds its genesis in the stealing of the Mace in this very House.

Since the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, has asked about the additional funding that has been requested, I would like to take this opportunity to first of all say on record that every single region in this Country will receive the benefit of our ground enhancement programme out of our allocation. The supplementary allocation that we are seeking now, in addition to the more than \$200 million that we have had coming out of the budget that was passed in February, 2022, because of the aggressive work that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and the entire Cabinet have been doing led by His Excellency, The President, in addition to the ground engagements that His Excellency and the Vice President have been leading for the Cabinet. They have been doing some very important community work all across the country where we now have this level of ground engagement that has never been seen before in our country's history. Out of those engagements, the requests are being made for the upgrade of our communities and our community grounds which includes the areas of the Hinterland.

Earlier, we saw the Chairman of the National Toshias Council (NTC) who was elected here at the National Toshias Conference. It was a very successful Conference led by my Colleague, the Minister, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai. Out of that engagement one heard that the additional \$3 billion would be allocated to do works in communities which include: community grounds. All of those requests are going through an assessment process at the moment. I would like the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, to be satisfied that no community would be left behind. The Ministry and the Government of Guyana are committed to advance that process. I have done work with all the representatives here. I know that while I was coming into the Dome/Chamber, just

a few minutes ago, Member of Parliament (MP), Mr. Jaffarally, was asking about the allocations for Region 5. In addition to what we have done last year, we have already assigned for De-Hoop, we have already assigned for Fairfield and we have already assigned for Belladrum in the Eldorado area. That is in addition to the work that we did in Ithica, in Bush Lot, Bath, Cotton Field, Cotton Tree and many, many, areas in Region 5 already. There were very successful projects and very successful programmes out of the community engagements that we have had in Region 6 which was led by the Vice-President and The President. Last month, I visited with the representatives from Region 6. We visited 11 communities which came from our community consultation. It was led into an extensive community engagement where scores and sometimes many more than that were able to attend and put forward their designs. We brought the engineers there; we prepared the Bills of Quantities (BoQ) and we have gone out for tendering for some of them.

The next place that we have to go to as well is Region 10. I would like the people of Region 10 to know that is very high on my visits, including Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 coming out from the National Toshias Conference. I would like to impress upon the House and the people of the country who are listening and paying attention is, you have been seeing the aggressive works being done already, which is not change for the next three years. It will continue at an even more accelerated pace. It is a commitment by His Excellency, The President, to build our 'One Guyana', which some people are unhappy about and that is why they are not here today. A very small handful of a minority group who are unhappy about the development that His Excellency and the People's Progressive Party/Civic is advancing aggressively and transforming the country. They are unhappy about it and that is why they are not here today. That commitment is, we would develop every single community. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Charlie and Hon. Minister, I think the question and the response pertain more to chart of account 4506400. I did not interrupt but I know that may pre-empt the question from that chart of account.

Item 10: 44-443 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport - Youth – Youth – \$16,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 10: 44-444 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport - Sports – Field Materials and Supplies – \$13,000,000

Item 10: 44-444 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport-Sports – Field Materials and Supplies \$13,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

2.09 p.m.

Capital Expenditure

Item 10: 44-444 – Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport – Sports – Grounds Enhancement Programme – \$200,000,000

Item 10: 44-444 – Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport – Sports – Grounds Enhancement Programme – \$200,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 45-452 – Ministry of Housing and Water – Housing Development – Infrastructural Development and Buildings – \$15,908,368,000

Item 11: 45-452 – Ministry of Housing and Water – Housing Development – Infrastructural Development and Buildings – \$15,908,368,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 45-453 – Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Service Expansion and Management – Hinterland Water Supply – \$250,250,000

Item 11: 45-453 – Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Service Expansion and Management – Hinterland Water Supply – \$250,250,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 45-453 – Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Service Expansion and Management – Coastal Water Supply – \$4,231,832,000

Dr. Mahadeo: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister tell this House, of the

“Provision of additional resources to increase treated water coverage through the construction and upgrading of water treatment plants.”?

We know that there are some water treatment plans in the system. I would like to ask the Minister two questions. One, what systems does the Ministry have in place to check the quality of water we are receiving from these plants? The

second question is, this sum of money, over \$4 billion, how would it improve our system?

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]: In response to the first question, may I say that the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) has its own interlaboratory, for which, as part of its standard operating procedure (SOP), water is tested from each plant across the country. When I say, “across the country”, it is not only for the coastland but also includes the hinterland, for where we have regional laboratories established. That is how we are able to monitor the water and the quality. Having said that about quality, we recognised that there is an issue about the quality of water that is being delivered to households. In fact, only about 52% of the coastland receives treated water. I speak here of Regions 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; and, a little of Bartica, Region 7. Recognising that we have a major challenge, this PPP/C Government, led by His Excellency, The President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, who happens to be the former Minister of Housing and Water understands the challenges, has committed, as part of his Government, to ensure that by 2025 that 90% of treated water is delivered to households.

Having said that, how could we achieve this benchmark? I make this comment of the benchmark, in light of the fact, that Members have heard repeatedly that we have a commitment, as part of our Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) six by 2030, not 2025, of equal access of water to all. In that is also included a better quality of life, which means better water being delivered to households. As a result, the GWI is working with a 2021–2025 plan. In that plan – whether it is for ensuring first time access to water, whether it is for ensuring that we can improve the service and whether we are talking about the quality of the water – we have costed all of that. For this line item, the focus is on coastal, treated water. Mr. Chairman, may I also make the point that in order to achieve the 90% coverage that I have just spoken about, it will cost the people of Guyana \$28 billion. I repeat that figure, \$28 billion. The resources that we have come here for supplementary provision is intended, as part of our commitment, to achieve that target to start the process. First of all, it is \$4.2 billion we are asking for under the coastal water programme, of which we are asking for \$3,891,000,000 now to start the coastal water treatment infrastructure construction an upgrade.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to delve a little into what this \$3.8 billion will entail. First of all, our main target includes the construction of seven new coastal water treatment plants. Where do we plan to put these seven new treatment plants?

Let us start, Region 2... By the way, Region 2 is where we have the highest level of iron content in the water that is being delivered, especially from the Charity vicinity. ...we have already advertised for these new plants. The tenders are closed. They are going through the evaluation process and, then, by the end of this month, we expect to have awards. For Region 2, from Taymouth Manor to Good Hope, we are targeting approximately 15,400 beneficiaries. That is one of the new treatment plants. In Region 3, one, – I see the Hon. Members: Mr. Indar, Ms. Manickchand and so forth; they will be glad to know this – from Ruby to Lookabu; two, at La Parfait Harmonie; and three, Canal Number Two to Free and Easy. We are talking about close to 50,000 beneficiaries from these new treatment plants.

Let us go to Region 4, the East Coast – the Ministers, Dr. Anthony and Mr. Nandlall will be glad to know this – from Coldingen to Haslington, 10,000 beneficiaries. Since we are speaking about the East Coast, let me also just mention that Cove and John to Mahaica is also expected to benefit, but that will follow the current studies on the usage of the Hope Canal. From that study the necessary resources will be available, because the study will inform us in terms of usage of that fresh water. From that we will be able to have that range, Cove and John to Mahaica, be catered for. I have called five treatment plants so far. The sixth will be at Cummings Lodge. You will be aware that Cummings Lodge itself is part of the expansion. It will be one of our largest schemes because it is sandwiched between Ogle and Sophia and will run all the way up to Eccles. That is over 10,000 beneficiaries. The final one which is the new plant, will be at Caledonia – New Hope, to Soesdyke, another 17,000 beneficiaries. Those are the seven new treatment plants that are catered for.

To start our expansion programme, we have also catered for the upgrade of a number of water treatment plants in the various regions. In fact, there are 12. Let us start with Region 3. The treatment plant upgrade is expected to be done at Vergenoegen, as well as Pouderoyen and Fellowship. Those are three villages in Region 3. The plants at Better Hope, Mon Repos and Friendship are the three in Region 4. Further on the East Bank is Eccles, Covent Garden and Grove. In Region 5, the Cotton Tree Plant will be upgraded. In Region 6, there is New Amsterdam as well as Port Mourant. Those are 12 treatment plants that will be upgraded. Mr. Chairman, the \$3.8 billion is therefore being asked for because, one, we have had to set up a unit specifically in the GWI for the water treatment department. I only gave you some information. You will realise the

magnitude of expenditure and work that is expected to be undertaken in under three years. As a result, we have had added staff at the GWI. In the proprietary stage, one has to do designs and that is one aspect. There is the geotechnical investigation because if one is going to put these plants, then one must know the necessary site studies to be done. We also catered for a number of inline filters for some of the plants. Therefore, those are part of the initial setting up of the department and the functioning for the water treatment department.

2.24 p.m.

As I mentioned to you, the tenders for the seven new treatment plants and the 12 to be upgraded by the end of this month, we want to be able to award those. Therefore, this initial sum as part of the \$3.8 billion is expected to be paid for mobilisation. In addition to that, there would be another \$340 million being spent on the expansion of the Friendship and Sophia Water Treatments Plants, transmission mains from Vergenoegen to Zeelugt, extension of distribution mains to a number of unserved areas, as well as – the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy would be glad to hear this – the extension of distribution mains at Yarowkabra, Swan, Kuru Kururu and some additional areas at the Linden/Soesdyke Highway. Those are part of the coastal water treatment programme. As I am on my feet, I also want to add, as part of the resources requested, – this is in terms of the urban sewerage and water programme item – we have also catered for drilling of some wells. Let me start nearby. We would be drilling a new well nearby at Turkeyen, so the Hon. Member, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall, would not have to call me often to find out about the well, and if Sixth Street is getting water or not. We would be drilling a new well at Shelterbelt to provide additional ground water resources. We would be expanding and upgrading the Linden Water Treatment Plant.

I also want to speak on when you drive on Church Street, Mr. Chairman, you would see work being done there. It is the changing of some old pipelines. You would see some big pipes being replaced that are century old pipes. The current programme that you see there is from Shelterbelt to East Street. There used to be frequent leakage around the Square of the Revolution area, Cuffy, but since the PPP/C Government got back into Office, we have already changed from there all the way to Mandela as part of us changing of the pipeline. There is also the programme we did from Shelterbelt to Lamaha Street that passes through Newtown, Kitty, and Bel Air Park. This is a project that we had to salvage because, for many years the people of Republic Avenue or Republic Street, have complained about the work

that was started by the previous Government and for which it did not complete. We would be catering for this programme as part of our supplementary for the changing of the old pipe from the Parliament Office to the Bank of Guyana. Around the area of Bank of Guyana and the Cenotaph area, now and then there are leakages seen from underneath. We would be changing that pipe. The Minister, Mr. Indar would be glad to know because whenever he is leaving work and he drives past the Umana Yana, I would get called often about that area. We would be changing from Lamaha Street to Kingston which would end somewhere in the vicinity by Pegasus. Some of those complaints that would be seen along Main Street would be dealt with as part of our supplementary.

Mr. Chairman, you can realise that, now more than ever, no other previous tenure lead by President Ali, have we seen a commitment of resources placed in the trust of the Guyana Water Incorporated to deliver on its mandate. That is, one, of course to ensure that we have expanded delivery of water across the country and, secondly, for us to also improve on the quality and the level of service being delivered to households. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Item 11: 45-453 – Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Service Expansion and Management – Coastal Water Supply – \$4,231,832,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule

Item 11: 45-453 Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Service Expansion and Management – Urban Sewerage and Water – \$660,000,000

Item 11: 45-453 Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Service Expansion and Management – Urban Sewerage and Water \$660,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule

Current Expenditure

Item 12: 47-471 Ministry of Health – Policy Development and Administration – Other – \$332,640,000

Dr. Westford: Could the Hon. Minister of Health please advise us on the scope of this collaboration? What are the benefits to be derived?

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and thank you very much, Hon. Member Dr. Westford for that question. As you know, Mr. Chairman, Guyana is in the process of modernising its healthcare system. One partnership that we have is with the Mount

Sinai Hospital, a globally recognised hospital system. Under this agreement, Mount Sinai Hospital would be working with us in three broad areas. The project that we have with them is called the Guyana healthcare initiative project and it has three broad areas. The first is the national health strategy initiative. Under this initiative one of the things that we would be doing is to improve our health information system. It could be recognised that right now we do not have a comprehensive electronic medical record system. This is something that we feel would really enhance patient care by having such a system in place. This project would help us to put such a system in place. That is one of the areas we would be working on.

The second that would be recognised is that in health we have to train a lot of people in different specialities and not just doctors, but also nurses, and other categories of healthcare workers. Part of this project would look at studying the health sector, looking at our current deficits, projecting future needs and developing systems and strategies to be able to fill those needs, including developing new training programmes, upgrading current training programmes and so forth. We would also be strengthening the existing healthcare system in the public sector. There are a number of sub-initiatives that go along with that. We would also be looking at improving financial sustainability to the sector in new ways of financing the sector. That is another area that would be studied, and recommendations would be made as to how we could bring additional financing into the sector.

A big part of this first component has to do with improving primary healthcare. Mr. Chairman, you would know that in Guyana we have five levels of healthcare. At levels one, two and three, we would consider more to be primary healthcare. Although, at levels four and five, sometimes in the outpatient clinics, some amount of primary healthcare could be done. Our focus under this component, however, would be at levels one, two and three. This is to expand the services that we would be offering; to be able to have better trained personnels on the ground; to have the right equipment; to introduce telemedicine so that we could improve quality; to give people in very remote communities access to medical doctors, and other specialist as would be needed; and to make sure that we could do better, and accurate diagnosis with the support of doctors in the telemedicine programme. We would also be improving diabetes management and all other chronic diseases. There are quite a few of them. We want to standardise protocols and make sure that these are implemented across the system.

Mental health is another area that would be of focus. We would be doing a number of initiatives to make sure that we have better mental health services, and more fully integrated into our primary healthcare programme. This is one set of initiatives.

The second set of initiatives that we would be looking at is going to be more focused on the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). The reason we chose there is because it is our premier hospital in the public health sector. The things that we would be doing there, would be replicated to all the other regional hospitals. We would be starting there but we would be replicating the things that we do there in the other hospitals. What are some of these things? We want to make sure that the hospital's operations are improved so it would be more efficient, and we would be utilising our resources at its optimum and there are many ways of doing this. We want to also improve quality and safety systems, so that we would reduce any error be it medical or otherwise. We could only do that if we have a feedback loop, in terms of making sure that we are constantly improving the quality of healthcare that is being delivered.

Our pharmaceutical systems – we want to manage our pharmaceutical systems in such a way that any patient who shows up at the pharmacy would be able to get his/her medication in a timely manner. We want to reduce shortages so that eventually no patient who comes to the pharmacy would have to go elsewhere to source medication. We would be focusing a lot on this because right now, in some cases, we might have pharmaceuticals at the bond but it is not readily transferred to the pharmacy. Therefore, there are sometimes a notion that things are short. We want to eradicate that from our system. We would also be putting in place systems and standardised protocols to allow for the better treatment of patients with cardiovascular diseases and also to ensure that persons who present with hypertension and possibly stroke could get the best treatment. That should be done in a very critical time period so as to prevent complications. We would be standardising these things and working on them at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.

2.39 p.m.

Laboratory operations – we do not want when people come to our laboratories that they have to wait too long to be able to access service or for that matter, to be able to get back their results. Therefore, improving the efficiency of our laboratories – and also laboratories that we are currently not

doing but are essential for modern diagnostics– so that we are able to provide for our patients.

We are also going to introduce something that we call remote pathology services. Right now, if someone takes a biopsy and he/she comes to the Pathology Department of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), sometimes he/she have to wait six weeks before he/she could get back the results. This, we want to change and have a faster turnaround time. One way of doing this is to do a telepathology meaning, we have to prepare the slides and take high resolution photographs, so that we could have an image. That image in turn could be interpreted at some of the centres abroad, so that we could have the same quality of diagnosis as if one has the actual specimen. This is what we are working to introduce and I think it would vastly improve our current turnaround time for pathology.

The other main area that we have also been working on under this project is to make sure that we create two centres of excellence. One to deal with cardiology. We want to have a Cardiac Centre of Excellence, where patients who require sophisticated cardiac surgery would be able to go there and be able to get those types of services.

The second of course, would be in the area of Oncology. As Members know, there are lots of patients who would come to our system and sometimes have difficulties in getting a diagnosis. Even when we know that it is some form of cancer, we cannot differentiate what type because we do not have the requisite equipment. All of this is going to change because we are going to set up an Oncology Centre of Excellence and make sure that patients have the benefit of these services. This collaboration is one of the many steps which we are taking to improve our health care system and as the President has repeatedly said on several occasions, that our aspiration is to make our health care system one of the best in the world. If we are going to be able to do that, then we will have to get world class partners who could help us to navigate that path, to walk that journey hand in hand, teach us how to do some of these things and then make sure that we are maintaining these standards. That is the sort of partnership that we have with the Mount Sinai International. Thank you, very much.

Item 12: 47-471 Ministry of Health – Policy Development and Administration – Other – \$332,640,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 51-511 Ministry of Home Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Other – \$40,000,000

Item 13: 51-511 Ministry of Home Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Other –\$40,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 13: 51-511 Ministry of Home Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Buildings – \$22,436,500

Item 13: 51-511 Ministry of Home Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Buildings –\$22,436,500 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Field Materials and Supplies – \$23,000,000

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Field Materials and Supplies – \$23,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Print and Non-Print Materials – \$125,038,000

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Print and Non-Print Materials – \$125,038,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Fuel and Lubricants – \$200,000,000

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Fuel and Lubricants – \$200,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Local Travel and Subsistence – \$200,000,000

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Local Travel and Subsistence – \$200,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Vehicle Spares and Services – \$40,000,000

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Vehicle Spares and Services – \$40,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Equipment Maintenance – \$10,000,000

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - Equipment Maintenance – \$10,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Dietary – \$200,000,000

Item 13: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Dietary – \$200,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 52-523 Ministry of Legal Affairs – Attorney General’s Chambers – Other - \$100,000,000

Mr. Datadin: Mr. Chairman, could I ask the Hon. Attorney General (AG) and Minister of Legal Affairs to give a breakdown or disaggregate the \$100,000,000?

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Permit me to thank the Hon. Member for the question. It is public knowledge that the Government of Guyana was sued for the parking meter contract that was entered into during the tenure of the last Government. There are legal proceedings currently ongoing at an International Tribunal in Washington, District of Columbia (DC). Some US\$3 million will have to be expended in legal fees to represent the Government’s interest in those legal proceedings. What is reflected here is simply a deposit towards those legal fees. In addition to that Your Honour, every day almost, the Government of Guyana is being sued in what I consider to be frivolous litigations. Only today, we had proceedings filed in relation to the appointment of Patrick Findlay as Chairman of the Police Service Commission (PSC). Every Member appointed by the President to the Integrity Commission have also been sued. These persons are simply dragged before the Court because he/she have demonstrated a willingness to serve the people of their country. They have been sued simply because he/she were the subject of consultations between the President and the Leader of the Opposition, as is required by the law and the Constitution. Each of these persons have been sued in his/her personal capacity. The State has to provide lawyers to represent these persons, as they are being sued for no fault of their own.

We have different litigations of that type being filed by the Opposition in the Court system of our country. We also have *elections petitions* that are ongoing in the Court system too, where the Government’s interest has to be protected as the

Government is part of the litigation. This \$100,000,000, Sir, is to pay for lawyers whose services we have retained in those categories of matters, to which I have made mention.

Item 14: 52-523 Ministry of Legal Affairs – Attorney General’s Chambers – Other - \$100,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

2.54 p.m.

Capital Expenditure

Item 15: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Air, Land & Water Support - \$157,875,000

Item 15: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Air, Land & Water Support - \$157,875,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 15: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Equipment Maintenance - \$277,900,000

Item 15: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Equipment Maintenance - \$277,900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 16: 71-711 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Regional Administration and Finance – Fuel and Lubricants – \$4,600,000

Item 16: 71-711 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Regional Administration and Finance – Fuel and Lubricants – \$4,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 16: 71-713 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$5,000,000

Item 16: 71-713 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$5,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 16: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Fuel and Lubricants – \$10,000,000

Item 16: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Fuel and Lubricants – \$10,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 17: 72-723 Region 2: Pomeroon/Supenaam – Public Works – Fuel and Lubricants – \$3,000,000

Item 17: 72-723 Region 2: Pomeroon/Supenaam – Public Works – Fuel and Lubricants – \$3,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 18: 79-791 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Regional Administration and Finance – Fuel and Lubricants – \$2,993,600

Item 18: 79-791 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Regional Administration and Finance – Fuel and Lubricants – \$2,993,600 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 18: 79-793 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Public Works – Fuel and Lubricants – \$1,569,200

Item 18: 79-793 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Public Works – Fuel and Lubricants – \$1,569,200 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 18: 79-794 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$5,158,400

Item 18: 79-794 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$5,158,400 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 18: 79-795 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Fuel and Lubricants – \$4,532,800

Item 18: 79-795 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Fuel and Lubricants – \$4,532,800 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have considered the line-by-line items of Financial Paper No. 1 of 2022 in the grand total of \$44,794,011,175 of current and capital estimates.

Question

“That the Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No.1 of 2022 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$44,794,011,175 for the period ending 31st December, 2022.”

put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Committee of Supply (COS) has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No.1 of 2022 and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now consider the Supplementary Appropriation Bill.

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed with the introduction of the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 1 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 17 of 2022.”

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I move that Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 1 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 17 of 2022 to be introduced at this stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with paragraph 2 of article 171 of the *Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana*, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 1 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 17 of 2022 for consideration by the National Assembly. I now present the Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read for the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read for the first time:

Supplementary Appropriation (No. 1 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 17 of 2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of the Cooperative Republic

of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2022, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read the first time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 1 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 17 of 2022 be read a second time.

Bills – Second and Third Readings

Supplementary Appropriation (No. 1 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 17/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2022, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

3.09 p.m.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance will now move the following motion that is the Low Carbon

Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030. Could we get someone to move the podium across?

Dr. Singh: If it is not too much trouble, Sir, my preference would be to use the podium, if available, providing it is no inconvenience.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Senior Minister said he will continue from his seat.

Dr. Singh: No, I was saying I would prefer to use the podium.

Mr. Speaker: He prefers to use the podium. Could we put a picture of Dr. Singh on the screen? Let us see if there is sufficient light. Are you okay with that, Hon. Minister?

Dr. Singh: I am happy to proceed, whenever you are ready, Sir.

Motion

Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030

WHEREAS His Excellency President Irfaan Ali launched a draft version of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030 on 28th October 2021, building from the original LCDS of 2009 and its update in 2013;

AND WHEREAS the Draft LCDS 2030 subsequently underwent more than seven months of national consultation, during which community-level consultations took place alongside engagement with national stakeholders to shape the main elements of LCDS 2030;

AND WHEREAS the LCDS 2030 has been updated to include inputs received through the more than seven months of consultation;

AND WHEREAS the National Toshias Council, at their Conference in July 2022, have endorsed the LCDS 2030 and the mechanism for benefits sharing at the village and community level;

AND WHEREAS the Multi Stakeholder Steering Committee, the oversight body for the LCDS, at its Meeting on 18 July 2022, has approved the LCDS 2030 and recommended it for tabling at the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the LCDS 2030 was laid in the National Assembly on 21st July 2022;

AND WHEREAS the LCDS 2030 sets out a strategy for recognising Guyana's world-class ecosystem services, including those provided by its forests, biodiversity, fresh water and oceans;

AND WHEREAS the strategy prioritises the evolution of Guyana's sale of forest climate services in line with a three-phase plan which was first set out in 2009;

AND WHEREAS the first phase of the plan saw Guyana enter into a partnership with the Kingdom of Norway, under which Guyana received a total of over US\$220 million from the Kingdom of Norway as payments for forest climate services provided in the period from 2009 to 2015;

AND WHEREAS revenues received from the Kingdom of Norway were, and are being, invested in clean energy, low carbon jobs, Amerindian land titling, the Amerindian Development Fund project, small and medium enterprise development, rehabilitation of the Cunha Canal and other climate resilience work, building a world-class forest carbon Monitoring Reporting and Verification System (MRVS), and other priorities set out in the original LCDS in 2009;

AND WHEREAS the LCDS 2030 sets out how Guyana can move to the second phase of the plan for forest climate services, where payments from the Kingdom of Norway can be replaced or augmented by payments from forest carbon markets;

AND WHEREAS the LCDS 2030 articulates how these new revenues can be invested in a new suite of social and economic investments across Guyana; BE IT RESOLVED: That this National Assembly welcomes the tabling of, and endorses, Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly welcomes the tabling of, and endorses, Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly supports the approach to investing revenues from forest carbon markets through two pathways:

- *National programmes* as outlined in the LCDS 2030, including investments in renewable energy, land titling, protection against climate change and other areas;
- *Community/Village-led programmes* for indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as set out in Village Sustainability Plans (VSPs) or equivalent, put together by communities themselves;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly supports the proposal to dedicate 15 percent of all revenues from forest carbon markets to Amerindian communities, which will be supplementary to the funds received by these communities from the national programmes;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly, including through its Committees, will oversee the investment of all national revenues received from forest climate markets and managed via the Consolidated Fund through the budgetary process.

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

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I consider it a singular privilege to have been tasked with the responsibility of moving – on behalf of this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government – the motion circulated on the Notice Paper No. 215, the subject of which is Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030. A strategy which was tabled before this honourable House recently, but a strategy which has been in a widespread public circulation for several months now and which has been the subject of extensive national consultation – a matter to which I will return to shortly. It will be noted that an executive summary of our 2030 Low Carbon Development Strategy, recounts some very striking facts which are worthy of repetition, highlight and emphasis and I will select a few of these for the simple reason that I consider them to be such striking statements about the situation in which Guyana is situated as it relates to responsible management for our natural resources and as it relates to our potential for low carbon development.

Firstly, these include that Guyana has maintained the second highest percentage of forest cover on earth with more than 99% of the forest 18 million hectares remaining.

Secondly, Guyana's forest stores 19.5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, which those in the industry would know is the measure used for the greenhouse gas emissions which caused climate change. To put things in perspective, consider that we store 19.5 billion tonnes, and the world emits about 50 billion tonnes per year. Our relative contribution to the global effort should be evident for all to see.

Thirdly, our deforestation rates are amongst the lowest in the world and we are one of only four countries in the world and one of only two in the Amazon basin verified to have sustained a High Forest Low Deforestation Status.

Fourthly, we are one of six countries which host the Guiana Shield one of the most pristine rainforest landscapes in the world and it is worthy in particular to note that the said Guiana Shield stores about 18% of the world's tropical forest carbon and 20% of the world's fresh water.

I will stop there but I will commend the Low Carbon Development Strategy for close reading by all, who have not yet read it because it articulates in a rigorous yet assessable manner, the remarkably unique position that our country occupies on the spectrum of sustainable management of natural resources and like I said a remarkable potential for low carbon development. Beyond recounting these facts, I wish to point out that this circumstance did not happen by accident, it did not happen by chance, and it did not happen by good fortune only. Indeed, for generations successive cohorts of Guyanese nationals have in one way or another recognised the importance of maintaining our forest cover.

3.24 p.m.

Indeed, long before greenhouse gases, the ozone layer, the emissions and climate change had entered into popular discourse, had into the nomenclature of sustainable management of natural resources, and had entered even into public consciousness, long before that, generations of Guyanese before us recognised that cutting down the trees would have had multiple perverse consequences.

For generations, our country had forgone what undoubtedly would have been opportunities for accelerated economic development; forgone the benefits of an economic development which other countries that did not practice the same responsible management of their forest resources realised the harnessing of their forest assets in pursuit of their model of economic development, the clearing of land for use, including things like urbanisation, *et cetera*, indeed,

many of the world's best known and most prosperous metropolises were once forested areas and where trees once stood a concrete jungle now rises. Despite the fact that we have been forgoing and have forgone the opportunities that may a century or two centuries ago have presented themselves through less responsible management of forest resources, we have remained as a country whose responsible forest management has gone largely unrecognised. At the same time, we face more than most. We face an extraordinary threat from and vulnerability to climate change. We all know the vulnerable state of our low-lying coastal plain which remains today vulnerable to a single episode of hightide. All of us has lived through several episodes of hightides overtopping the seawalls that we have constructed over the centuries, in fact. We have spent, been spending and continue to spend billions of dollars to extend, reinforce and maintain. We face disproportionate vulnerability to climate change when, at the same time, we are making a disproportionate contribution to the global effort to fight climate change through the preservation of our standing forests.

Recognising and juxtaposing those two facts, in 2009, under the distinguished leadership of His Excellency, President Bharrat Jagdeo, Guyana articulated its first Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). That strategy made all of these arguments in a rigorous and detailed manner, grounded formally in the science and set the stage for one of the first payment systems for forest climate services in the world. Because, at that time, no market mechanisms existed to remunerate forest climate services, we entered into a bilateral arrangement with the Kingdom of Norway. Under that arrangement we received over US\$220 million in payments for the work that we did to maintain not only our world class forests over the period from 2009 to 2015, but also for the work that we did to lay the building blocks and to assemble, painstakingly, the foundation that would be required for a market-base mechanism. Things like a pioneering world class Monitoring, Reporting and Verification System (MRVS) which, up to today, remains an outstanding example of what such systems should do. It would be fair to say that the 2009 LCDS was a truly pioneering strategy far ahead of its time and visionary in every respect. It was visionary in its articulation on our case for earning revenue in exchange for the climate services that we are providing globally and visionary in articulating the utilisation of those resources to put Guyana on a path of accelerated economic development but along a low carbon trajectory.

Investment in clean and renewable energy: It would be recalled that the flagship project under the Low Carbon Development Strategy at the time was the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Had that Project not been derailed by the deliberate actions of then A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Opposition, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project would have been in operation today and would have been supplying more than 150 megawatts of clean power from a renewable source from hydropower to the national grid as we speak. The cost of electricity would have been reduced for the people of Guyana as a result of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project being brought onstream. We had the committed participation of a creditable, large international investor willing to develop this project as a private sector project but, alas, the APNU/AFC chose to adapt, yet again, a path of frustrating national development, instead of supporting and facilitating it.

There were a number of other projects under the LCDS for which resources were mobilised. More than 2,000 jobs were created through support for small and medium size enterprises in low carbon sectors on the coast and in the hinterland. The land tenure of our Amerindian brothers and sisters was safeguarded and strengthened with the design and implementation of an Amerindian Land Tilting Project. Under that Project 13 Amerindian villages received absolute grants to bring the total number of villages titled with grants to 109. We rehabilitated the Cunha Canal to protect local communities from flooding. We strengthened a number of our institutions, including the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) and others. The original LCDS not only mobilised a substantial amount of resources, but it also facilitated the investment of those resources in a number of very important projects. It would be recalled, for example, that over and beyond the Amerindian Land Title Project, projects were also designed to rollout the Hinterland Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and bring it into our hinterland villages amongst others.

Tragically in 2015, when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) demitted Office and the APNU/AFC assumed Office, in fact, if I might offer a prefatory remark before I speak about what happened tragically, it would be fair to say that, by the time we left Office in 2015, Guyana was well positioned as a global leader on the subject of low carbon development. It would be recalled that President Jagdeo was recognised internationally. He was recognised by the United Nations (UN) as a Champion of the Earth, a distinguished recognition for persons making a global

contribution to matters related to the environment. It would be recalled that he was recognised by the *Time* magazine and others for the outstanding leadership he was providing and had provided, not only to Guyana and not only in Guyana's interest, but the outstanding leadership that he was providing globally on this subject. We, as a country, must be proud of that because here we were as a small country, not yet on the global radar because of oil and gas and so on, which we all know that oil and gas has helped to put us on the global radar, a lot of people have awareness of Guyana who did not have awareness of Guyana at that time. Here we were, as a small country, punching solidly above our weight, providing intellectual leadership on one of the world's most pressing problems; the existential threat of climate change and here we were, Guyana, providing global intellectual leadership on this matter. Then in 2015, the People's Progressive Party/Civic demitted Office and the APNU/AFC assumed Office. All this work in which was invested tremendous effort, not just at the political level, but we had also built up a world class technical expertise, some of the best technicians in the world and all of this work was brought to a crashing halt.

3.39 p.m.

The Low Carbon Development Strategy was effectively shelved, the global advocacy on the Strategy was abandoned, not a cent more was earned. The Strategy was shelved and not only was the Strategy shelved, but all of the projects that were intended to benefit the people of Guyana were also shelved and mothballed. The Amerindian Land Titling Project, Sir, ground to a complete standstill. Virtually nothing was done for five years from 2015 to 2020. The Hinterland ICT Project was brought to a crashing standstill too. I am told that some components were purchased, locked up in a bond and nothing was done with them. They never arrived in a village and not a single individual ever benefitted from them, and the list goes on. I am told, in fact, that, perhaps, the only project that did move was the Micro and Small Enterprise Development (MSE) Project where some grants were given but, in customary APNU/AFC style, those grants were given only to selected political cronies and that, perhaps, Sir, is a matter for discussion on another occasion.

Instead of using the work that had already been done to advance the calls of national development, a Green State Development Strategy (GSDS), as I believe... Is that what they called it? I think that is what they called it. A Green State Development Strategy was developed. This Green State Development Strategy, I am told that the cover was

green, the pages were green, the font was probably another shade of green. In fact, some of my colleagues are telling me and the evidence suggests that they are absolutely correct, that the main anchor, the central pillar of this Green State Development Strategy was to paint the State green, every State building, and every State fence. Apparently, that was the interpretation that was applied to. The GSDS did not propose any credible strategy for raising revenue on anything remotely close to the scale that the LCDS had already done. And so, not having laid the foundation for generation of a flow of resources, it could not articulate the utilisation of the flow that did not exist. What is more, Sir, is that whereas the Low Carbon Development Strategy that we developed was developed indigenously, domestically in Guyana by Guyanese people and had benefitted from consultation with the Guyanese people, whereas the LCDS 2009 was an indigenous strategy, indigenous in the sense of local, a Guyanese strategy, the GSDS was here again in typical APNU/AFC style. It was the product of a farmed-out intellectual effort. They got some international people to write it. I am not sure if they read it. I am not sure if they provided any input or intellectual leadership in its crafting. Some external consultants wrote it and that was it.

Once again, when it comes to the issue of low carbon development, once again, the 2015 to 2020 years can be characterised as lost years. We gave a commitment in Opposition that we will renew our work on the Low Carbon Development Strategy, preparing an updated LCDS to reflect new realities and, of course, much has changed now. Guyana is now an oil and gas producer. That is a reality that has to be taken into account when one is engaging in any discourse on low carbon issues and, indeed, on economic development issues. This and, of course, our economic context have changed quite significantly as well, but what has not changed since the first Low Carbon Development Strategy is the commitment of this Peoples Progressive Party/Civic Government to accelerated economic development in Guyana along a low carbon path. That has not changed. If anything, we are reinforced in our conviction to pursue this path.

Indeed, now that we have become an oil and gas producer, we feel even more strongly about the importance of maintaining our environmental credentials. The Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030 represents the outcome of that, the manifestation of that commitment. The Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030 is an updated and expanded LCDS, building on what was already achieved in 2009 or out of the 2009 Strategy. Updating it for current realities,

incorporating a number of new dimensions, including dimensions such as the blue economy. We have a lot of oceanic and marine resources. At the time of the original LCDS, that strategy did not incorporate the blue economy, our marine and oceanic resources. This strategy now largely reflects the evolution of global thinking. This strategy now incorporates our oceanic and marine resources with a substantive section on the blue economy. Like its predecessor, the 2030 LCDS articulates a clear mechanism for mobilisation of resources for earning of revenue by our country. Of course, the global context has also been changed and so the LCDS has itself been updated and expanded to take account of those global realities. For example, and, perhaps, the most obvious change is the fact that when we did the 2009 LCDS, we recognised at the time that a market-based mechanism was really not in existence. That has changed quite a lot and the world has moved much closer to market-based mechanisms for remunerating forest carbon. This LCDS reflects that reality and builds a foundation for Guyana now to earn revenue for the global climate services that we are providing, not only potentially from bilateral engagements like the one we had with the Kingdom of Norway, but also in an open market arrangement.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to updating to reflect these new realities, there are a few points that have to be made. First of all, this Strategy, like its predecessor's strategy, goes to the core of the debate on justice and fairness. The reality is that forests are an extremely valuable part and one of the most effective means or mechanisms in the global climate solution. From a global justice and fairness perspective, forests should and must be remunerated for the global climate services they are providing. It would be recalled that Guyana was also a forefront of articulating the argument about why standing forests or avoided deforestation should be recognised and remunerated in the same manner that reforestation was being proposed at that time as a solution. We argued that it would be perverse to reward those who have cut down their trees and are now planting them back but not to reward those who have exhibited consistent good behaviour by keeping their trees standing, and Guyana led that global argument.

There is a fundamental principle that lies at the heart of this LCDS and, indeed, similarly at the heart of the previous LCDS that, countries like ours, custodians of standing forests, must be remunerated for the global climate services we are providing. Secondly Sir, we as part of the global family of the nations are committed to doing our part in the global climate effort. In particular, we are committed to

advancing the transition in so many areas of economic life that are important to this collective global effort. To give you one example, the energy transition. Just last week His Excellency, President Ali, addressed the Latin American and Caribbean Region of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and he gave a seminal speech on Guyana's energy transition, covering the entire spectrum of our energy transition efforts, including, of course, our investment in the Gas-to-Shore Project. Of course, like so many others around the world, we regard natural gas as a transition fuel. Our investment in hydropower; our investment in other renewables, including solar, mini grids – both hydro and solar – we are committed to making that effort. We recognise that our current fossil fuel-based electricity generation is not climate-friendly and, moreover, is expensive and inefficient and we will be investing as is well known. We will be investing in transitioning our energy matrix to more clean and renewable sources.

Additionally, Sir, we have set up a number of robust mechanisms first of all to ensure... I referred to the Monitoring Reporting and Verification System earlier regarding monitoring our forest assets but also to ensure that the funds generated under the LCDS by our standing forests, that those funds are not carved out, earmarked or set aside, but instead are fully integrated into the parliamentary budgetary process.

3.54 p.m.

Those funds will come into the Consolidated Fund. They will be appropriated back out to finance projects in keeping with our Low Carbon Development Strategy. They will be subjected to extensive and detailed parliamentary scrutiny – both *ex-ante* and *ex-post*. *Ex-ante*, during the budgetary process and *ex-post*, through the external audit and the Public Accounts Committee's (PAC) processes of scrutiny. Of course, compliments of our 2001 constitutional amendments, we have several special sectoral committees that will be exercising oversight. They have the right and mandate to exercise oversight over these matters.

We will ensure, therefore, that the revenues we earn from the LCDS are processed through – as I said – the most rigorous of accountability systems and fully incorporated into the budgetary process. We will also, of course, be investing those resources – as I said earlier – in advancing the cause of low carbon development. This not only includes the energy transitioning, which I referred to earlier, but advancing hinterland development. Just about a month ago, we hosted the first National Toshias Council (NTC) Conference. I

think for about several years it had not been held. At least for two years, it had not been held – most recently because of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Of course, the NTC engaged and conducted its business – the regular business of the Council. The NTC's meeting also gave the Government an opportunity to engage closely with the leadership, so that we have the most current understanding of the development situation and the priority areas of interest and concern to them. In fact, just a few minutes ago, this House appropriated an additional \$3 billion. This was a sum committed to by His Excellency, the President, at the closing of the annual NTC Conference that was held here.

This LCDS takes Guyana forward. It creates a new stream of revenue for investment in low carbon development. It ensures that we remain a net-zero country, which we already are. It ensures that we earn the revenue to which we are justly entitled given the global climate service that we are providing. It ensures that those revenues are invested prudently in investments to take us down a low carbon development trajectory. The Strategy has also benefitted from – first of all – outstanding technical work. As I move this motion, I want to acknowledge the work done by our world-class technical team. It is a world-class technical team, whose members can hold their own on this subject matter, against any of their international peers. Secondly, the Strategy has benefitted from extensive consultations. We have engaged in several months of consultations throughout the length and breadth of this country. Many of us on this side of the House, have been participants in and/or have led consultations in villages across the 10 regions of Guyana. I think, perhaps, all of us on this side of the House have had the privilege of leading or participating in consultations across the length and breadth of the country.

We have received extremely valuable feedback from the communities, directly from the people of Guyana, indicating which aspects they like, which aspects they wanted to be elaborated on a little more, which aspects they consider to be their top priority, and which aspects they would like to see, perhaps, expressed differently. Our technical team has painstakingly compiled all those comments. That compilation has indicated how every comment that was received, was addressed. We have a complete compendium of all the comments received from this unprecedented wave of national consultation. We have articulated how we have addressed those comments. The consultations were not confined only to our Guyanese brothers and sisters. We also engaged in consultations with our international friends, the diplomatic community and the development partner

community. We received again, very valuable feedback from all of them.

As I move this motion, I want also to say that the LCDS has benefitted tremendously from a rigorous governance structure with its preparation, consultation and refinement being supervised by a broad-based multi-stakeholder steering committee. I want here to recognise the role that is played by that Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC). I believe that some of them are in the House. In fact, I know that I saw quite a few Members of the MSSC. I should say that the MSSC is chaired by no less a person than His Excellency, the President, who has taken the time to attend every meeting. I do not recall the President missing any. Perhaps, he missed one but not more. In fact, I see one distinguished member of our local team, Ms. Pradeepa Bholanath, who was integral to this work, indicating that the President did not miss any of the meetings. The MSSC is led by His Excellency and includes the Vice-President and a number of Members from the Cabinet. It brought together several Government ministries but, more importantly, it included stakeholders from across our society – our Amerindian brothers and sisters, the private sector, labour, youth, and many others – around the table, engaging in a process of preparing and refining this document. The MSSC served almost as the apex of this structure that led to the finalisation of the LCDS 2030.

Finally, the preparation of this LCDS 2030 benefitted from outstanding and unstinting political and intellectual leadership by both the Vice-President and His Excellency, the President. Today, I want to say that publicly and repeat it. I suspect that it is widely known but it should be placed on the public record. As I said, in his previous role as President, the now Vice-President Mr. Jagdeo had provided a lot of the global intellectual leadership in preparing the original LCDS. He was once again instrumental in the preparation of this LCDS. President Ali has immersed himself in this work. He has embraced this work and provided the strongest possible political and intellectual leadership to get us to this point.

I consider it most regrettable that our Friends on that side of the House did not see it fit to come out today to support what can only be a Strategy that will redound to the national interest. That is most regrettable but, perhaps, not uncharacteristic of the APNU/AFC. Be that as it may, it is my privilege to move – I will do so at the appropriate time, once the debate has concluded – the motion to resolve that this National Assembly welcomes the tabling of the LCDS 2030, endorses the Strategy and supports the approach to

investing revenues from forest carbon markets through two pathways – national programmes and community or village led programmes. I know at least one of my Colleagues will speak a little more about that. This National Assembly supports the proposal to dedicate 15% of all revenues from forest carbon markets to Amerindian communities, which will be supplementary to the funds received by these communities from the national programmes. This National Assembly through its established mechanisms, including its community system, will oversee the investment of the revenues earned under this LCDS and received from forest climate markets, and manage it, as I said earlier, through an accountable system, through the Consolidated Fund and *via* the budgetary process.

Mr. Speaker, the LCDS 2030, building on the LCDS 2009, is a truly pioneering and historic piece of work. It is my honour to have been associated with it. I believe that it merits the support of every Guyanese person and, certainly, every Guyanese legislator. Thank you very much, Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. You mentioned the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee and only last month, I think, Mr. Derrick John, who is here with us this afternoon, was elected the Chairman of the National Tshaos Council. I now invite the Hon. Deputy Speaker to make his presentation.

4.09 p.m.

Mr. Shuman: Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying that I am humbled, privileged and blessed, for the first time in what I think is Parliament's history, to not only be the sole Opposition Member, but, today, I am also the Chief Whip (Ag) and the Leader of the Opposition. It is a task that I did not think I would have met at any time in my life and so I feel very pleased by that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker, you have joined an illustrious group that includes yours truly.

Mr. Shuman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off to cradle the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) Bill within the context of the Constitution. When I say to cradle, I do not want to replace nor to supplant, but to ensure that we understand how they fit together, more specifically, article 149 G of the Constitution of Guyana. I will read it for the persons who are with us virtually or looking at us on television. Article 149 G reads:

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

I do recall that a while back, 2015, 2016, 2017 – whichever year it was – there was an administration that resided in a white and green house that ended up being green. It produced something called The Green State Development Strategy. I do recall that in the entirety of the development of that document – and I was on the National Tshaos Council (NTC); I was the Vice Chairman of the NTC at that time – not an iota, not a single line of communication, not a single phone call nor text that was sent to the NTC could be traced back, recorded or otherwise that asked the NTC or the Indigenous peoples for their views on the Green State Development Strategy. I want to ensure that makes it on to these parliamentary records.

In converse, I stand here with what is now published and what we are debating today, the Low Carbon Development Strategy. We have gone out many times and talked about Indigenous peoples' rights and our rights to our way of life. If we do not have our forest standing – and our forest is integral to our livelihood – then what kind of life would we have? I did not see much of that in the Green State Development Strategy. When we talk about forest governance, for example, I remember there was an entire chapter on the promotion of good governance, the promotion of governance and governance. Yet, what we saw that followed was, had the Green State Development Strategy matured long enough or far enough, we may not have had any governance at all, based on the path that they went down in 2020. I do not know if that is their idea of forest governance and good governance. I say that because when we contributed to this Low Carbon Development Strategy, we were asked for extensive comments and we provided those. I am happy to say that I see a lot of what we contributed in this Low Carbon Development Strategy. Granted, it is not all because there are some conflicting components. We talk about responsible mining in rivers in forests, developing a larger framework for legislation and how we deal with overlapping land titles and a series of things.

Before I go any further, I want to pay Dr. Ashni Singh a compliment. I think he said something earlier. I do not know if he meant the entire Opposition. I am assuming that he did not mean I was absent because I am present in mind and in body. I also think that my colleagues in the Opposition could not be here – and you should take this as a compliment, honourable colleague – because they would have had no foot

to fall back on to say they would have voted against a progressive strategy for Guyana. I think you should take that as a compliment.

Mr. Speaker, I think that when you look at the document, the entire Low Carbon Development Strategy...and I have not really picked out every single thing that I wanted to. It is comprehensive. I know Cde. Teixeira said that I could speak. That means that I would have to speak after the next speaker, the next speaker and the next speaker. I do not want to do that. I think of some of the complementary services that we are looking at. When I say 'we', I am speaking about Parliament. When the budget was passed, it complemented and highlighted some critical components in the Low Carbon Development Strategy. Take, for example, the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) project. I can say this with the utmost confidence because I sat on the ALT Board when I was the Vice Chairman of the NTC. In our entire tenure, there was zero title given out. How do you begin to protect the forest when all these United Nations (UN) bodies and a variety of other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have said that forests that are cared for by Indigenous peoples tend to have better governance? Yet, under the previous administration, we saw zero titles. There seemed to have been some conflicts in how they would have developed their Green State Development Strategy. Through the budget that we passed earlier, there was money allocated for land titling programme. I sat in a very seat up on this side here through the NTC Conference when His Excellency was right in the middle here handing out grants and land titles – a massive change from what obtained previously. I think that speaks volumes for the commitment that the Government brings, that the Low Carbon Development Strategy brings and that we, as Indigenous peoples, have in the direction that this document takes us.

We had talked about how we allocate resources to Indigenous peoples. I recall, under that strategy, we were trying to figure out how to integrate the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) activities into whatever strategy there were...Basically, they could not 'marry' all these things. They had sought an extension of the project from Norway, and I do recall a very critical meeting at the Office of the President. The Chair of the NTC, Tshaos Joel Fredricks, and I were invited. We are talking about meaningful consultations. When we showed up at the gates of the Office of the President, we were locked out. [**Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] It was the Ministry of the Presidency. Thank you. We were locked out of those

consultations. That is the extent to which they had wanted to consult on anything to do with Indigenous peoples.

During the debate, I was heartened to hear our honourable colleague, Ms. Campbell-Sukhai, state that there was money allocated for the revision of the Amerindian Act. I also recall that, under the previous Administration, they had also allocated moneys for the Amerindian Act. However, that project was to be driven only by two or three select persons from the Ministry. That is not meaningful consultation. That is not inclusive. I have every confidence that my colleagues on the other side would agree with me that when one talks about better forest governance and better governance nationally, the LCDS encapsulates all those things and then some; and that when one talks about the revision of the Amerindian Act, it is not driven by two or three persons, but it is driven comprehensively to ensure that we have the kind of forest governance and the kind of support in the Indigenous communities to ensure that it ties in with what is written in this development strategy.

Much like everything else, I strongly believe that the best way forward most times is direct. No walking around or *beating around the bush*. There were talks of non-consultative process, talks of non-engagement, talks of a whole host of things but, comparatively, I do not really think there is a comparison. Maybe, inclusively, I would say that from 2009 to now, there has been no document that has had greater consultations than what is before us right now. It was consulted on before 2015 – from 2009 to 2015. Even after the PPP/C was out of Office, it was still being consulted upon to draft some strategy that stood opposed to this. Then, when the Administration got into office, they rolled out another series of consultations. I do not even believe, in my humble view, that constitutional reform went through that process.

I want to take this opportunity to say to my friends and colleagues that the document that we have before us is comprehensive and it stands in line to support article 149 G of the Constitution. It does not supplant it and it does not replace it. When you couple those things with the revision of the Amerindian Act and what we are going to be debating here today, the diversity in changing how we manage forests, that is, the Industrial Hemp Bill 2022, I think we could all agree that the LCDS is a document that takes care of our future, our children's future and our children's children future. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that I wholeheartedly and unreservedly support this document. Thank you. [*Applause*]

4.24 p.m.

Ms. Campbell- Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, I wish to immediately say that the motion before us on the Low Carbon Development Strategy finds my immediate support for approval by the National Assembly. The Low Carbon Development Strategy has four major objectives, which are outlined in the *Guyana Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030* document. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance has already alluded to its objectives, so I will just rehash that the *Guyana Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030* sets the direction for Guyana's economic development – today, to 2030, and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to record that the LCDS was subjected to adequate consultations. Even in the face of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, there were eight months of deliberation on this strategy. Consultations were taken to every hinterland region, engaging Amerindian leaders and Community Development Chairpersons from clusters within the many districts. To report that there is adequate representation of Amerindians on the Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC), I am pleased to announce that the recently elected National Toshias Council chairperson has been included, almost immediately upon his assumption, in that Committee. I also want to place on record that the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA), the Guyanese Organization of Indigenous People (GOIP), The Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana (TAMOG), and the National Amerindian Development Foundation (NADF) are also included on that Committee. Included also are the private sector stakeholders from many other sectors. I also wish to say that consultations included Amerindian leaders and village councils at the National Toshias Council Conference. The technical committee took time out to ensure that the strategy was once more provided or that insight to that strategy was comprehensively provided to the leaders.

As the LCDS moves into the implementation stage, it is expected that all elements will be subjected to detailed consultation and aligned to the budgetary process. Annual consultation with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals are also expected to be conducted. This is according to the document. Today, I wish to address the LCDS, which offers Amerindian and hinterland interventions to complement opportunities for improved livelihoods, further securing land rights, improved services, and infrastructure, among many other development supporting interventions that will be funded for advancing development in the hinterland. The initial LCDS, under the

successful bilateral agreement with Norway, offered a number of benefits. The 2013 signing of the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) and the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) project are two such important projects. It was unfortunate that under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government, there was either its unwillingness or non-support for the continuing of the ADF and the halting of the ALT programme. This was significant for Amerindians, the land titling project, which sought to secure land rights and expand areas or locations owned and utilised by Amerindians.

I wish to assure the Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman, that the Amerindian Land Titling project is back on track. Currently, the unit is actively pursuing the full details to ensure that agreed upon targets are achieved. There were moneys available always to pursue land titling and demarcation, as left by the PPP/C Government. However, we must always remember that it was the APNU/AFC Government that failed to pursue that project aggressively. Another reminder is that Amerindians, today, own privately an estimated 14% of Guyana's land mass. Of course, this is not static. Recently, at the NTC Conference in July, we were very happy to have had provided two communities with additional extensions to their communities. We have also been able to complete five demarcations, that is, cadastral surveying of the boundaries of five villages. We must, however, never forget that it was the APNU/AFC Government which attempted to railroad the successes of the ALT project by halting the activities under the project and by directly attempting to mastermind the lumping of Amerindian land issues under a Commission of Inquiry (COI), which was set up with one of its activities, under its terms of reference (TOR), being to inquire into Amerindian land ownership, which was addressed under the PPP/C Government. That was a core activity of that Commission of Inquiry. One would recall the objections by the People's Progressive Party/Civic at the time in Opposition. That, too, was objected to by the NTC of the time. We can recall vividly that it was the APNU/AFC that attempted to ghost the NTC by inviting the APA to deliberate on the matter when objections were raised.

I wish to say that His Excellency and the Vice President have led our Government to be one of the Governments and countries which, internationally, is leading the way with respect to building a low carbon economy. This means quite a lot, not only for Guyana, but we are an example to those who are venturing out in similar fashion. I also want to briefly say here that in comparison to the APNU/AFC's

Green State Development Strategy, I recognise that that strategy, as many have explained, was a strategy which sought to green everything in Guyana. Even the areas where we sit are indicated by green arrows. It must also be put on record that it is the PPP/C Government which continues to uphold free, prior, informed consent (FPIC), and not only with the consultation with regards to the Low Carbon Development Strategy.

I would like to, once more, allude to the mention by the Hon. Member on the other side, Mr. Shuman, who noted that our Government has allocated, in 2022 Budget, moneys to initiate the revision of the Amerindian Act. Some \$10 million has been allocated for that activity, in which we will move to set up the committee that will involve stakeholders such as the NTC to work alongside the Government. I want to recall also that the NTC is the legitimately elected body to represent Amerindians in this country. I wish also that the National Assembly be informed that it was under the PPP/C Government that consultation took the lead on both occasions, and that the LCDS 2030 is expanded to include investments to the real sectors, making them sustainable. This motion includes a whereas clause, which states:

“AND WHEREAS

the strategy prioritises the evolution of Guyana’s sale of forest climate services...”

The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance alluded to this too. The motion also lays out that the LCDS 2030 sets out how Guyana can move to the second phase of the plan for forest climate services, where payments from the Kingdom of Norway can be replaced or augmented by the payments from forest carbon markets. This is a huge step. Again, I want to place on record that it is the PPP/C Government, its leadership, and our country, Guyana, that are fully prepared to venture into the carbon market. The LCDS 2030 offers a significant benefit-sharing mechanism for Amerindian villages and communities. This benefit-sharing mechanism was endorsed at the recently concluded NTC Conference by all the leaders, where it was recommended that 15% of the sale of carbon be assigned for Amerindian and local communities. Here, again, is very tangible evidence that our Government not only makes commitments but that our commitments are strong and have always been implementable.

4.39 p.m.

Therefore, I believe that the 15% of all proceeds earned or every US dollar earned from the sale of carbon is a significant movement forward, whereby it is expected that villages and communities would directly receive such payments, which would be used to consolidate development and investments in terms of transitioning their economy and building a much more solid village economy. The community/village led programme for Indigenous peoples and local communities is also set out in this motion, where it speaks about village sustainable plan or its equivalent, put together by communities themselves. Again, the motion is very clear that our Government respects the ability of the villages to derive and to develop their own pathways. It is not going to be top-down approach, but a full consultative approach at the village level. Government would so be advised when that process is completed.

Investment plans for the LCDS 2030 would be the means through which climate financing from the LCDS would be measured and the impact of actions financed and monitored. This is taken from the document. It would outline the main programme areas for each sector within the LCDS and it would offer a mechanism to direct activity implementation and track LCDS financing within the national budgetary process. Again, you could find this in the concluding parts or sections of the document. Any strategy, obviously, should be able to have and declare their investment plan. I wish, at this point in time, to provide the level of credit to our Government and to its leaders for being able to pilot another LCDS, and, at this stage, an expanded LCDS, to ensure that we are comfortable, in terms of understanding where we would take Guyana, and to recognise not only the key role that the Amerindians play in the protection and sustainable activities, which they employ as it relates to the forest, but that our nation as a whole has come to realise that our country is not only the saving grace, but we are part and parcel of the lungs of the world. We have recognised the services our forest provides and that we should be compensated, and rightfully so.

I take pleasure in once more providing to this House support for the passage of this motion and to place on record that I am very pleased, also, that the National Toshias Council has fully endorsed the LCDS 2030. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon. Vickram Bharrat.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that Guyana is indeed a blessed

country. This is one of the few countries in the world where our Parliament would be engaged in such a debate on such a motion. There are very few countries in the world that are fortunate like Guyana to have a forest like we have, and that we could actually craft a strategy that speaks significantly to our green economy, and also the blue economy now in the expanded LCDS 2030. I say that Guyana is a blessed country because there are many countries around the world that are now grappling and now putting mechanisms in place, so that they could achieve net zero and so that they could be carbon neutral. Guyana, however, is carbon neutral. As a matter of fact, we are in the negative and as a Government, we are not satisfied. We are taking steps to further reduce our emission, and I would speak to that as I continue.

It is a blessed country when there are 86% of the land mass covered in forest, maybe only second to Suriname. We are blessed because we have, as Minister Singh mentioned, 99% of our virgin forest still standing – probably one of the only countries in the world. Further to that, we are probably one of the only countries in the world that has reserved almost 2 million hectares of land in areas that we identify as the conservation areas, namely the Shell Beach area, Iwokrama Rainforest, Kaieteur National Park, the Kanuku Mountain ranges and the Konashen area in south Guyana. Those are our five reservations and five areas in which we do not allow any form of economic activity with regard to logging and mining. Yet again, we are one of the few countries in the world. This speaks to how serious we are about the preservation of our environment, about the preservation of our forest, and about our contribution, as a small developing country, to being the lungs of the world. I say that we are blessed because we have in Guyana, and we could boast about it and we should boast about it, one of the best forest management systems in the world. Many speakers before me mentioned the Monitoring Reporting and Verification System (MRVS). Very few countries in the world have this system implemented and active in their country. Very few countries that are engaged in logging activities actually do selective felling like us in Guyana; instead, they do clear felling.

Even though we have been focusing so much on our forest and preservation of the environment, we are blessed, too, to have so many natural resources – an abundance of natural resources – including copper, and there is a high prospect, and I speak with no technical data, that we may very well have lithium deposits, too, in Guyana. We know that copper and lithium are the elements that would be needed as we move forward into the new world where there would be

renewable energy and not fossil energy. I say blessed too because Guyana, right now, is the fastest growing economy in the world, something that we are very proud of. We are net zero, but we are still transitioning, and we are still reducing our emission.

Finally, I say that we are blessed because we have good leadership. We have a strong, bold, decisive and visionary leadership in our Government today, led by none other than our President himself, Dr. Irfaan Ali and our Vice President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, who was very instrumental and who was the leader behind the crafting of the Low Carbon Development Strategy, which started in 2008, when our Vice President was the then President. He has continued to develop the Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030, which, of course, is an expanded version of the 2009 strategy. My colleagues outlined the benefits that Guyana enjoyed from the 2009 Low Carbon Development Strategy. We enjoyed, as a country, from the bilateral agreement with Norway a sum of a little over US\$220 million used wisely in land titling, in creating alternative economic activities, especially in the hinterland riverain communities, where the main economic activities are logging and mining.

I wish to support, wholeheartedly, this motion today, this expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030 that speaks directly to the green economy, our forest, our biodiversity and also our blue economy, which is added to the Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030, that is, our abundant supply of fresh water in Guyana. The Low Carbon Development Strategy is built primarily on four pillars, and I wish to outline the four pillars on which the Low Carbon Development Strategy has been built. Firstly, to create new incentives for a low carbon economy and sustainability planning, that is, forestry, biodiversity, water resources, ocean and marine resources. As I mentioned, Guyana is one of the few countries that has over 90% of its standing forest intact, a forest that could actually hold 19.5 billion tonnes of carbon.

We are making our contribution, as a small country, to the world. The conversation right now around the world, and which is resonating from country to country and from continent to continent, is the conversation on climate change and cutting emission. There are many countries that are now making commitment to cut emission and to move to net zero or to have 100% renewable. Guyana has far advanced its agenda with regard to moving towards renewable. We are already net zero and we are planning to even cut that further.

The second pillar is to protect against climate change and biodiversity loss, climate adaptation and resilience, climate resilience for agriculture and that is why you realise, Mr. Speaker, that we have been focusing so much on agriculture. Again, we are a blessed country because most countries that are venturing into agriculture would have to experience a significant amount of deforestation in order to have land for agriculture purpose. We, in Guyana, do not have to cut down our forest to get into agriculture. We already have enough fertile land available that we could venture into agriculture without cutting down our forest.

Climate risk assessment and insurance of coastal infrastructure: This is very important to us, and this is key. As we know, Guyana is one of the countries that is actually below sea level, especially on the coast here and our capital city, and we have been experiencing the effects and impacts of global warming and of climate change, especially of recent. We have never seen the kind of flooding we are experiencing right now in our hinterland regions, which are known as our highland regions. Most of these regions right now, as we speak today, they are under water. We definitely need to look at our infrastructure as we move forward, especially coastal infrastructure, if we are going to protect the almost 90% of the population that lives on 9% of coastal strip.

Mangrove restoration: We know that a project was started under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration, prior to 2015, that has planted mangrove throughout or almost the entire coast of Guyana. Another area that LCDS 2030 speaks to is drought and flood management.

The third pillar is to stimulate future growth, clean energy and low carbon development, green jobs and sustainable livelihoods, clean and renewable energy, ocean economy opportunities, digital infrastructure, and low carbon transportation. Guyana has taken significant strides towards moving away from fossil, moving away from Heavy Fuel Oils (HFOs) and diesel, especially in terms of power generation. We know that power generation is one of the biggest issues for us as a country and as a people. The cost of power generation and the reliability of power generation has been a hinderance to us for decades and for not venturing into value-added, down streaming activities.

4.54 p.m.

As a Government, we are now seeking to address this issue. The Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, spoke of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. If the previous Administration had

gone through with the plans that we had left behind in 2015, today, we would have been receiving electricity or power supply at a much cheaper cost than we are paying for it. Mr. Speaker, we are paying, today, close to thirty United States cents per kilowatt. Had the previous Administration continued with our plans for the construction of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project we would have, probably, been paying at least 50% of that today. Unfortunately, they did not see it that way. They saw it as a People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) project and not a project that would benefit Guyanese, like the many other projects which they shelved. My colleagues spoke of the *Guyana's Green State Development Strategy* (GSDS) being a strategy of painting buildings and planting a few trees in Georgetown, but there is much more to that. There was no plan designed to bring in an income using our forestry resources and there was no plan to generate income so that there will be alternative livelihoods for our people, especially in the hinterland communities. In other words, we would have wasted five years from 2015 to 2020, where we could have gotten revenue from our forests that we so deserve.

Guyana is now moving towards addressing our energy issue, that is, through the gas-to-energy project. The gas-to-energy project will not only reduce our electricity cost by 50% and it will not only produce reliable electricity to us, but it will also produce clean energy. I am told that it will cut our emission for power generation by 70%. This will happen in another two years, bearing in mind that we are already in the negative; we are already net zero. Further to that, and not daunted by what was done over the period 2015 to 2020, we are still moving ahead with the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. We are committed to that project. That will further cut our emission and provide over 150 megawatts of clean power, renewable power. Added to that, solar farms will be done in Essequibo, in Linden, in Berbice and a few of the other areas which are not connected to the national grid. We have already started three mini hydros in the hinterland communities which will provide electricity. We have already secured almost 30,000 solar units which would be distributed free to all the households in the hinterland and riverain communities throughout our country. I am mentioning this because this will further move us into the negative in terms of emission. We are transitioning away from the hydrofluoro-olefins (HFOs) diesel, which we are currently using for power generation, into solar and hydro, and then later into wind.

We, as a country, also need to look at our 'blue' economy and how we could maximise and gain from that economy and how we could maximise and gain from our abundance of

freshwater resources which is available in Guyana. Only recently, I met an investor from Colombia who was encouraging us to use the water that is extracted when oil exploration is ongoing to purify and distribute. My simple answer to him was that we do not need to do that because we have such an abundance of fresh water in Guyana. All of this is happening while, indeed, Guyana is one of the newest oil-producing nations in the world. Yes, we are producing oil, but we will continue to do so in a responsible manner. We will continue to ensure that we play a part as a country, or we play a role as a country, in ensuring that we safeguard the environment and the economy. We too, believe that our people deserve a good life. We, too, believe that we should have first-world education, health facilities and infrastructure. We, too, believe that our people must have the opportunities like first world countries. The only way that we are going to achieve that is by exploring and producing our natural resources.

The *Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030* speaks to sustainable responsible exploration and production of our natural resources. There is no way or no part of the *Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030* that speaks to the stopping of mining or the stopping of logging or the stopping of the exploration and production of oil and gas. It speaks to the sustainable and responsible exploration and production of our natural resources because, as I mentioned, our people deserve a better life.

Achieving net zero, which we already did, or going further in the negative, and achieving 100% renewable, comes at a cost. It is a good conversation to have. There have been many forums around the world where countries are making commitments of moving to 100% renewable by 2030, by 2035 or by 2050. I think the United Nations (UN) is 2050. There is a cost attached to that. The big question here is: Who would fund that? If we are going to ask countries to stop logging, or stop mining, or stop producing oil and gas, then from where will the revenue come to achieve 100% renewable energy? That is the big question, I think, we need to ponder upon as we move forward. That is why the *Low Carbon Development Strategy* is so comprehensive, comprehensive in a sense that it speaks to the sustainable and responsible extraction and exploration of natural resources and, also, the protection and preservation of our environment which we believe is key. It is not because we are a new oil producing nation it means that we will not be responsible, or we will not be taking care of our environment.

Mr. Speaker, I think both of us, myself and you, attended a conference recently in Uruguay which spoke to cutting emissions and climate change. I know you could recall when the gentleman came to me and asked me, unknowingly, without knowing what country I was from or who I was, to sign a petition which speaks to stopping exploration and production of hydrocarbons around the world. My response to him was me asking him why is it that he was asking people to sign a petition to stop the production of fossils around the world; why is it that he did not have a petition and go around and try to stop or reduce the demand for fossils around the world? That would have been the right approach to take. If we stop supply and the demand is there, then it means that we are carrying up the cost for the poor man or for the average man. The right thing to do is to stop the demand or minimise the demand. Once the demand is minimised, automatically the supply would have to be reduced or to whom would it be sold. Who will buy it?

That brings me to a point, and Minister Singh mentioned it, that, in the coming years, the demand for fossil will be reduced. Many countries... and the UN states clearly that, by 2050, we want to go to net zero status around the world, we want to move to renewable. It simply means that, for fossil fuel, the demand for it will reduce significantly. I personally, and there are many others who share the same view, think that there will still be some amount of demand. The need for fossil will not be eradicated completely. There will still be a small demand for fossil. The big question now is: Who will produce that? Which country will we allowed to produce that? We are saying, in Guyana, and we are making that argument around the world, that Guyana should be allowed to do so. Why? It is because we are one of the latest producers of oil and gas in the world; it is because our people deserve a better life, and they deserve facilities and amenities like first world countries. There are countries that have been producing hydrocarbons for decades and for centuries. In all fairness, we believe that it is the small developing countries that must be given the opportunity to produce when that demand is reduced. As I move on, low carbon transportation... and this is something that we are encouraging. I know that it has not been moving in our country as fast as we want it to, or around the world as a matter of fact, but it is something to which the *Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy* speaks. It also speaks to incentives. I know there are already some tax incentives with regard to moving away from fossil engines to electric engines.

The fourth pillar is to align with global climate and biodiversity goals. United Nations (UN) Sustainable

Development Goals, nationally, determine contributions. Our contribution is keeping our forest intact. We have no question. We are doing that – protected areas and, of course, net zero by 2050.

The world is saying to Guyana, and a few countries like us that have a forest coverage like we do, that it wants us to keep our forests intact; that it wants us to have clean energy and that it wants us to keep our temperature increase below 1.5 degrees Celsius. We are saying, yes, we can save our forest. In retrospect, the same countries that are shouting to us and saying we should keep our forest, they are cutting down their forest and they are building factories and they are building skyscrapers and they are developing their countries. They are shouting to us and to other small countries to keep our forests intact. We are willing to keep our forest intact. That is what the LCDS 2030 speaks to. What we are saying further is that we must be compensated for it; that we must be compensated for keeping our forest intact. We have no problem. We are not going to cut down our forest, we are not going to cut it down and build factories, skyscrapers, and condominiums. We are going to keep our forest because we have other land that we could use for agriculture and for other developmental purposes. The simple thing is that we must be compensated for keeping our forest intact because we need to ensure that there is alternative livelihood or that there are other economic activities that we could take to our Indigenous communities and other communities which depend on mining, which depend on logging, and which depend on the forest. If we are going to keep it intact, then there must be alternative livelihoods. From where are we going to get those funds? We are saying that we must be compensated for our forest.

In a nutshell, the *Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy* is a comprehensive document that speaks to the sustainable exploration/production of our minerals and of our forest. It speaks to adding value to our raw materials. This is a direction in which we will have to head. Already, we are preparing the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) and the stakeholders in the forestry sector, for the need for us to move towards downstream activities. We need to move toward valued added because there will be a time when we will harvest less, but we still want the sector to be productive. The only way we could harvest less from our forest but still be productive is by ensuring that we have downstream activities, we process, or we have value added products, rather than exporting logs, only. We have started and this document speaks to that, Mr. Speaker.

[Hon. Member displays document]

That is why it is so comprehensive. This is something towards which we have already started to gear our stakeholders in the forestry sector.

In conclusion, I want to fully support, like my colleagues and the Deputy Speaker, the *Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy*. I believe all Guyana, all Guyanese should or must support such a strategy because this will be our second new stream of revenue coming into our country – oil and gas being the first new one and the revenue from our forest. The revenue from the forest will be the second new revenue stream that will come into our country and will be utilised to ensure that every Guyanese could be afforded a better life. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

5.09 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister of Natural Resources. Now to conclude, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh.

Dr. Singh (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be extremely brief in concluding. I will simply say that, under the original *Low Carbon Development Strategy*, Guyana earned more per capita from forest climate services than any other country in the world. The LCDS 2030 provides the basis for us to resume a similar position and to generate a stream of revenue earned in exchange for the climate services that our standing forests are providing, globally, and a stream of revenue that can and will be deployed in pursuit of an accelerated development agenda along a low carbon path, but, more particularly, which will benefit every Guyanese in keeping with our President's vision of 'One Guyana'.

With those concluding remarks, I thank all who contributed to the debate, my colleagues on this side of the House and, of course, the Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly for their very insightful, informative, and instructive contributions to the debate. This is an issue on which volumes can be written and much can be said, but I believe we, notwithstanding the absence of the Opposition, had a very informative debate. I want to thank everyone who contributed to it and for the support that they lent to this motion.

I now have the honour of formally moving the motion that was published on Notice Paper No. 215. I do not believe that it is necessary for me to read the motion. It has been circulated and it is very clear in its language. I move that this National Assembly approve the motion entitled:

“Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030”

Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the second suspension.

Sitting suspended at 5.11 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.33 p.m.

Hon. Members, kindly take your seats. We will now proceed with the second reading of the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2022 – Bill No. 16/2022 published on 20th July, 2022.

Bills – Second and Third Readings

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]

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure to rise and speak in support of and move the eventual enactment of the Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill 2022 – Bill No. 16/2022. This Bill serves two purposes. The first of which I will dispose of relatively quickly and the second I will elaborate on a bit more significantly.

The first is to do some minor tidying up and streamlining of various reporting and filing dates which, over the course of time, have been found to be either inconsistent with practice or onerous in implementation. In the interest of simplifying and streamlining and easing the taxpayer experience with the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), we took the opportunity because of some other substantive provisions that we are enacting today. We took the opportunity and advantage, as we are doing amendments to the Income Tax Act and other Acts, to do that minor tidying up.

The more substantive purpose of this Bill is to bring into law certain measures that were announced by Government to bring relief to the mining industry. It would be recalled that a

few months ago, I believe it was in May of this year, the Hon. Vice-President met with members of the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GGDMA) who represent small-and medium-scale miners in Guyana. He was joined by our distinguished colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources. In their engagement with the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association, a number of issues of concern were raised. In order to ensure the continued competitiveness of the gold mining industry, Government indicated that it would bring certain reliefs to the industry, specifically by removing the 10% Tributors Tax – I am going to come back to that in a minute – and also reducing the withholding tax that is paid from the current sliding scale that goes up to 3.5%, reducing the maximum rate to 2.5%.

Essentially, this Bill seeks to enact those measures. There were other measures that were agreed to such as the removal of Value Added Tax (VAT) on lubricating oil. It would be recalled that was done by Order, and that Order was tabled in the National Assembly not so long ago. I want to situate this Bill in a particular historic context because it was our predecessors in Office, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), which, in the first instance, doubled the Tributors Tax from 10% to 20% and only when the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), then in Opposition, highlighted the devastating impact that this increase would have on the gold mining industry that they eventually relented and reverted from 20% back to 10% in 2018. We are now seeking to remove that 10% altogether. I say this because this was a measure, amongst the several punitive measures, which was implemented by the APNU/AFC in Government with no concern whatsoever for the impact that such measures would have had on industry, on production and on people.

It is a matter of public knowledge, now, the callous attitude they displayed towards the sugar industry. Having effectively closed that industry, bringing the industry *to its knees*, starving it of resources, closing several estates and causing more than 7,000 persons, who were direct employees, to be forced to the breadline, putting them out of work, impoverishing, in *one fell swoop*, their families and devastating their communities. The callous attitude of the APNU/AFC, though perhaps most visibly and tangibly felt in the sugar industry, was not confined to the sugar industry. It would be recalled that, under their stewardship, the bauxite operations in the Berbice River were closed. They made absolutely no effort to contain the difficult circumstances that were being created for the company and, indeed, actively encouraged the harassment that was meted out to the company which eventually led to the withdrawal of the

operator in the Berbice River, leaving in excess of 500 bauxite workers, in the Berbice River, out of work.

It would be recalled the several hardship measures that were implemented in the gold mining industry, not only this Tributors Tax and increase in tax rates, but also measures such as introduction of VAT on heavy equipment which is so critically needed in the industry. Anyone with a modicum of familiarity with the gold mining industry would know that heavy equipment is essential to the operations of this industry. They slapped VAT on heavy equipment which is critical for gold mining operations and forestry operations and so many other aspects and facets of productive activity. They, unconscionably, put VAT on heavy equipment, increased Tributors tax, and increased the sliding scale without a second thought to what that would mean to the competitiveness and even the viability of small-and medium-scale gold miners. In fact, it is widely known amongst the small-and medium-scale gold mining operators that they came to a point during the 2015 to 2020 period when they were virtually unable to operate and produce because of the unfriendly and hostile policies that were implemented by the APNU/AFC.

I gave only the sugar, bauxite and gold mining examples. One could literally take any productive sector and demonstrate the hostile posture that was adopted by the APNU/AFC towards the private sector, towards production and, therefore, towards job creation and towards the people of this country. Consistent with our commitment, even while we were in Opposition, we recognised how important it is to nurture a growing and competitive non-oil economy. The gold mining industry has served this country well. It has served this country well. For many years, it has been the largest foreign exchange earner in this country. It employs, directly and indirectly, perhaps more than 20,000 persons who are dependent on this industry for their livelihood. Entire communities in the hinterland of Guyana are dependent on this industry.

6.45 p.m.

Our commitment is to ensure a competitive non-oil economy, as I said earlier; our commitment is to restore and then maintain and further enhance the environment for doing business and ensuring that there is an environment which was attractive and conducive to doing business; creating the conditions that are facilitative and encouraging to private investment, job creation and income generations. These are things to which we are strongly committed as a Government. This Bill represents yet another tangible demonstrable

manifestation of that commitment. It is against that background that we have brought this Bill to bring into Law the measures that were announced to support the Gold Mining Industry and, by extension, the people who work in that industry to ensure that their jobs are preserved and that more jobs are created in that sector.

With those uncharacteristically few words, it gives me great pleasure to commend this Bill to the House and I believe its passage at the appropriate time. Thank you very much, Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, I now call on the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Vickram Bharrat.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support my colleague to have the successful passage to the amendment to the Fiscal Enactment Bill 2022- Bill No. 16/2022. It speaks to simple amendments; however, the simple amendments will have significant impact on the lives of our people; it will have significant impact on the lives of our miners, in particular; the mining community; and, more importantly, the Indigenous communities which depends heavily on mining. It must be noted that the amendment to this Act would benefit, directly, small-and medium-scale miners in Guyana. I want to say that small-and medium-scale mining in Guyana is only done by Guyanese miners. Large scale mining is done by foreign investors, but small-and medium-scale mining activities is done by Guyanese and Guyanese miners. It is not only the mining community but also the spinoffs that would come from the extra income or the extra money that would be going back into the communities, and into the businesses for reinvestment and recapitalisation.

Since we took Office, a number of measures was taken by Our Government to incentivise the mining sector. This is all part of our promise as a Government to ensure that we continue to grow the non-oil sectors. That is why you would have seen the amount of emphasis and investment we are making in the non-oil sector, particularly agriculture, so that we are food secure – logging, mining, tourism, manufacturing and the other sectors that are important and that had always been with us and contributed to where we are today before oil and gas. This evening is one such example of our Government's commitment to the miners and to the mining sector. Added to this, Mr. Speaker, you would recall that there were a lot of incentives that were given in the previous budgets. We have reversed a number of

hardship measures imposed by the APNU/AFC Government on the mining and the mining community. Today, we can boast as, probably, one of the only countries in the world that there is no tax on fuel, because we recognise the rising cost of fuel and other commodities, which is mainly due to the effects of COVID-19; the shipping cost; the shortage of basic supplies around the world and, to compound that, the war between Russia and Ukraine has added to the increase cost in fuel, resulting in high cost of other commodities. Having recognised that as a Government, we reacted by removing the tax completely on fuel, benefiting not only the mining sector, but all sectors.

Added to that, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), in 2022, alone would be spending over \$2.2 billion to maintain hinterland roads and infrastructure. You know the weather has not been too kind to us over the last two years and we continue to expend large sums of money to ensure that our structure and infrastructure, which happens to be one of the greatest challenges for the mining and logging sector, are kept in good condition and is passable by miners and loggers. I know that the Ministry of Public Works are also expending billions of dollars to support our effort in ensuring that there is connectivity between the hinterland communities, coastland communities, the mining area and the mining districts and the logging Districts. This will continue because this is a commitment by our Government to ensure that we upgrade, maintain and ensure that there are new roads to mining land and to forest concessions so that they are accessible.

Last year 2021, we would have conducted a lottery and auction because the cry amongst small- scale miners has always been the availability of land. As a result of that we answered the call in the year 2021 and 202 Guyanese small miners were awarded small blocks on which to mine. It was their first time owning a mining block. We know one of the issues in the mining community is that small miners are being used as prospectors by the larger miners. They are placed on lands to work on and as soon as they find gold they are then removed from the land. The cry by small miners have always been to have or access their own land to do mining, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government answered that call in the year 2021 and 202 small miners in Guyana are beneficiaries of mining blocks in all of the mining districts around the country. What we are working towards, in 2022/2023, is to ensure that all of these blocks and other blocks, too, are accessible. It makes no sense to allocate mining blocks or forestry concessions and

they are not accessible, so we are expending large sums of money to ensure that these lands are accessible.

Dr. Singh would have mentioned the removal of VAT on heavy duty equipment which not only benefited the mining sector but also the agriculture sector and the forestry sector. The removal of tax and the reduction of duty on the 4x4 four door pickup trucks. The removal of VAT and the removal of duty on all-terrain vehicle (ATV), and the removal of VAT on lube oil are all incentives that we would have ensure that we extend to the mining sector and other sectors so that there would have greater productivity in these sectors in keeping with our focus and our plan to ensure that we incentivise the non-oil sector or use proceeds from the oil sector to ensure that we grow the non-oil sector. What we are also doing is to ensure that there is increase monitoring. What we found in the forestry and mining sector, when we took over in 2020, is that there was little or no monitoring in the interior regions. We rehabilitated a number of field stations. To date, between mining and logging, we have close to 60 field stations around the country with almost 500 field workers doing physical monitoring in our interior regions. This has contributed, significantly, towards the reduction and possibly elimination of illegal activities with regard to mining and logging in the interior regions.

What we are working on, further, is to ensure that GGMC... and I know there is always a stain when referring to GGMC. We have heard it several times in several districts that there is a perception that GGMC is a corrupt agency and that it is not professional enough. We have taken on the task to ensure we professionalise the operations and the manner in which people are treated at the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, also to remove that perception that it is a corrupt agency. We all know that temptations are something to which humans tend to get weak. We are working to ensure that we can eliminate whatever corrupt act there may be. What we found in August, 2020, when we took over, in the mining sector, and which has been a challenge for us, is that it had almost 20 thousand unverified claims in the system. This has contributed to a number for court cases towards a number of disputes among our small miners, affecting our productivity in the sector. We have embarked on a special project to ensure that we verify these claims and do so in a timely manner. To date, after two years, we have almost verified half of those claims; almost 10,000 claims we would have verified in two years. We are hoping that, in another two years, we will verify the other 10,000 so that we can get to a state where, when claims are made, we can do almost immediate verification to eliminate the issues and the

conflicts that arise among miners over land and mining blocks.

These are some of the works that are being done presently and some of the incentives that the Government has given to the mining sector. As I mentioned, mining is important to us. Mining is the second highest contribution to our gross domestic product (GDP). As Dr. Singh mentioned, they are thousands of Guyanese that are employed in the mining sector. We know that the oil and gas sector is not labour intensive; it is more capital intensive, but our traditional productive sectors are more labour intensive. Agriculture, mining and logging sectors are sectors that employ hundreds of thousands of Guyanese directly and indirectly. That is why we have been very keen and ensuring that we continue to grow these sectors and to not make the same mistake as other oil producing countries would have, as we are seeing today. I want to state in closing, that, in the mining sector, we are gearing mining towards a situation or towards a path in which we can have sustainable responsible mining – maybe, at some point in time, mining without Mercury. We would have sign up to the Minamata Convention on Mercury which states what we would work towards reducing and, possibly, eliminating the use of mining in some point of time, which is in keeping with our *Low Carbon of Development Strategy 2030* which we just pass in this National Assembly.

With those few words, I wish to support my colleague in seeking the support of this House to pass the amendment to the Fiscal Enactment (No. 2) Bill 2022- Bill No. 16/2022. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with the Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, you may respond

Dr. Singh (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Nothing more remains to be said. I think the case has been abundantly made and, Sir, I wish to move the Fiscal Enactment (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2022- Bill No. 16/2022 be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Members.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

7.00 p.m.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill 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]

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, very much, Sir. It is my distinguished task this evening to present the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill 2022 – Bill No. 15/2022 for its second reading.

Still fresh in the minds of Guyanese is the agony to which we were subjected to some years ago in relation to the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) amendments, while the APNU/AFC enjoyed a one seat majority in the Opposition. Time and time again, we came to this National Assembly to present bills of national importance, upon which the financial infrastructure of our country depended, and they rejected those bills without any basis whatsoever, other than to score politics points, catapulting our financial structure into chaos and causing sanctions to be imposed on our commercial institutions for no reason whatsoever. I am sure when our population hears the name of this Bill, those memories will come rushing back. Perhaps it is not without significance that, today, we are bringing this amendment and there is no one on the other side, save Mr. Shuman, who was not part of that diabolical bunch to which I make reference.

This Bill is simple yet significant. The Bill seeks to pave the way to facilitate Guyana’s joining of an international body called the Egmont Group, in order to implement recommendations that devolve upon us to implement, under the international arrangements under which we operate in the AML/CFT structure. Guyana will be subjected to a peer review through a mutual assessment process during the first quarter of next year. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to implement all of our outstanding obligations and to ready our fiscal and financial structures so that we could be prepared for that review. Among the recommendations that

we are to implement, to ready us for that review, is to ensure that we join this institution called the Egmont Group, which is a united body of 167 Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) across the globe that provides a platform for the secure exchange of financial intelligence and expertise to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

In June, 1995, the representatives of several state bodies and international organisations gathered at Egmont/Arenberg Palace in Brussels, Belgium, to discuss money laundering and ways to overcome this global problem. As a result of the meeting, the Egmont Group was formed. Initially, it was an informal organisation of state bodies, united by a common goal of strengthening corporations and information exchange, for combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism. Since its inception, the Egmont Group has grown from a small group to 167 FIUs. Through the charter, the Egmont Group established a permanent secretariat, headquartered in Toronto, Canada, in July, 2007. With the publication of the revised 2012 Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations in 2013, the Egmont Group produced a complementary set of documents which are interlinked and reference relevant FATF recommendations. They include a revised Egmont Group Charter, 2013, the Egmont Group Principles for Information Exchange, and a new operational guidance for FIUs. These publications by the Group serve as a guide for jurisdictions in the establishment, structure, and operations of the FIUs before consideration is given for membership within the Group.

For the purpose of implementation, Guyana falls into the group of countries that are considered part of the Americas. We, in the Caribbean, form part of the Caribbean, South America, North America and Latin America group of countries. All countries in this hemisphere have already signed on or changed their laws to accommodate membership to the Egmont Group. The only countries that are left, and are yet to join, are Haiti, Montserrat and Suriname. Of course, with the passage of this Bill, Guyana will join. The Bill essentially lays the statutory framework for our entry into membership and then lays down the infrastructure that would allow information received from that platform, or information that we give to that platform, to be disseminated. Now, it is all based upon reciprocity. So once one country joins on to that global organisation then it can request information from any of the 167 countries and *vice versa*. The legislation across the 167 countries is couched in such a way that it does not create a mandatory obligation, obviously, recognising the principle of

sovereignty. Sovereignty includes the right not to disclose information that may be peculiar to national defence and the security of a particular nation. While we are members of this international group, Guyana, and every other nation state that is a member, retains that independence of refusing to furnish information, if it is felt that to do were to jeopardise the national or security interest of its country. That safeguard is built-in in the entire infrastructure that governs this organisation.

The Bill also lays down a network of how the information, once received by the FIU, is to be disseminated to the various organs that form part of the AML/CFT structure of our country. If the information, for example, is requested from the banking sector, then the Bill tells one how the information moves from the banking sector to the supervisory authority of that sector, then to the FIU for onward transmission to the Egmont Group where the information will be processed. If it passes the litmus test, then the information that is being requested will be filtered through the established channels that the Bill seeks to establish, as well as the protocols that would govern the arrangements among the Egmont Group members. The Bill also authorises our FIU and other important agencies within the AML/CFT structure to sign on to any international agreement or international treaty that our membership of the Egmont Group may require us to do. That is also a part of the Bill. This is a regulatory requirement. It is important that we implement it into our legislative AML/CFT landscape, so that we continue to prepare for our assessment while, at the same time, we continue to upgrade, update, and modernise our AML/CFT structure to bring it into conformity with the realities of the international organisations, whose regulatory framework we have to comply with.

This is a very simple Bill. I do not think that there is any basis for anyone to object to it. It advances Guyana's AML/CFT structure. It brings us as part of that global organisation established to combat money laundering and the countering and financing of terrorism across the global. It gives me great pleasure in asking this honourable Assembly to support this Bill. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Attorney General. In my notes, I have no other contributor to the debate. So I will put the question, unless you want to have a minute to wrap up from your presentation.

Mr. Nandlall: No.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

7.15 p.m.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members I understand that the other Government business will be deferred to the next sitting of the National Assembly. Hon. Minister Teixeira.

Ms. Teixeira: I think you misunderstood, Sir. We will deal with the Industrial Hemp Bill 2022, Mental Health Protection and Promotion Bill 2022 and Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2022. The other Bills: Suicide Prevention Bill 2022; Restorative Justice Bill 2022; and the Bail Bill 2022, will be deferred to when we return from recess.

Mr. Speaker: My apologies.

Industrial Hemp Bill 2022 – Bill No. 10/2022

A Bill entitled:

“AN ACT to provide for the cultivating and manufacturing of industrial hemp and hemp related products; to provide 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]

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the Industrial Hemp Bill 2022, Bill No. 10/2022 published on 17th May, 2022, for the second time. Guyana is projected to attain unprecedented growth rate, which no other country in the world is currently projected to achieve in 2022. In keeping with such growth, our Government will continue to provide viable business opportunities to the people of this nation.

The tabling of this Bill is a timely one, as Guyana recently hosted an Agri-Investment Forum and Exposition in collaboration with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM),

with the aim to invest in ‘Vision 25’ by 2025, to diversify our agricultural sector for the increase of trade opportunities. Hemp is a high-value commodity with endless potential for development. This increases interest in the cultivation of industrial hemp as a potential source of diversifying our economy and providing new jobs in the agricultural and industrial sectors as well as to develop alternative sources of fibre. Our Government is giving the agricultural and industrial sectors the opportunity to grow and exploit industrial hemp in a controlled manner. We are here today to align our laws to benefit from opportunities in the cultivation of this important product. Guyana, with its vast expanses of rich, arable, well-drained land, is ideally suited for hemp production.

Industrial hemp can be successfully grown on a wide variety of soil, especially our soil, which fits well with crop rotation for crops such as wheat, corn, and soya bean among others. With Guyana currently being a producer of corn and soya, and experimenting with wheat, the production of hemp would be collectively explored with a view of realizing optimum yields to satisfy local, regional and international markets.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, hemp has multiple uses such as clothing, construction materials, paper, healthy food, medicinal value, *et cetera*, which will create new opportunities for Guyanese. With this legislation, Guyana will be poised to tap into the global industrial hemp market. The global industrial hemp market sites were valued at \$4.9 billion in 2019 and are projected to reach \$10.6 billion by 2025 and \$18.6 billion by 2027. Apart from bringing in valuable foreign exchange to the economy, it will create significant employment opportunities by catering to an increasingly growing and highly desired market demand, while at the same time, providing a relatively higher profit margin compared to other traditional commodities. In a typical case taken in Australia for instance, the total cost of cultivating one hectare of hemp, inclusive of all costs up to harvesting and processing, amounts to US\$4,140 with a gross return of US\$12,075, allowing for a gross profit of US\$7,935. As pointed out by His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, the hemp industry is not only about hemp cultivation but is about the processing and value-added facilities that can be established in Guyana, which will create jobs and generate high returns and investment.

To diversify our industrial sector, we can start many new industries with the cultivation of this one crop. Hemp can be grown as a renewable source for raw material that can be incorporated into thousands of products. The global market

for hemp consists of more than 25,000 products in nine sub-markets. Let us examine one of these sub-markets – paper. One of the first uses of hemp was paper. The market size of the global paper and pulp industry in 2020 was US\$349.18 billion. Furthermore, the hemp paper market is expecting market growth at a rate of 36.9% in the forecast period of 2022 to 2029. In Guyana, this will be the birth of a new whole industry. We, in CARICOM, imported US\$356 million in paper and pulp in 2021. We can tap into this market. More than this, there is the environmental side too. It takes 10,000 acres of hemp to produce as much paper as 40,500 acres of forest. One acre of hemp, grown in a single season, yields as much paper as/up to 4 acres of trees. More than that, it reduces deforestation and there are fewer chemicals in the manufacturing of paper.

Mr. Speaker, industrial hemp development is not new to the countries of the world. There are more than 30 countries that cultivated industrial hemp, with China being among the countries with the highest production and export of textile products made of hemp and its seeds. The European Union also has an active industrial hemp market. Allow me to explore just another country that legalised its industry and its path to development. In Canada, industrial hemp production was legalized in 1998, and back then there were many unknowns about the hemp production and limited market opportunities for hemp products. Today, Canada is a leader in innovations with a Canadian industry of C\$387 million, exporting about 30% of that, and with approximately 4,000 jobs in this industry. Further, there is multiple economic significance of a new industry. Most of what I mentioned are direct or indirect economic contributions where the revenue or operating expenditure are from the industry operators or suppliers. More than that, there is induced economic contribution which is associated with the spending of wages and salaries earned because of the industrial hemp industry activity. Looking over the horizon, the possibility exists when the industry, Government, and the researcher share a common vision of an extraordinary opportunity. This is the time when Guyana is about to take off. We are now bringing new industries to our country and, this Government, our responsibility is to continue to explore options where we will bring more opportunities to the working people of our country, especially the productive sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is providing the enabling legislation for all to benefit and invest. This promising industry is yet to emerge but imagine the possibility it will bring to our economy and country. The popular demand for hemp, both from a production and a consumption

perspective, is by no means insignificant. Hemp production in Guyana is a win-win situation for all the players involved – for the grower, it will be a source of income generation and job creation; for the consumers, it could have significant benefits; and for the broader economy, it will be a valuable source of foreign exchange, especially in the context of economic diversification. As promised by His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Guyana is now moving to decriminalize hemp production while creating a viable alternative for commerce. This new legislation will decriminalize the use of industrial hemp once the tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) level or content remains less than 0.3%. While we are setting up this legislation, at the same time, we are encouraging persons to deviate from crime.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to highlight some of the main areas of this Bill. Part II defines industrial hemp to categorize and distinguish hemp from marijuana. As such, the Bill will remove the restrictions on the domestic cultivation of industrial hemp. This clearly shows that the Government is committed to taking steps to transform the lives of its citizens. However, this new industry will require close monitoring and regulation.

Part II, clauses 3 and 4 of the Bill creates a regulatory regime through the establishment of a corporate body, the Guyana industrial hemp regulatory authority, and the constitution of a governing board to oversee operations. To ensure that consideration is given to public health, safety, agriculture, and commerce, various stakeholders will make up the board, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory, and the Private Sector Commission. The board will be chaired by a nominee of the Minister of Agriculture; this is set out in clause 4(2).

Clause 6(1) of the Bill sets out the functions of the new authority inclusive of considering applications; issuing, varying, suspending and revoking licenses; determining the number of licenses to be issued considering any adverse impact; prescribing quotas for the cultivation of industrial hemp in collaboration with the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit; monitor, supervise and control industrial hemp or related products; ensuring there is compliance with this legislation.

7.30 p.m.

Developing standards and codes of practice for licensees in collaboration with the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS); collaborating national, regional and international

organisations and matters relating to industrial hemp; advising the Minister on matters relating to industrial hemp for medicinal health, scientific research or any other purpose; and establishing a hemp register. Training will be provided for interested persons. To ensure the development of a viable hemp industry, the board can enter into any agreement, including cultivating, manufacturing or training agreements – clause 33. This is indicative of the commitment by the Government to have persons trained in every aspect of hemp cultivation and to ensure maximum productivity and long-term sustainability of the industry.

A part of the regulatory regime, Part III of the Bill, creates a licencing scheme whereby interested persons can apply to the authority. Once a person is desirous of cultivating or manufacturing hemp commercially, all he or she has to do is to apply, once above 18 years of age, is of sound mind, and is not legally bankrupt; subject to clause 13 of the Bill, in the case of an individual, he or she is habitually a resident of Guyana, and in the case of a company, it must be incorporated or registered in accordance with the laws of Guyana.

Clause 12(1) of the Bill states:

“A person shall not cultivate or manufacture industrial hemp and hemp related products or conduct research on industrial hemp or any activity concerning or related to industrial hemp without a licence issued by the Authority under this Act.”

Clause 12(5) states:

“A person who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence...”

That is, anyone caught cultivating, manufacturing, and conducting research or any other activity related to industrial hemp, without a licence, will be liable to a fine of \$500,000 and to imprisonment for one year.

Clause 14(2) provides for the facilitating of licences. The board will consider issues of public health, safety, agriculture, commerce, and the orderly development of the sector. Successful applicants would be issued with either a cultivation or manufacturing licence or both.

Clause 14(3) provides that an application would not be considered unless it is accompanied by a criminal background report.

Clause 15(1) sets out the procedure for persons or companies applying for a cultivation licence.

“(a) in case of an individual, is habitually resident in Guyana;

(b) in the case of a company, in incorporated or registered according to the laws of Guyana;”

A licence can also be issued to a person who owns, leases or has entered into a sharecropper agreement for the purpose of cultivating hemp; provides proof of financial capability and has an established seed or crop supply, whether individually or jointly with others, to undertake the terms and conditions of the licence to cultivate industrial hemp. As such, this legislation compliments our local content legislation.

Clause 15(2) of the Bill provides conditions to ensure that persons who get into hemp production are serious about production. Interested persons will be required to submit an industrial hemp planting, propagation and harvesting plan for approval to the board. The board will be tasked with monitoring the plan’s implementation.

Clause 15(4) of the Bill provides a condition that a person licenced to cultivate hemp shall not commence the planting of any seed or plant or harvest any plant unless a sample of the seed is analysed to ascertain that it confirms with the prescribed THC content allowed under this Bill. The board will create guidelines for testing and sampling to be done.

Clause 31 of the Bill sets out that the Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory, an independent laboratory, or any other designated body by the Minister, will carry out such testing and sampling.

Clause 18(2) of the Bill provides that the cultivation licence would be valid for three years and will include activities such as possession, planting, propagating, harvesting, transporting, distributing and selling of industrial hemp. This licence is renewable.

Clause 16(2) of the Bill provides that manufacturing licences would be issued for 15 years and shall be renewable for a further term of 15 years as determined by the board. A manufacturing licence will include activities such as processing, manufacturing, possessing, buying, selling, distributing, importing and exporting industrial hemp seed and hemp related products, except for the cultivation of hemp. This, again, is an ideal opportunity for the private sector to come on board.

Clause 17(1) of the Bill provides that the board will be tasked with promptly reviewing all applications. As such, approval, renewal, or refusal of licences, shall be done within 30 days of receiving the application.

Clause 21 of the Bill sets out that a licence may be refused where the applicant does not comply with the provisions of the licence; is in contravention of the legislation; the issuance of licences would be injurious to health, public safety or commerce; the issuance would impact negatively on agriculture; and the cultivation of hemp is not done in a designated geographical area. Additionally, a licence for renewal shall be refused where there is an outstanding payment or obligation on the lease, mortgage or sharecropper agreement. However, clause 17(4) provides that a person who was refused a licence may appeal to the Minister, who may confirm the refusal or issue a directive for the board to reconsider the application.

An important feature of this legislation is zoning. Clause 23 of the Bill sets out that there will be designated geographical areas for the cultivation and manufacturing of hemp. In designating such areas, consideration shall be given to the suitability of the area, the risk of diversion, the risk of contamination, economic decentralisation and the proximity to educational institutions, public places and residential areas frequented by children. This is to ensure that any negative impact will be mitigated. As such, prospective locations that will be identified will have significant amount of acreage. Vulnerable communities with unemployment issues would be targeted.

Clause 24 establishes and creates an industrial hemp register with all the particulars of persons issued with licences and the types of licences that were issued. This is important for the development and growth, as well as the proper monitoring of the industrial hemp sub-sector.

For the production of the industrial hemp seed, clause 25 of the Bill provides that the production and multiplication of the industrial hemp seed will be done through the Seeds Act. This will allow for diversification and improvement of agriculture produce in Guyana, in accordance with the current drive of the Government.

Clause 27 provides that authorised persons will be employed to enforce the provisions of this legislation. Such will include persons coming from the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act, the Plant Protection Act, the Police Act, the Crops and Livestock Registration

Act, the Environmental Protection Act and any other person the board deems fit.

Additionally, clause 28 (1) of the Bill provides for special powers of testing, sampling, and analysis entry. Search, examination, intercept and seizure will be given to those persons once a search warrant has been issued by a magistrate.

Clause 28(5) expresses that once an investigation is being conducted, an authorised officer shall furnish a written report to the Board. The Board will then inform and guide the Minister on the results and recommendations of any investigation.

Clause 30(4) of the Bill highlights that the Minister may, by notification in the *Gazette*, designate any duly qualified person as an analyst for the purposes of conducting tests and analysis of any hemp crop, seed, or any other industrial hemp products.

Clause 31 outlines:

“The Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory, an independent laboratory or any other body designated by the Minister shall, for the purposes of verification, test industrial hemp, seed and hemp related products before it is planted, propagated, harvested, processed, manufactured, distributed, imported or exported.”

Clause 35 of the Bill sets out:

“The Minister may by regulations, regulate and control the advertising and labelling of industrial hemp or hemp related products, including the form and content of advertisements and labels which shall not include the use of industrial hemp as a psychotropic substance.”

Clause 37 of the Bill sets out that individuals and corporate bodies – their directors, managers, secretaries or officers – once proven to have committed an offence, with the consent, can be liable for breaches under this legislation. Penalty under this legislation will range between \$200,000 and \$500,000 and imprisonment for one year. To ensure that Government keeps up to date with the development of the hemp industry, all licensees will be required to submit an annual status report of activities. Annual returns are also to be submitted by the 31st March of the following year. The failure to submit will result in a fine of \$200,000. It is expected that as the hemp industry develops there will be a

need to regulate areas relating to hemp. As such, to give effect to any provision under this new legislation, according to clause 38, the Minister may make regulations, inclusive of minimum and maximum acreage to be used in hemp production, the form and manner to cultivate, manufacture, buy, sell, import and export industrial hemp; regulate designated areas; prescribe fees; regulate the use of premises, vehicles or equipment associated with industrial hemp; and regulate the sale, storage, supply, transportation and the disposal or destruction of industrial hemp.

Mr. Speaker, through this legislation, our Government is once again responding to the needs of a large section of prospective farmers who would now be gainfully employed. Additionally, it is expected that this legislation would develop industries that would further boost Guyana's economy. Presently, we have already started the diversification and the promotion of our agriculture sector. We have commenced the production of crops that will help us to reduce our food import Bill and save much-needed foreign exchange which, in turn, will be spent for the benefit of the people of this country. For example, we will be moving from 125 acres of corn and soya in 2021 to approximately 4,000 acres in 2022. We have already started the production of high-value crops for young people, and we have seen a number of young graduates included in the production of these high-value crops. This is as a result of the vision of our Government and President.

Today, the entire Caribbean Community is looking toward Guyana for leadership and guidance in reducing the food import bill to achieve 'Vision 25' by 2025. Under this visionary Government, we will continue to bring new industries and technologies to our beautiful country, Guyana. We have the expertise within Government and the people of our country to produce new crops. Guyana is well known for being innovative when promoting new crops and new plants. This is a good opportunity for the entire country. The growing of industrial hemp is a genuine agricultural alternative for farmers, particularly those with small land holdings, as the return can be quite large. Also, hemp is a genuine way of replacing some of the logging of forests that is currently taking place as it would enable us to maintain some of the forest bases, which is in keeping with our Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). I must say that I am quite enthusiastic and excited about the opportunities that will be presented to the industry through this Bill. It offers some further diversity to our existing agricultural base and will create further industries and opportunities for wealth. I wish to state that this Bill, which will create the legal

framework for the cultivation of hemp, is yet another necessary intervention by the Government to provide economic opportunities for Guyanese. With an excellent track record of advancing the lives of our people by creating enabling environments, the PPP/C Government has been in overdrive since August, 2020, to develop our country on all fronts. Agriculture was not placed on the back burner. As a matter of fact, since taking Office in 2020, agriculture regained its prominence, ensuring conditions for farmers are improved despite global challenges.

For many years, agriculture has been the backbone of our country's economy. It was cast aside by the APNU/AFC Government thereby demoralising our hardworking farmers. The PPP/C Government's investment in agriculture shows its commitment to and the importance of the sector. When agriculture grows, the economy grows; when the economy grows, the lives of our people are improved. The cultivation of hemp will create employment which creates opportunities for advancement. That is what is important – the welfare of our people. That is what our Government is about – people. This Bill further demonstrates our commitment to the people. Mr. Speaker, with this, I commend this Bill for a second reading. Thank you. *[Applause]*

7.45 p.m.

Mr. Shuman: Let me commend the Hon. Minister of Agriculture for tailoring this Bill and for bringing it to this House for a second reading. This afternoon, as I start off this presentation, in the context of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), I am acutely aware, and I am sure that the country and the Indigenous peoples' are acutely aware of the importance of such a Bill. In reducing our dependency on harvesting our trace in the forest, the diversification of our agricultural sector, the diversification of our productive sector, the decriminalisation of hemp in itself....

[Technical difficulties encountered]

...is a most welcomed piece of legislation in many communities. I will use my community as an example, Region 4, Pakuri. It is a community that is blessed with vast savannah lands that we have not been able to monetise. We have tried our outmost to harvest lumber but then we have over harvested causing a lot of our animals and fish food, per se, to leave our community.

This Bill really, now, permits our community to reduce our dependency on forests or forests products. It permits us, on an opportunity to diversify our economy, so that we could

now benefit from something that I think would give us a lot more returns than the one used first which we have. There are some things that I was hoping that the Hon. Minister would have spoken about. For example, the reduction and the dependency of cement because, in Canada, some tremendous progress was made in diversifying away from cement where hempcrete is being used to build buildings, to build houses and to do a variety of things. That itself would sequester carbon for over 100 years, just hempcrete in itself.

Once again, I strongly believe and support this Bill because I believe that it is long overdue for this country. Looking at what Canada did and having lived there for a number of years, I understand the impact that it has on the economy. I understand the impact it has on the lives of people. What I will ask the Hon. Minister to do in this process, because all cannot be written in legislation but though the administrative process, is to ensure that Indigenous communities have equal access to all the facilities and all the mechanisms inclusive of applying or the application process for licences. Also, that those things be dealt with administratively so that they could also benefit equitably from this Bill. I understand that not everything could go into law but there are some administrative hurdles. I hope we could find way to address those.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture, I take this opportunity to appeal to the select committee to which the so-called marijuana bill had been sent for them to have an urgent meeting to deconflict some of these areas. I am sure that there are people out there who are sitting and thinking of this as an opportunity because they want to cultivate. How do we not trap these people and say that you are doing something illegal? It is to work towards decriminalisation, not entirely legalisation. I think that it is a practice and we will see a lot of persons wanting to engage in. How do we ensure that they do not fall through the cracks and fall into the prison systems? I hope that at some point after the recess, we will have an opportunity to revisit that discussion and to see how we could have that Bill to be navigated through this National Assembly, once again, to maybe reduce some labourous components of this Bill.

I do not know if the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance would outstrip me on how succinct one could be but, with those short comments, I would say that I support this Bill. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Deputy. You took five minutes. Our next contributor is the Hon. Minister of Foreign

Affairs and International Co-operation, Mr. Hugh Todd who is online.

Mr. Todd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me commend His Excellency, the President, for his stewardship and leadership in Guyana's economic transformation in the 21st Century. Allow me to also thank the Attorney General, the Minister responsible for the Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, the Minister responsible for Agriculture and their team for putting forward a very comprehensive and robust Bill which is progressive and forward looking – the Industrial Hemp Bill 2022. In a globally competitive environment, nation states are responsible for their own survival. I think it is commendable that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government is presenting this Bill to the National Assembly. Given the fact that we understand how to take advantage of our comparative advantage, our history shows that we have always had comparable advantage in agriculture.

The revenues from oil and gas would allow us to advance our economy. We could say that this is our first industrial revolution. In some ways, we have to do some leapfrogging and I believe that we are rightly positioned to take advantage of the opportunities presented, having had a wealth of history in leading Guyana. I do not want to get into how well we have done for Guyana in terms of – not only in terms of economy – the social wellbeing. I believe, we are on the right track with the right leadership, team, the right support and participation from our citizens which is very valuable and important for us. We pride ourselves in being a very democratic and inclusive Government. We also pride ourselves in being a Government who understands development in a balanced way. We are proud that the response from the citizens show that we are actually on the right track.

We are a small state with inherent vulnerabilities. As the speakers before me mentioned, we are literally punching above our weight in terms of our positioning of our economy. With our leadership in Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Agri-Food agenda, I think, this Bill that we are presenting here would give Guyana a much-needed boost in terms of creating a new sector. I believe this is the sort of innovative thinking and visionary leadership that we are very proud of. Let us take a look at the global value of hemp production. In 2019, the global hemp market was valued at \$4.7 billion and is estimated to be \$26.6 billion by 2025. That is due to an increase of 34% compound annual growth rate. This is the market that we are entering into as a small economy. When one looks at the multiplier effect and

the impact that it has on our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), I think, we will achieve much in economic games from entering this sector. I could safely say, this would be an economic boom in terms of our agriculture.

When we look at the first or the five leading nations in the production of industrial hemp – China, Canada, the United States of America (USA), France and right here in the Republic of Chile – we have all decriminalised and legalised the production of industrial hemp in some cases. For China – 2010, Canada – 1998, United States of America – 2018, France – 2019 and the Republic Chile – 2014. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the timings, I think, Guyana is entering the market at the right time. Given the fact that we have the capacity with the revenues from oil and gas, it feeds seamlessly into our diversification efforts which would allow us to be a very competitive participant in a very lucrative growing and sustainable market. The Bill before us, today, has gone through much scrutiny and research. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Minister of Agriculture who has responsibility for National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) for their sterling work and research that they did in producing the document on the group of cannabis with particular attention being paid to industrial hemp. The document is detailed and takes one through the definition to autonomy, toxicology, agronomy, environment as well as the usefulness of industrial hemp. If one take a look at some of the benefits in terms of what hemp can be used for. I will just name a few...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, let me interrupt you there and ask the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip to move the motion so that we can continue beyond 8.00 p.m. to conclude our business for today.

8.00 p.m.

Suspension of Standing Order 13(n)

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the House continue to its conclusion past the time of 8.00 p.m.”

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

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to move that the House continue to its conclusion past the time of 8.00 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, you may continue.

Mr. Todd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to briefly outline, for the people, some of the benefits or uses of industrial hemp: high quality paper, rope and cordage, clothes and textiles, biofuels and bioplastics, automotive manufacturing, eco-friendly building materials, health, beauty, and medicinal applications. Mr. Speaker, as you would see, entering this new sector puts us in a market where the demand for finished products which are high-valued products will give Guyana an opportunity to be in a marketplace where we have comparative advantage and the ability to compete. Mr. Speaker, when you think about our policies – going back to our inclusive policies – and looking at how Government allocates in terms of its strategy formulation, it is no guesswork why Region 10 was also selected as a region for the production of industrial hemp. If you look at the population Linden, Region 10 *per se*, of 400,000 people, you can tell of the economic boom that we will bring to the residents of Linden.

I think what is also important is that Linden and Region 10 are also agriculturally based. The people of Linden and Region 10 are no strangers to agriculture. There is the production of soya beans, corn, red beans, ground provisions, cash crops and citrus. These are all income-generating produce, but if you look at the scale at which we will be able to produce and earn from hemp, based on the extended reach and value that can be added, I think that it is commendable that the Government has taken the step to move towards the production and cultivation of industrial hemp. Per capita, I think we can celebrate for the people of Linden and Region 10, and by extension, for Guyana, because it would improve the value chain of Linden and the connection with all the other activities along the value chain throughout Guyana.

Linden is included in Guyana's development and has always been included. It was not only in agriculture but we could go back to housing infrastructure, healthcare, the school system, the Linden economic advancement programme and the fund itself. The Government of the day, the People's Progressive Party/Civic, has always paid particular attention to development across Guyana and Linden has always been included in our development exploits. Giving attention to Region 10 is the work of the Government. I want to call on the people of Linden and Region 10 to read the Bill, to connect with the Ministry of Agriculture and to connect with

their representatives in Linden. For those who are already in agriculture, they could start looking at partnerships and start looking at ways of building capacity. They could always also get help from the Government, in terms of the business plans. There are representatives in Linden who are responsible for agriculture who could also give guidance and provide leadership, so that they can take advantage of this massive or great opportunity that is coming to Region 10.

It is with great joy that I present this Bill to the House. I would like to commend the Minister of Agriculture for his leadership and his continued stewardship as the lead on agriculture here in Guyana. I could assure the people of Linden and Region 10 that they could depend on the Minister of Agriculture for leadership and for support, as we embark on this new journey, in creating a new sector for the people of Linden and Region 10, which will also be sustainable, falls in line with the Low Carbon Development Strategy or the expanded version, and it will bring massive economic benefits to the people of Linden, such as: job creation, income revenue generation and the value chain of Linden itself because not only the farmers will benefit but all of the support activities that will be needed to support those who are actually in cultivation. The development of Linden pays into the development of Guyana as a whole. I want to commend this Bill to the House and to register my firm support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, the Hon. Ms. Oneidge Walrond, to make her contribution.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support the Industrial Hemp Bill – Bill No. 10/2022.

First of all, before getting into specifics of the policy that drives this Bill, I wish to make an important point to this honourable House and to the entire country. That point is that hemp is not marijuana and for emphasis marijuana is not hemp. I think it is important for us to make this point clearly for all to understand, for if we understand this, then I hope it would be evident that this Bill does not, in anyway, deal with the decriminalisation of marijuana nor does it establish any sort of regulated regime for the cultivation of marijuana. Marijuana remains a prohibited substance under the Second Schedule of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act and dealing in it or any of its products continues to attract the treatment provided for it in that Act.

Having established that we are dealing with two different products altogether, we could now acknowledge that both hemp and marijuana are, by most classifications of this species, *cannabis sativa*. Industrial hemp, however, only has negligible trace amounts of the intoxicating compound tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), for which marijuana is primarily cultivated. It is this key difference that constitutes the bases of our different policy stances between the two. This difference also facilitates the legal definition of hemp, which we can operationalise in setting up a regulatory framework to govern the industry. Our legal definition of hemp is a *cannabis* plant, or part thereof, having a delta-9 THC content not exceeding 0.3% by dry weight. Any *cannabis* plant with THC at or below this threshold is thus taken outside of the ambit of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act. It is important to note that with these levels of THC, there is absolutely no intoxicating effect.

In fact, it is my understanding that the minimum level of THC that is to be found in marijuana starts at about five per cent, which is more than 16 times higher than our 0.3% threshold. Typical levels of THC in marijuana are said to range between five per cent to 20% and, in exceptional cases, approaching or even exceeding 30% THC. The practical significance of these numbers is that there is, in fact, a substantial buffer zone between the threshold of 0.3% THC, above which a *cannabis* plant is legally deemed to be marijuana and that level of five per cent, below which there would actually be little or no demand for the product as an illicit substance. For example, a plant with a THC level of one per cent would be an illicit substance but, in practical terms, it would probably not produce the desired intoxicated effect, and no one would actually hope to get it sold. Conversely, where anyone is to be apprehended with a product that is being sold, the THC levels would be so far beyond the threshold that there would be little to no plausible doubt about his/her intentions.

That said, while the chemical differences are vast, the fact that we are dealing with the same underlying species is sufficient to warrant a robust regulatory framework that one sees in this Bill. This framework is established in order to prevent cultivation and dealing in marijuana under the guise of cultivating and dealing in industrial hemp and hemp products. The centrepiece of that regulatory framework is, of course, the establishment of an authority administered by a governing board to supervise the industry. The authority will be responsible for governing the industry within which there are three key spheres of activity that will be regulated. These

are the cultivation of the plant itself, manufacturing of hemp-based products and research on industrial hemp, its production, and its uses. These three spheres cover all parts of the value chain; thus, they deliver comprehensive coverage of all foreseeable activities related to the industry. Under the proposed framework, all activities relating to hemp are required to be authorised under a licence. This is a key provision, which means that we will have oversight of all active operations in the industry. Operating without the required licence will be an offence contrary to the Act, with liability for significant penalties.

Another key provision is the requirement for testing before sowing or otherwise propagating any cannabis plant and an identical requirement for testing is provided for before harvesting. These are critical control points and they are designed to prevent the cultivation of plants for which the TCH content exceeds the legal threshold. I wish to draw attention to the provision for the Minister to designate geographical areas for the cultivation and/or manufacture of hemp and hemp related products. This creates a useful policy tool by which we can encourage economic activities in areas that might have otherwise been neglected. We heard about Region 10 from my Colleague being designated as such an area.

8.15 p.m.

When enacted, this Bill would create the enabling environment for our farmers, manufacturers and researchers to participate in an industry that is enjoying a resurgence across the world. You may be aware, Sir, that the hemp has been cultivated and deployed for the benefit of humankind for literally thousands of years. Archaeologists have found specimens of hemp in cords used in pottery in China dating back to 8,000 years. There is said to be a bridge in France constructed during the medieval period from which we could now call hemp concrete. Also, during the medieval period, the race for marine exploration drove a demand for rope and sail cannabis which were, of course, made from hemp. In fact, it is only within the last 100 years that hemp for reasons that are still debated, became the target of increasing intention of the authorities in the United States of America. This attention started in the 1930s with the tax and other regulation formulating an almost total criminalisation of all cannabis and cannabis derivatives in that country by 1970. It probably would not be surprising to many that much of the world followed.

Today, however, hemp is making a powerful resurgence and, indeed, we might say hemp's day has come. In a world

profoundly affected by climate change, hemp stands out as a climate friendly crop with a staggering array of applications. The humble hemp is a feedstock for a plethora of industries. Hemp seed is considered a super food extremely high in protein. Hemp oil is a culinary oil high in omega-3 acids and Cannabidiol (CBD) oil has been put to therapeutic use for a variety of conditions. Hemp could be used to produce cloth in the textile industry where it is slowly gaining currency as a complimentary material or even an alternative to cotton and linen. The hemp plant is a superior choice to wood pulp in paper manufacturing from an environmental standpoint. It could grow to maturity in about 100 days. By contrast, many of the trees that are decimated annually in the wood base paper industry are tens or even hundreds of years old. In other words, wood-based paper industry depletes the earth's forest resources at a rate that far exceeds that which we would hope to replace them. Additionally, paper made from hemp could be whitened with hydrogen peroxide instead of the toxic chlorine-based bleaches. The hemp plant consumes a fraction of the water of comparable crops and does not require use of toxic pesticides.

The plant could be used in the production of bioplastics which unlike petroleum-based plastics are biodegradable and could be composted in a domestic setting. This holds the potential of eliminating millions of tonnes of plastics that make their way into landfills across the world each year. These petroleum-based plastics are predicted to take hundreds of years to decompose so we are piling them into landfills at a rate far exceeding that at which they will decompose. Hemp concrete made by mixing the core of the hemp plant with water and lime is once again making a return to the construction industry. This 'hempcrete', as it is sometimes called, is a substitute for concrete in non-load bearing applications. It weighs a fraction of concrete and among other things, leads to a reduction in carbon emissions during transportation as compared to traditional concrete.

These are just a few of the uses to which this versatile plant could be put. In fact, some estimates of the uses of hemp run into the tens of thousands. This is the world of opportunity that we are opening to our people when we enact this Bill, which would pave the way for them to get into the production of hemp and its associated materials. All of these applications constitute opportunities for Guyanese farmers, for our manufacturers, researchers and small, medium and micro enterprises. These opportunities are green, sustainable and are well aligned with our renewed Low Carbon Development Strategy. This Bill does not come to this House in isolation. Like all measures we bring to this

honourable House, this Bill is part of a plan and a plan is based on a vision. Our vision is for a broad based inclusive and sustainable economic development. What you are seeing here, Sir, is one more building block in our crucial non-oil economy. According to Grand View Research, the global market for industrial hemp products was estimated at just over US\$4 billion in 2021. This market is projected to grow at a compound annual rate of almost 17% between 2022 and 2030 reaching to \$16.75 billion by 2030.

Mr. Speaker, the top importers of hemp products are in Europe with which you know we have the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). This Agreement provides duty and quota-free access to the European Union for all goods originating and exported from the Caribbean Forum of African Caribbean and Pacific States (CARIFORUM) and, thus, provides an excellent framework within which we could develop trade for hemp and hemp related products. I would also remind this honourable House that we substantially replicated that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) framework with the United Kingdom, which is another significant importer of these products following its exit from the European Union. Hemp has been with humankind for thousands of years to this point and there is no reason it should not be with us for thousands of years to come, so there could be few sectors in which we could better invest our efforts in developing for a sustainable future. Through this Bill, we are creating the environment for the development of a new component of our non-oil sector. It would take place alongside our other agricultural, agro-processing sectors, tourism, manufacturing and alike, and to help give our economy the resilience that would be needed in the future.

The framework that would be established by this Bill unquestionably aligns with our vision for a sustainable low carbon economy, so I support this Bill and commend its passage to this honourable House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister, and now for his contribution, the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our Manifesto, we promised that once we get into government we would pursue the creation, the establishment and the construction of a very diversified economic base. We promised that we would increase our agro sector so as not to place on due reliance on our oil and gas sector. We promised to pursue the economic undertakings and endeavours that would be

environmentally friendly and would fit into the four corners of our Low Carbon Development Strategy about which we heard so elaborately earlier today. Hemp, as an agricultural undertaking, fits squarely into that economic and/or environmental matrix to which I have made reference.

This Bill ranks along with many others as one of those bills that we had to draft in recent times – there are many like this that would come – that are largely without a precedential model to follow. It embraces a matter of some technicality and of scientific derivatives about which we have no known expertise in the country and that made it quite a challenge for the Drafter. I want to recognise a young drafting personnel from the Attorney General's Chambers, Ms. Ronetta Sargent, who worked almost singlehandedly with this Bill and with some guidance from the Vice-President, as well as with some expertise from North America, and came up with a Bill that has no comparison in the region – there is one in Belize but it pales in significance when compared with this – and had to essentially construct the entire Bill, the regulatory framework, the governance model, the licensing infrastructure, the distinction to be drawn between cannabis, marijuana and industrial hemp, and then to determine the tetra hydrocarbon content of the particular type of hemp that we would decide to cultivate and manufacture in Guyana. All of those important decisions had to have been made by a person or persons with very little expertise in these very complex areas. That is why I am particularly proud that we were able to produce a Bill of this quality and of this pedigree.

There are large number of companies in the agro sector and in the private sector, locally, as well as there are large conglomerates in North America who are anxiously awaiting the enactment of this Bill, as they are ready to move swiftly into hemp production. Hence, perhaps, the urgency in getting this Bill expedited through the Assembly tonight. It is no longer a debate in relation to the value of hemp, its utilitarian value across a wide variety of products, its record level of remunerative return and its general profitability. Those are matters that have already been settled right across the globe. The speakers who spoke before me highlighted the many uses to which industrial hemp could be put and the record level of revenue generated by this industry across the globe. That is why our Government is answering to a longstanding local call, a longstanding regional call and a very vibrant and available international market by introducing industrial hemp in our economic equation. Recognising the economic value of this industry in 2018, at the level of Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Regional Commission on

Marijuana did a long report ‘Waiting to Exhale’ and, in that report, it included a call for the enactment of legislation across the region to enable and encourage a viable hemp industry in the region. It is against that backdrop, Your Honour, that we present this Bill here tonight. Hemp is not a new industry in the world.

8.30 p.m.

It originated in Central Asia with its first cultivation for its fibre being recorded in China, as early as the year, 2800 Before Christ (BC) era. It was practiced in the Mediterranean countries of Europe early and in the Christian era, spreading throughout the rest of Europe during the middle-ages. Thereafter, it was planted in Chile and here in South America in the 1500s. A century later, it begun to be cultivated in North America. I want to join my Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, who spoke before me, and emphasise the distinction between marijuana and hemp. They are not the same but are from the same genus. They are cousins but they are radically different. The TCL content is what differentiates the two and that is why great care was taken in constructing the regulatory framework in the manner that it has been established in this Bill.

The Board is, particularly, constituted in the way it is simply because of the intense regulatory framework this Bill requires. Those who are entrusted with the responsibility of enforcing the provisions of this Act, one will see, are members of the Anti-Narcotic Unit, members of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and members of the Agricultural sector – the Livestock Department who are given police powers to enter into premises and powers of arrest, to search and seize, *et cetera*. The Board is comprised of officials from the Ministry of Health (MOH), officials from the Ministry of Home Affairs, officials from the Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory and other suitably qualified persons. The reason being— because of its health value and medicinal value there would be people from the Ministry of Health on that Board— because of the fear that persons may use hemp as a guise to infiltrate marijuana into cultivation. This is why there is a heavy scientific and police presence in the regulatory framework.

With the exception of Belize, there is no other Caricom state which boasts a designated Industrial Hemp Act. Countries, including Belize, Antigua, Barbuda and Jamaica which have enacted or proposed legislation for the declassification of hemp as a dangerous drug or a prohibited plant without value, have defined hemp as a plant of the genus of cannabis

with a *tetrahydrocannabinol* (THC) concentration level of no more than one *per cent*. We are lower. We are 0.3%. Why? It is because we are catering largely for the North American market. The North American market accepts as THC level for hemp that they wish to enter its market at the level that we are prescribing, which is 0.3%. Europe, by the European Union (EU) regulation is 0.2% and as I said, our target market is North America. We have heard a lot about the uses that could be made of hemp but what is important is the cultivation of hemp and its value to the environment. Today, we were privileged to hear at length, our national strategy on the environment – our Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). We heard how Guyana as a country, will strive to ensure that in almost each of its economic pursuits there would be an emphasis against the emission of noxious substances.

Industrial hemp is a clean, renewable resource. While it is planted, it produces a net negative in relation to carbon emissions. It absorbs carbon dioxide and releases oxygen into the atmosphere with one acre of hemp being able to absorb over 22 tons of carbon dioxide. Let me repeat that for emphasis. It absorbs carbon dioxide and releases oxygen into the atmosphere with one acre of hemp being able to absorb over 22 tons of carbon dioxide. When harvested, it replaces more polluting materials in the manufacturing industry, and it provides alternatives for sustaining the environment. For example, in the paper industry it could prevent deforestation with its high rate of recultivation making it an obvious environmental choice over the use of trees for the manufacturing of paper. Right here, we could continue to build our economic credentials which is already established, not only in this part of the world, but across the globe by moving into this industry. It is a multi-faceted plant whose fibre, seeds, flowers and leaves could be used in products ranging from medicinal, cannabidiol, nutritious facts and proteins to industrial ropes and building materials. Medicine containing low levels of THC may be prescribed to relieve the symptoms of chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy for cancer, rare forms of epilepsy, loss of appetite and weight loss in people with Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) and improper heart health.

Industrial hemp may also be processed and manufactured into ropes, textiles, clothing, shoes, foods, bio plastic, soaps, insulation, biofuel, cosmetics, animal feed, beverages rich in protein, unsaturated fats, minerals and vitamins *et cetera*. Hence, the great potential that this industry presents for

Guyana. I will not read the financial statistics of its production across the globe and the way it is projected to grow, as my Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation did. Hemp is cultivated in temperate zones and could be recultivated as quickly as twice within one year. Crops grow best in sandy loom with good drainage and require an average monthly rainfall of at least 2.5 inches throughout the growing season. Our Government has already identified at least two geographic regions of the country in which hemp will be cultivated. Regions 6 and 10 have thus far been identified. Why? It is because these are two regions that could be considered as depressed and as regions that we need to stimulate employment and economic activities.

In relation to Region 10, several letters have been sent to the Attorney General's Office complaining, that the Bill is not being passed swiftly because many persons have already indicated their readiness and willingness to get involved in the cultivation of hemp in Region 10. Another reason why we have a heavy regulatory framework is because, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation rightly stated and the Minister of Agriculture indicated in his presentation, hemp is highly profitable. It is not susceptible to the vagaries of changing weather conditions, as some of our traditional crops are and it is likely to yield far more profits than some of our traditional crops. That is another reason why we have to regulate hemp. A lax approach could lead to the wiping out of traditional crops, so important for our self-sufficient needs as a country, more so in our pursuit to be a food supplier in the region. That is simply because it is such a profitable undertaking. That is another reason why the licensing arrangement has to be exercised and scrutinised judiciously, with some degree of discretion.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill as you heard contains six parts with 39 clauses, setting out the regulatory framework to be implemented when the Bill is enacted. The Bill as I stated earlier provides a definition of industrial hemp. That definition is what differentiates it from cannabis and could only be possessed, cultivated, manufactured or processed *et cetera* under this Act by a licensee. If it is not hemp, then it shall fall back as a prohibited substance under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance (Control) Act. The Bill generally provides for the possessing, cultivating, manufacturing and using of industrial hemp and hemp-related products and the conducting of research on industrial hemp or any other activity concerning or related to industrial hemp under a license. It also provides for the establishment

of the Guyana Industrial Hemp Regulatory Authority and other related matters.

For centuries, hemp was cultivated, manufactured and used unregulated up until the 20th century when it fell victim to the campaign of the war on drugs. It became criminalised simply because of its association with cannabis, commonly known in the region as marijuana or ganja, as it is of the same genus. While marijuana is rich in psycho-active THC, hemp produces mostly a non-euphoric cannabinol which is the major difference between these two cousin species. It is arguable that hemp is poorly understood scientifically though it is proven to be of major economic importance. Nonetheless, owing to the proven value of hemp as a staple crop, countries began to regulate its use for research, medicinal and industrial purposes across important industries. Like other countries the Bill provides for the establishment of an oversight regulatory commission with the function of regulating, developing and controlling the industry.

8.45 p.m.

However, by clause three of the Bill, Guyana seeks to establish a body corporate known as the Guyana Industrial Hemp Regulatory Authority with a governing board and a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). I have already explained the composition of that board and there is no need for me to repeat that. The board's function includes granting and issuing of licences under the Act, ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Act and the terms and conditions of a licence issued under the Act, entering into agreements for the development of a viable, industrial hemp industry and prescribing appropriate and necessary best practices and guidelines for the effective implementation of the provisions of the Act and growing the industry. There are different types of licences that are grantable under the Act - research licences, a cultivation licence and a manufacturing licence. The Bill lists the qualification to make one eligible to be granted a licence. As most modern legislation does, this Bill sets out a process by which licences are not only granted, but the process by which licences can be revoked. When the revocation mechanism is activated, there is a series of processes and procedures outlined in the Act to ensure that there is due process and fairness inherent in the process with which persons are being given right of appeal and right of hearing *et cetera* in relation to their licence.

Some of these undertakings in this industry will be of a multimillion-dollar value. Therefore, if licences are granted, in particular, in the manufacturing sector of industrial hemp,

then the licences become very valuable. One must then be careful with how one revokes such a licence as it may involve – invariably, it will involve – litigation, if there is some feeling that due process did not attend a possible revocation. Those due process provisions are outlined in the Bill and there is another clause at Part Four that deals with enforcement of the provisions of the Bill. The Minister is given regulatory powers and that is important as this is a new industry that we are embarking upon. It is a new economic activity. It is a new agricultural product that we are going to invest in and therefore, we have to learn. That regulatory power that is being resided in the Minister of Agriculture, will give the legislation that desired flexibility to put into place, a regulatory framework as the industry is evolving to meet the needs and exigencies of the industry.

I want to conclude by saying this is a very pivotal piece of legislation. In fact, I believe that it is groundbreaking in the sense that we are now, by way of legislation, introducing a completely new product for the first time, at least at this level, into our highly agricultural base. It is a product that is filled with great potential to transform our country. Oftentimes we speak about transformative projects. This is a transformative undertaking that we are making available to our people beginning with two regions, but I have no doubt that it would spread further afield. This singular industry, if nurtured properly and if it is allowed to grow – having regard to the number of international players whom I know have an interest in manufacturing, in particular, and exportation of Guyana's hemp – can present a very bright and prosperous future for Guyanese. I offer my fullest support to this Bill. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Attorney General. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Agriculture to conclude the contributions.

Mr. Mustapha (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I want to thank all the Members who spoke on this bill. As the Attorney General concluded his presentation, he said that this is a very innovative and groundbreaking piece of legislation we have here tonight. I want to fully concur with him because we have seen, or we have heard the benefit of hemp cultivation in our country and how hemp cultivation or the production of hemp can change the ordinary people's lives in terms of moving them to have profitability in agriculture.

Today, when seeing our country moving forward, we heard the two regions that have been identified to grow or to start the production of hemp. We have seen over the years, the

economic depression in these regions. As the bill clearly states, we have taken consideration in ensuring that we look at the economic problems that these regions are faced with. We must never forget that. In Linden, the call centre was closed where a number of persons would have lost their jobs. Today we are seeing the Attorney General alluding to the fact that he has been receiving letters, and I also, from Linden. People want this bill to come into force so that they could get into production and be gainfully employed. We have seen thousands of people in Region 6 lose their jobs with the closure of the sugar industry. These are regions that were severely hit by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. Today, this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government is once again bringing economic opportunities to the poor and to the downtrodden to improve their lives. That is the philosophy of this PPP/C Government.

As we have heard all the benefits of hemp and as I said in my opening remarks, we have been diversifying the agriculture sector. Today, the entire Caribbean is looking to Guyana because of the leadership that we have in Guyana not only in the traditional crops, but we are seeing that we are going to new crops. I mentioned corn and soya. I mentioned the high value crops. I mentioned that we are going into wheat production, and today we are passing this innovative piece of legislation to start hemp production where thousands of farmers – thousands of small land-holding farmers – will be given an opportunity to get into this profitable and groundbreaking crop. As I said, the benefits that will derive from the cultivation of hemp will be tremendous. This can make Guyana the leader in terms of pushing this crop around the Caribbean and this will bring economic benefit to us in this country. With these few words and these closing remarks, I commend this bill for its second reading to this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I now put the question that the Industrial Hemp Bill 2022 – Bill No. 10/2022 be read a second time.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we now turn to the Mental Health Protection and Promotion Bill 2022 – Bill No. 7/2022 published on 8th April, 2022.

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 the Mental Health Board; to repeal the Mental Hospital Ordinance and for related matters.”

[Minister of Health]

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the Mental Health Protection and Promotion Bill 2022 – Bill No. 7/2022 published on 8th April, 2022. This bill would repeal the Mental Hospital Ordinance of 1930 and the rationale for repealing the Mental Hospital Ordinance, I think is quite self-evident.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

It is not just the age – the Ordinance is more than 92 years old – but it is the relevance to the practice of modern psychiatry that is very important. The tenets of the Ordinance when it was passed in 1930 had a different view. That is, that they must protect the public from dangerous patients. Because of that view, they used various methods, in terms of hospitalising people for long durations and very often without review. In the modern world of psychiatry, this is seen as a violation of patients’ basic human rights and therefore, it is not tenable in the world that we live in today. If one also looks at some of the articles in the Ordinance, let us take Article 16 for example, one of the things that the article pointed out is that patients who were hospitalised in any one of the mental health institutions must pay for his/her stay in the institution. If one is unable to pay within 10 days and one has an estate, then one’s estate could be sold and the cost recovered.

9.00 p.m.

Furthermore, the terms that have been used in these ordinances are very outdated. For example, Ordinance No. 9 of 1930 Section 2 states:

“Person of unsound mind” means an idiot or a person who is suffering from mental derangement;”

These terms are not compatible with modern standards and understanding of mental health. It also entrenches other types of words such as ‘lunacy’ and ‘lunatic asylum’. Again, we have moved away from using these terminologies because it could easily lead to discrimination and stigmatisation. This is why we have to move away from it. The challenge we have is that some of these things are so culturally ingrain... If one look at New Amsterdam, where the National Psychiatric Hospital is located the road going into the hospital is often refer to as ‘Asylum Road’, and this too we need to change. Since the year of 2010, there were attempts to draft new legislations, so that we can change these ordinances because the ordinances long ago were recognised to be inadequate. By the year of 2011, we had our first draft, however, while we did that first draft nothing much happened for it to proceed to come to this National Assembly. It was also recognised in successive health plans or national mental health plans for both for the years 2010 to 2015 and then from 2015 to 2020 that there is need to upgrade the law. The 2015 to 2020 plan clearly stated that it should have a new law in place by the year of 2017. It set itself that goal. Unfortunately, instead of using the already existing draft to move this process forward the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government opted to go and start the process afresh and draft a new law and so by the year 2019, it produce a different draft but that draft had several defects.

When we sat to look at the current piece of legislation that is before this House, we took the strengths from the years 2010 or 2011 and the one done in 2019. We then had to add various components to it including a human rights section which we would go through in a bit. We had a number of persons, over the years, that worked on this piece of legislation. For the earlier version– apart from the local people who worked on it– we had experts help from Dalhousie University and for the 2019 draft, I am not sure who the APNU/AFC relied on. For this current draft, we were able to circulate it to a number of local stakeholders including psychiatrists, psychologists, various mental health activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that work in the mental health areas and we took their comments as best as possible and tried to incorporate it into this new version that we have. Some of the comments that we

received from psychiatrists was from Dr. Bhiri Harry, Dr. Meenawattie Rajkumar, Dr. Timothy Morgan, Dr. October who is a Child Psychiatrist and Dr. DeClou who is another Child Psychiatrist who contributed to different sections of the bill. We were also able to get a lot of overseas expert help like Dr. Renato Oliveira e Souza Unit Chief, Mental Health and Substance Use, The Pan Health Organization and World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), and Claudina Cayetano PAHO Regional Advisor on Mental Health. The Pan American Health Organization also recruited an external consultant Dr Soumitra Pathare, Director of the Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy at the Indian Law Society, who also worked with the Indian Government in developing India's National Policy in 2014 and India's Mental Health Care Act of 2017.

We also received other medical advice from collaborators of Northwell Health System in New York and also Dr. Eric Pena, Dr. John Young, and Dr. Laura Hannon all of whom contributed to enhancing this bill. We also received some advice from Mental Health Practitioners from the United Kingdom (UK). On the legal part from the Attorney General's Chambers and the AG of course— after reviewing this bill and making some strong legal points which we would hear him a bit later – we also had Ms. Joann Bond the drafter on the bill and other lawyers from the Chambers who contributed to making this bill possible. We had some overseas experts that participated as well, Dr. Ignacio Ibarra who is the PAHO Regional Advisor on health-related laws. We had a number of experts from Hogan Lovells who helped to formulate different sections of the law.

On behalf of the Government of Guyana, I want to thank all these persons who contributed to making this piece of legislation possible and ensuring that it is compatible with modern psychiatric standards and the care for mental health patients. What we have before us, today, refers to a very progressive piece of legislation. One of the things we recognise is that mental health is causing a lot of illness globally and if one look at the most recent statistics from the World Health Organization where it was able to point out is a report on 16th June, 2022, which stated there are close to 280 million persons that suffers from depression, 45 million persons that suffers from schizophrenia and 50 million persons from dementia. When one looks at how mental health illness is classified, I think sometimes we group them in one large group to state well this is how we classify mental health illnesses. We have 22 major categories with more than 150 discrete illnesses.

One of the problems there is with mental health it that it also contributes to prolong disability and disability can be measured in years with that disability. Mental health accounts for one in every six years lived with a disability globally. For all the diseases mental health contributes to one in six which is the devastating effect mental health has on people's health. When we look at our numbers locally the Guyana National Mental Health Action Plan of 2015 and 2020 estimates that approximately 10% to 15% of Guyanese have a mental health disorder that would mean approximately 78,000 to 114,500 persons have some form of mental health disorder. About three *per cent* or five *per cent* of those persons have a chronic mental health illness, and an estimated 20,000 persons or so have a severe mental health illness and this is not helped by the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic because we know in the early days of the pandemic, we have seen a lot of people with depression, anxiety and now with Long Covid. We have also seen neurological manifestations of Long Covid, and this added to the burden of existing mental health problems that we are seeing.

Children are not exempted from this category, and we have seen that as one of the major disorders in neurodevelopmental disorders that occur with children's disorders such as, autism, intellectual developmental disorders and so forth that affects children. This bill provides a section by which we can properly treat children affected by mental health problems. One of the biggest challenges that we have in caring for mental health patients are being societal attitudes. Persons diagnose with mental health illnesses are often stereotyped as being 'mad' and the persons considered 'mad' are therefore persons to be avoided or to be rejected. Many families with persons who have mental health issues are embarrassed by this diagnosis and some are even fearful of the patients, some think that the patients would behave violently and therefore they themselves would often request that these patients be put in some institutions. This vicious cycle of how we perceive people and how they do not have access to care and treatment can lead to more discrimination, stigmatisation and violation of people's fundamental human rights. Very often patients with mental health issues can be denied his/her civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and this is a serious matter. Sometimes, also, because of societal convenient blindness and some forms of institutional indifferences we have seen that this too can contribute to physical, psychological and sometimes sexual abuse of persons with mental health disorders. Much of these experiences by mental health patients go unreported and

therefore sometimes this burden cannot be properly quantified.

One of the innovative features of this particular bill is that there is an entire section of the bill— part four from clauses 13 to 22 – devoted to promoting and protecting human rights of patients with mental illnesses. This section aligns with all the major international instruments relating to the rights of people with mental health disorders. One of the instruments is, the Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and the Improvement of Mental Health Care (MI Principles) which is dated back to the year, 1991. Then, there is the Improvement of Mental Health Care that was done by PAHO/WHO, the Declaration of Caracas that was done in the year, 1990 and the Declaration of Madrid by the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) that was amended in the year, 2002. Our bill is in keeping with the international best practices and take these principles into considerations. Some of the best practices and the fundamental rights that we have enshrined in this bill includes the right to mental health care, the right to respect, the right to human dignity and privacy.

9.15 p.m.

The right to live and be treated in one's community, the right to non-discrimination, the right to the disclosure of information to prevent the disclosure of information about one's condition if permission is not given and the right to consent before that information can be disclose. Let us take the right to mental health care. We assume that this right is widely available, but there are many communities in our country that still do not have access to proper mental health care. This Bill is going to help us increase that access. One of the things that we are currently working on is the integration of mental health services into our primary healthcare system so that at levels one, two and three a person could now access mental health care. With the introduction of telemedicine, one could also have expert consultations from our psychiatrists. We are actively working on this. One would see that in communities where we previously did not have any statistics pertaining to mental health care, there are cases now that we have started this new system.

The right to privacy – this is also very important because we need to protect people's confidentiality – what is wrong with them, their information. We cannot go about willy-nilly disclosing people's illnesses to persons who are not involved in the care and treatment of those persons. Therefore, this must be properly protected. There are penalties if it is not

properly protected. One of the most important provisions in this Bill talks about the right to be treated in the least restrictive environment. This is absolutely important because the traditional way of treating patients have been to hospitalise them – bring them into an institution – keep them there and, sometimes, they are there for years and are not integrated back into society. The modern view is that patients should be treated and managed closer at home. That is the least restrictive environment we are talking about. This Bill will lay the foundation for us to rollout that sort of programme. With the inclusion of this right section in this Bill, it will make it one of the most progressive and power thinking mental health legislation in the Caribbean. This is what is very important. In this Bill also, because issues relating to mental health are not just medical issues, there are some intersections between medicine and the law. My good Friend, the Attorney General, will touch on those aspects of the Bill as it relates to patients' capacity and incompetence or competence to make decisions because of the medical/legal connotations.

Another section of the Bill that is very important is the section that talks about the treatment of patients. That is covered in Part VI, clauses 33-50. It governs from how a person can be admitted, when that person is in the institution what is expected of the staff of that institution and how a person can be discharged. When we talk about admission, there are two types of admissions we could look at. One where a patient presents themselves voluntarily and ask to be admitted, and when they are evaluated by the medical staff, if they believe that admission is warranted, then they would admit that patient. The other one has to do involuntarily admission. For a person to be involuntarily admitted into an institution means that he/she would have to meet very specific criteria to be admitted. Those include, one, that he/she would have to be properly diagnosed with a mental health illness. That is the first broad criteria that must be met. The second one is that he/she must, in some ways, present some imminent danger to themselves – that is, the patient – or might cause harm to other persons. Under that rubric too, in some cases, persons might need to be admitted because they would require a particular type of treatment that if he/she is not in an institution he/she would not be able to get that treatment. These are the broad areas in which people could be admitted – voluntarily or involuntarily.

Once the persons are in the hospital, especially those who came in through that involuntarily process, then there are mandatory requirements for that patient to be properly reviewed by an independent board or a psychiatrist so as to

make sure that someone is not going to keep that person in the hospital because he/she just wants to keep that person. They have to go through a very strict process of review. If, having done that review, they believe that patient should be discharged, then that patient will be discharged. If patients spend a long time in the institution, then there is a board that will be established by this Bill that will review that patient's case. That board could order the discharge of that patient or could also order that the patient continues to be in the institution. The reason for all of this is that, over the years, people who have been hospitalised have been abused and kept in institutions for very protracted periods of time, when they were already well and did not need to stay in an institution. To protect against that, we have these mandatory reviews that will be done over specific periods of time. That is another way in which we protect patients' rights. Another area that is very important is when patients are in the hospital, if they have acute episodes, then we would want to make sure that the use of seclusion is done according to regulations which would be issued by the Ministry of Health. That is something because there might be a set of patients that require that type of treatment, where they are secluded. Therefore, the Bill must provide for forms of treatment.

The wording in the Bill, when we come to that section, I would like to make one amendment because, as it currently stands, it prohibits. We will make that amendment to allow for those particular conditions, very restricted, to allow for seclusion of some of these patients that require them. It will be governed by regulation so it is not at somebody's whims and fancies that somebody could go into seclusion. It would be strictly governed by those regulations. Another area that is very important is to make sure that persons who have to be restricted by using restraints would only apply for very limited time periods. The maximum period it could be applied is up to three hours. Therefore, there are eligibility requirements when restraints could be used, how they could be used, the permissions that must be granted and so forth. Again, this is very progressive in the way this would be applied. The Bill also sets up a new governance structure. We have a new board that is going to be in place that, from time to time, would review patients and see whether or not they have to be in the institution. The board will have some other functions that it would perform. It also allows the Minister to designate institutions as facilities to provide mental health care. As it is right now, there are institutions that provide care, let us say for addiction recovery, but they are not classified as these types of institutions. Therefore, it allows for us to classify these institutions and to bring them under a set of rules that would govern their functioning.

There are many other features of this Bill that are very important. By putting in this Bill, at this point in time, it is one of those things that we really need to do if we are going to scale up. The way that we do mental health in Guyana, we need to overhaul the entire system. This Bill will provide that overarching architecture to allow us to do the overhaul that is necessary to bring the practice of psychiatry in Guyana into the modern world. The standards that this Bill allows us to set will pull us out from the dark ages of how psychiatry was practiced back in the 1930s to the modern world. Therefore, this Bill is absolutely essential for us to move forward to modernise the practice of psychiatry and to protect our patients who are affected by mental health disorder. I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Nandlall: Again, I rise to speak on another Bill of a transformative nature. When I look across and see the empty benches on the other side, I must say that it is highly regrettable that they have decided not to represent their constituencies' interest in these matters of fundamental nature, but that is their choice.

Deputy Speaker: Mr. Attorney General...

Mr. Nandlall: I speak to the empty benches. You are well elegantly poised where you are, Sir, so you are excluded.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Nandlall: At the beginning of our entry into the Parliament, we announced a very aggressive legislative agenda. One that we intend to pursue to modernise almost every area of human endeavours in Guyana. What is more important than the health of this nation? Our Government accords our peoples' health as the highest of priorities. That is why, very early, in the year 2021, I wrote to my Hon. Colleague, the Minister of Health, and I requested from him a list of the most important pieces of legislation. I received from the Hon. Minister a list containing some 26.

9.30 p.m.

We passed early, this year, the Human Organ and Tissue Transplant Bill, a very crucial piece of legislation in the public health architecture of our country. We are working on a new Public Health Bill that will transform the entire public health sector in terms of erecting a modern governance structure and then *flesh it out* with different administrative and bureaucratic provisions to administer health care and health services across the 10 regions of our country. Today, we have before us a modern mental health promotion and protection Bill, a much-needed piece of legislation in our

public health care system. Mr. Speaker, what we are governed by currently is a 1930 legislation which we inherited as the 1890 Lunacy Act of the United Kingdom (UK). Our current Public Health Act is over 130 years old. That, without more, renders it completely obsolete and out of sync, not only with current medical realities, but also with current Guyanese realities. This Bill Mr. Speaker, coming at this time, is long overdue. I daresay, Mr. Speaker, it is the most modern expression of a public health legislation in the Caribbean region.

The Minister of Health, in his presentation, detailed for us the list of local and international experts who worked on this Bill. This Bill presents a good collaborative effort with the Legal Drafting Department of the Attorney General's Chambers; the Ministry of Health; our local experts here; as well as international experts from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO); World Health Organization (WHO); universities in the United Kingdom, the United States of America (USA) and in Canada. The final product is a product of a lot of research and interventions coming from international health organizations as well as international health experts. That is why I am confident that it is a very progressive and modern piece of legislation. I will concentrate on the legal components of the Bill. As the Minister of Health correctly said, there is a large portion of this Bill that is directed to the rights of mental health patients. This Bill goes a very far way in identifying those rights, promoting those rights, and protecting those rights. The Bill provides a regime of legal remedies if these rights are infringed, contravened or not observed.

Mr. Speaker, according to the World Health Organization, human rights are inherent to all human beings. Human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible, and interdependent. Upholding human rights in mental health care is of utmost importance. This Bill represents the Government's commitments to its obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of every Guyanese. The right to health, including mental health, is inextricably linked to human rights. The right to health and mental health are recognised as fundamental rights and freedoms by the Constitution of Guyana, our supreme law. Article 154A (1) states:

“Subject to paragraphs (3) and (6), every person, as contemplated by the respective international treaties set out in the Fourth Schedule to which Guyana has acceded is entitled to the human rights enshrined in the said international treaties, and such rights shall be respected and upheld by the executive,

legislature, judiciary and all organs and agencies of Government...”

Article 154A (3) states:

“The State shall, having regard to the socio-cultural level of development of the society, take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of the rights provided for in paragraph (1).”

One of the international instruments listed in the Fourth Schedule to the Constitution is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Article 12 (1) of this Covenant states:

“The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”

Guyana, by incorporating this Covenant into our Constitution, has secured at the highest level for all Guyanese and any person in Guyana's soil, the right to health and mental health, which are universal rights. This Government has taken the right to health and mental health further by transposing it into this Bill before this House as directed by Article 154A (3) of the Constitution of Guyana. Mr. Speaker, we have transposed into domestic legislation, provisions of international treaties that we have signed on to as a country, thereby making those international treaty provisions part of our municipal or domestic laws. By bringing this Bill before the National Assembly, this Government recognises that there is no health without mental health. Moreover, we recognise that a human rights approach is fundamental to safeguarding the right to mental health. In this regard, this Bill moves away completely from our current law, the Mental Health Ordinance of 1930 which is a ruminant of colonialism. It means that our legislative framework and mental health are not only archaic and anachronistic, but not fit for that purpose any longer. This is why this law reform is as timely as it is important.

Within the mental health care context, law reform could play a crucial role in increasing access to mental health care and ensuring the rights of persons living with mental health conditions are realised on an equal basis with others. The mental health promotion and protection Bill clearly states that there is a right to mental health care in Guyana and all persons have the right to exercise all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights according to every person under the Constitution or other written law. This is

because mental health is an integral and essential component of the right to health. This Bill, through its provision, safeguards those living with a mental illness against abuse, discrimination, and inequality. The Bill crystallises for these persons the right to self-determination, equal treatment, information, confidentiality, access to justice and to be treated in their own community. The distinguished Minister of Health took us through the long incarnation that this Bill underwent and the number of experts that worked on this Bill, so I will not go through that. Except to recognise that works on a modern Mental Health Bill began in our Government since 2010, but the drafting was never completed. That was done under the stewardship of the then Minister of Health, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy. I want to recognise Dr. Leslie Ramsammy as beginning this process, which was so competently concluded by his successor, Dr. Frank Anthony.

From 2010 to 2022, a lot of changes have taken place on the international medical landscape, in particular, pertaining to mental health. What the drafters had to do was to bridge that huge gap and we are working with the team of experts, to whom Dr. Anthony made reference, and we were able to bridge that huge timeous divide of over a decade. Dr. Anthony mentioned a host of international personnel and I want to not repeat but reiterate our gratitude to those persons, but I also would like to put on the record, the contributions of local experts namely Dr. Bhiri Harry, Dr. Meena Rajkumar and Dr. Timothy Morgan. As I indicated earlier, a large part of this Bill deals with the illegal rights, capacity, guardianship, maintenance, and custody of persons affected by mental health. I want to deal briefly with some of those issues. Capacity and consent, for example, are two concepts that feature prominently in the Bill.

The right to self-determination is recognised in international law and at common law. It means that a person is entitled to make autonomous decisions about their medical treatment. However, persons living with mental illness are often denied this right when they are deemed to lack mental capacity because of mental illness. This is one of the main barriers to a person fully exercising their human rights to self-determination. The denial of capacity and consent affects a person's ability to make decisions for themselves like any other person. This is a direct product of the way our common law evolved, even in contract law and criminal law, capacity is one of the main characteristics that could affect a person's ability to transact legal business. While the court and other areas of the law will deal with those components, this Bill addresses the question of capacity for the purpose of

determining the type of treatment one is entitled to. While before there were guardians being appointed, guardian's *ad litem* being appointed, meaning secondary parties of whatever legal or label may be attached to them, there were decisions that were largely made by persons other than the affected person. Here this Bill emphasises deeply the need, for as far as possible, that the person who is the affected be allowed and empowered as a matter of law to make determination and to make decisions, of course, on the condition that they can do so.

9.45 p.m.

This denial of the right of persons to make these important decisions is remedied under Part III of the Bill which sets out that:

“10 (1) Every person, including a person with mental illness, is deemed to have the mental capacity to make decisions regarding his or her mental care or treatment....”

It used to be the other way around. The assumption used to be that, once you are afflicted with a mental sickness, you are prohibited from making those decisions. That onus has been abolished and the presumption is in favour of the persons affected – for them to be able to make the decisions, unless disqualified from so doing. This part also sets out:

“11. (5) Where the court has determined that a person lacks the mental capacity to make decisions regarding... treatment, consent may be given by the nominated representative or guardian, of the person...”

Further, it states that, where the mental capacity of a person is challenged, the court shall, when making a decision, consider the provisions of Part III. Part III provides safeguards against the person being denied mental capacity based on them being diagnosed with a mental illness, their age, appearance, condition, or aspect of their behaviours which might lead others to make unjustified assumptions about the person's mental capacity. There is a series of inbuilt guards against irrational and unscientific assumptions being made about a person's mental capacity because of their ages, behavioural patterns, and idiosyncratic traits, *et cetera*. It must now be based on empirical data, heavily grounded in psychology and expert reports.

Before mental health care is administered to persons, they must be informed by the doctor, nurse, or other health professionals of their rights. If you do not inform an

uninformed person of their rights, then their rights become illusory. They do not even know that they have those rights. As *ab initio*, a doctor or a health care personnel is cast with a responsibility, indeed a mandatory duty, to explain to the person receiving the health care of their rights. Not only must the person be informed, but the information must be given to him/her in a manner and language that the person can understand. Mr. Speaker, you have to go down to the level of the person. For example, if the person does not understand a particular language, then the language that the person understands must be employed in providing that information. If the person lacks the mental capacity to understand, then the nominated representative or guardian of the person must be given this information. This is necessary so that the person can make an informed decision about his/her treatment. Access to Justice: Part IV of the Bill recognises that a person living with a mental illness has the right to access justice. Clause 21 of the Bill provides:

“21 (1) Every person with a mental illness shall have access to justice on an equal basis with others and shall have the right to participate in the administration of justice.

(2) The court shall employ any appropriate procedural accommodations to ensure that a person with a mental illness can participate in all ... proceedings.”

Access to justice is obviously an essential ingredient of the rule of law. In the absence of access to justice, people are unable to have their voices heard, exercise their rights, challenge discrimination, or hold those in authority accountable. All persons, therefore, must be able to access the judicial system and participate fully in that system. They must also be able to access legal aid. Without access to justice, persons will not be able to enforce their rights. As a result, there would be no justice. Additionally, persons with mental health conditions should be provided with procedural accommodations to ensure their effective roles as participants in all legal proceedings. Procedural accommodations refer to all necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments in the context of access to justice where needed in a particular case to ensure the participation of persons living with mental health illnesses on an equal basis with others. That is a common thread that runs through this legislation – on an equal basis with others. Here the drafter is emphasising the need to avoid discrimination against persons who are mentally afflicted, at all costs and at every opportunity.

The Bill introduces in Guyana the concept of making an advanced directive. This advanced directive will allow every person, except a child, to have the right to determine the manner in which the person wishes to be cared for or treated, or not be cared for or treated. For future mental illness, the person will act as their nominated representative. Our legal system, currently, only provides for the appointment of a guardian. This happens after the person is diagnosed with a mental illness. The appointment of a guardian allows for substituted decision-making and not supported decision-making. For the first time, we are introducing, in the place of a guardian, a substituted decision-making process. This is a new concept in our law. International human rights dictate that supported decision-making must be the first option, while substituted decision-making, is the last resort. This goes hand in hand with the right to self-determination and the need to uphold the right to be deemed mentally capable. This is captured in Part V of the Bill.

The Bill embraces the right to liberty which is protected as a fundamental right by Article 139 of our Constitution. Only in given parameters laid down in the Bill that a person is to be deprived of his/her liberty on the basis of mental illness. The Minister of Health drew attention to an amendment that is to be proposed at the appropriate time. That amendment is another attempt at realising the right to liberty because the Bill, in its current form, has an error that speaks to seclusion in a mandatory way. The Bill removes that. The proposed amendment is intended to remove that and, therefore, recognise the right to liberty. The Bill creates a series of offences against its provisions, most of them directed against protecting the welfare of the mental health patient. It also lists a series of procedures that allows for decisions to be appealed if the aggrieved party feels that he/she needs to appeal the decision. There is a regime of fines that are imposed.

In conclusion, this Bill breaks new ground in Guyana by laying the foundation for the highest quality of mental health care. Once it becomes law, it will be the most modern health law in the region. Again, Mr. Speaker, I take pride in saying that our Government is again the trendsetter in the region, when it comes to legislation. With the Industrial Hemp Bill that we just passed, we are leading in this one, again. We will be the trendsetters in setting the standard for mental health in the region. The Chambers of the Attorney General will continue to work with the Ministry of Health to ensure that this level of bills come to this House. This is because we are committed as a Government, as a collective, to ensure that not only in the economic and financial arena we should

have modern legislation, but moreover, where the health of our people is concerned, that remains the highest of our priorities. That is why we are ensuring that the highest possible public health standards are set, both by principles, by the association with international medical institutions, as well as, by our legislative framework. I, therefore, support this Bill wholeheartedly. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Attorney General. I now call on the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo.

Ms. Teixeira: I am sorry Mr. Speaker, we have dropped two speakers, Dr. Mahadeo and Dr. Persaud. So, we will just go to the closing now with Dr. Anthony.

Deputy Speaker: I now call on the Minister of Health, Dr. Anthony, to conclude.

Dr. Anthony (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my Colleague and all the Colleagues on this side, for the support they have given to this Bill. I have one amendment, as I have said before. At the right time, I would like to propose that amendment. Thank you very much.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will now resolve itself into Committee and consider the Bill clause by clause. My apologies, the question is that the Bill now be read a second time.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee

10.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: The Bill has 69 separate clauses and there is a proposed amendment to clause 49 (1).

Clauses 1 to 48

Clauses 1 to 48 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 49

Dr. Anthony: Clause 49 (1) of the Bill is proposed to be amended by substituting the subsection with the following subsection:

“(1) a person shall not be kept in seclusion unless it is necessary and conducted in accordance with any regulations the Minister may make.”

Clause 49, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 50 to 69

Clauses 50 to 69 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported with amendments, read the third time and passed as amended.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the second reading of the Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2022 – No. 12/2022 published on 2022-06-27

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

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Medical Practitioners Act.”

[Minister of Health]

Dr. Anthony: Colleagues, as we know, Guyana is undergoing a rapid transformation in the health sector and our ambition is to create a world class healthcare service where all our citizens could enjoy the best medical care in Guyana. We envisage that many persons living in the diaspora would want to come back home for care and even non-citizens would want to come here for care. The transformation has already started with significant investment in hospital infrastructure and in equipment. So, in the next few years, you will see this infrastructure totally transformed. One of our challenges is with human resources. While attempts would be made to increase training and to expand our training programme, it will still take a few years for us to complete this process and to have all the staff that is necessary.

[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair.]

To train a doctor takes quite a long time and to train a specialist taken an even longer time. The amendment that we have to the Medical Practitioners Bill allows for us to change the existing law to allow non-nationals from coming into Guyana and to be able to practice medicine and to be

registered by the medical council. We have removed the criteria where one has to be a national or be married to a national before one could be considered for proper registration in the country. By removing that, we are opening up the country to a pool of expertise that is urgently needed if we are going to continue with this transformation of the healthcare sector. I so move that we make this amendment in the interest of accelerating the pace of development in the health sector. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I see no other contributor to this amendment to the Medical Practitioners (Amendment) Bill 2022.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

World Indigenous People's Day

Mr. Shuman: Thank you very much for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy with the work that we have done today. I think there are a lot of positives for the Indigenous peoples of Guyana. It is very fitting, at this juncture, for me to take the opportunity to wish all my colleagues in this House, all the ones who are absent, the entirety of Guyana and the world at large a very happy Indigenous Heritage Day, which is tomorrow. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Deputy Speaker.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to add to the compliments which have just been afforded to the National Assembly, the People of Guyana and internationally to wish everyone World Indigenous People's Day, which is being celebrated under the theme "The Role of Indigenous Women in the Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge". Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I think we have had a very productive day, our last day before we go on recess. I want to thank my colleagues for all the support and discipline we have had for us to get through what was a weighty agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to wish you, the Clerk of the National Assembly, the Clerks of Committees and all members of staff... I hope they have the opportunity, during the recess, to have some vacation and to get what they call R&R – rest and recreation. As Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) on this side, unfortunately, we just change the pace, but we do not really get to rest. I wish that you, the staff and, of course, my colleagues here would be able to get some R&R during the recess to prepare for what will be a heavy parliamentary agenda when we come back in October. I am wishing you all the best. Stay safe from Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and, of course, monkeypox, according to Dr. Anthony. We have to protect ourselves from new diseases. Keep safe and keep well everyone. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let me also join in the sentiments expressed with respect to having a happy World Indigenous People's Day tomorrow and to have a very restorative recess between 10th August to 10th October. I know many of the staff would still have some work to do. I just want to let our Members know that on 12th August, which is World Youth Day, we will begin the programme for the 2022 Youth Parliament, which will see the young parliamentarians meet on the 17th and 18th August. Hon. Members, many of the staff will continue some work.

10.15 p.m.

I take this opportunity to wish those who are going to be getting a break from us in the National Assembly, formally, and the committees well. Hon. Minister, do you want to move the adjournment *sine die*?

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

"That the Assembly be adjourned, *sine die*, to a date to be fixed."

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance]

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to move that we be adjourned, *sine die*, to a date to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. We have completed our business for today and this session. The House now stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.16 p.m.