



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

OFFICIAL REPORT

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

88TH Sitting

Monday, 25TH November, 2024

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 2.12 p.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.*

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent – on leave]

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 (16)

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

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

+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
and the Public Service,
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.

[Virtual Participation]

+ 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.

[Absent – on leave]

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ 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.,
(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.

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 (15)

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.

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

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

Hon. Ms. Nandranie Coonjah, M.P.,
(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
Lot 69 Suddie New Housing Scheme,
Essequibo Coast.
c/o Freedom House,
Lot 41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.

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

[Virtual Participation]

Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,

Lot 10 Delph Street,

Campbelville,

Georgetown.

Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,

[Virtual Participation]

Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,

South Ruimveldt,

Georgetown.

Hon. Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,

(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),

Lot 55 Henrietta,

Essequibo Coast.

Hon. Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P.,

(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),

Lot 13 A, New Providence,

East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,

Lot 48 Atlantic Ville,

Georgetown.

Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,

Lot 590 Good Hope,

East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P.,

Lot 7 Freeman Street,

Castello Housing Scheme,

La-Penitence,

Georgetown.

Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P.,

Lot 933 Block 1,

Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P.,

Opposition Chief Whip,

Lot 609 Conciliation Street,

Tucville,

Georgetown.

Hon. Mr. Vinceroy H. Jordan, M.P.,

(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),

Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,

West Coast Berbice.

C/o Christopher Jones

Hon. Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.,

Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field,

East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P.,
*Lot 202 N, Fourth Street,
Alexander Village,
Georgetown.*

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

Hon. Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.,
*(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
Shulidnab Village,
South Central,
Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)*

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

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

Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,
*Lot 1110 Plot ‘B’,
Herstelling,
East Bank Demerara.*

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

Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
*Lot 1282 Block EE,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,
*Lot 151 Durbana Square,
Lamaha Gardens,
Georgetown.*

[Virtual Participation]

Hon. Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,
*(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini),
Mabaruma Compound.*

Hon. Mr. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P.,
*(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 136 2nd Street,
Silvertown,
Wismar, Linden.*

[Virtual Participation]

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

Hon. Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.,
*Lot 18 Public Road,
Johanna Cecilia,
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).*

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

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

[Virtual Participation]

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

Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)
Lot 169-170 Stanleytown,
West Bank Demerara.
c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.*

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

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

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

Hon. Dr. Asha Kissoon, M.P.,
*Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,
Lot 855, 3rd Field,
Cummings Lodge,
Greater Georgetown.*

[Virtual Participation]

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 (16)

Ms. Allison Connelly,
Chief Editor

Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor

Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor

Ms. Shevona Telford,
Senior Editor

Ms. Carol Bess,
Editor

Ms. Indranie Persaud,
Editor

Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Editor

Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter

Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter

Mr. Daniel Allen,
Reporter

Ms. Rajkumarie Ramdeen,
Reporter

Ms. Jasmine Grant,
Reporter

Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician

Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents Page

88TH Sitting Monday, 25TH November, 2024

Announcements by the Speaker 13575-13577

Presentation of Papers and Reports 13578

Questions on Notice For Written Replies 13579-13583

Questions on Notice For Oral Reply 13584-13585

Introduction of Bills and First Reading 13586

Public Business – Government’s Business 13587-13633

BILLS – Second Reading - The Open Data Bill 2024 – Bill No. 13/2024 13589-13614

BILLS – Second Reading - Deceased Persons Estates’ Administration (Amt) Bill 2024 – Bill No. 14/2024 .. 13616-13632

Adjournment - 13634

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Condolences

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, bear with us. We do have quite a bit of announcements this afternoon. First, on your behalf, I extend our condolences to the Hon. Vickram Bharrat on the passing of his father. While we express our sympathies, let us also extend those sympathies to our Clerk who, in the last two weeks, had to do duties as a bigger brother for his little sister who passed away. Mr. Sherlock Isaacs, please accept our condolences.

Gratitude to Parliamentary Staff for duties performed during visit by His Excellency, the Prime Minister of India

Hon. Members, we had a very historic session last Thursday. From my account, noting all the planning that went on nationally and also within our Parliament for the special sitting where His Excellency, the Hon. Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, addressed us, that Parliamentary sitting was not only very historic but, for me, it was executed to the best I would have expected. In this regard, we had a small team of staff filling in for Mr. Sherlock Isaacs, and I am asking if we can give those members of staff a resounding applause. They will stand. The team leaders were Ms. Carlleta Charles, Ms. Juleanna Chatterpaul, Ms. Karen Lewis – where is Mr. Yannick December – Mr. Yannick December and our own Mr. Etwaroo Jagernath. They led the team. I did very little thinking and lifting. The staff came up with the ideas and we refined those. I was very honoured when, as we were leaving, the Hon. Prime Minister said, ‘Mr. Speaker, your protocol was excellent’. Thank you very much, staff.

Birthday Greetings

Hon. Members, we are also celebrating a birthday today – the Hon. Member, Mr. Vincent Henry. Happy Birthday, Sir. They say the celebration is on, Hon. Member, Mr. Henry.

Report on the Chairmanship of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Hon. Members, circulated, you would have seen a report I did for the Caribbean Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Guyana held the Chairmanship of that branch from around May of this year because Antigua had some challenges, and they asked us to hold the Chair. It was a very productive six months and culminated with us assembling in Sydney where the Caribbean branch won the Chairmanship of the Small

Branch Association. Speaker Woods of Belize got that Chairmanship. The victory there was 49 to 15 to 3. She won a plurality and majority of the votes. We had Speaker Holder from Barbados who went up for Chairmanship of the CPA. We lost that one 108 to 109.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lifetime Parliamentary Award

More particularly, at that meeting, we learnt that the Hon. Gail Teixeira was awarded the CPA Lifetime Parliamentary Award. Congratulations, Hon. Member. The award is presented to a parliamentarian who has served for over 20 years and has demonstrated an impressive record of achievement as a parliamentarian in his/her contribution to his/her Parliament and country. The person must have promoted democracy and good governance within his/her jurisdiction – this seems tailor-made for Ms. Gail Teixeira. He/she must have achieved notable and sustainable positive change over the course of his/her career.

We nominated the Hon. Gail Teixeira who has served in four ministerial capacities as the Minister of Health – 1992-1997; Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport – 1998-2005; Minister of Home Affairs – 2005-2006 and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance – 2020-present. She served as Presidential Advisor on Governance – 2006-2015 and was Chief Whip on the Government side – 2012-2015; she was the Opposition Chief Whip – 2015-2019 and continues as Government Chief Whip. As a long-standing Member of the Parliamentary Management Committee (PMC), our Hon. Gail Teixeira has provided valuable guidance, helping to foster consensus on complex issues and encouraging a spirit of cordiality in the House. Her influence extends regionally and internationally where she continues to mentor parliamentarians.

We have the award here, which Minister Parag, the Hon. Mahipaul and I received on 7th November, on behalf of the Hon. Gail Teixeira. I am asking our International Secretary, Ms. Carlleta Charles, Mr. Etwaroo Jagernauth and one of the longest-serving public servants in the country, Ms. Jaitun Haniff, who is celebrating 50 years in the public service and 38 years here. Ms. Haniff will present that award on the CPA’s behalf to the Hon. Gail Teixeira. Bear with us. Ms. Haniff, Ms. Charles and Mr. Jagernath... I think we need to honour our Minister. We can all stand. *[Applause]*

The Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, was presented with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Lifetime Parliamentary Award.

We cannot let her take her seat without saying a few words.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: The emphasis is on a few and you know I am not always a short speaker. It is a great honour to receive this from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I want to thank the Members on both sides of the House because the nomination was based on a unanimous decision to submit my name. I think it is a big achievement for this House and a special honour for me that I had the support of both sides. Thank you very much.

2.25 p.m.

My Friend, Mr. Mahipaul, I saw him on the video. It was as if he was receiving the award. He was so excited. I am very glad. Thank you, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul for the support, the Members of the Opposition and, of course, those on my side. I just want to say, this job we have, this task that we have, where we were elected by the people and we are selected by our parties, it is an extremely great honour and one we must treat with great respect, dignity and integrity. For me, as a woman and a Member of Parliament (MP), if I had to live my life over again, it would be no other way than it has been over all these years. I encourage all the young MPs, particularly on both sides of the House, this is about serving the people and being able to do the best you can in the interest of the people of our country. I want to say to the Guyana Parliament, thank you very much for nominating me. I also want to thank my party, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government and the people of Guyana for entrusting me with the responsibility of being a Member of Parliament for all these long years.

It has been an honour, and I am humbled by it. I have tried to do my work to the best I can. You know me when I am fighting on the floor but, otherwise, I am not too bad as a person. Thank you very much. I will continue to serve as long as I can and as long as my party brings me here. For the younger MPs, this is a great place to be. I know it is frustrating, but it is a great honour to serve the people of our country. There is no greater honour for me than that, so thank you very much. I am very overwhelmed. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. As we were handing out bouquets last Thursday, it could not have been the success it was had it not been also for the assistance and cooperation of Mr. Nankishore and his staff at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC). Let us also acknowledge them, please. *[Applause]*

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Report were laid:

(1) Government Notice No. 4/2024, regarding Notification Receipts of all petroleum revenues paid into the Natural Resources Fund during the period 1st July, 2024 to 30th September, 2024.

(2) Financial Paper No. 3/2024 – Supplementary Estimates (Current) – advances made from the Contingency Fund totalling \$456,851,845 for the period 7th November, 2024 to 22nd November, 2024.

(3) Financial Paper No. 4/2024 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) – totalling \$84,074,229,401 for the period ending 31st December, 2024.

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

(4) Annual Report of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority for the year 2022.

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip on behalf of the Minister of Public Works]

(5) Audited Financial Statements of the National Communications Network Incorporated (NCN) for the years ended 31st December, 2020, 2021 and 2022.

[Prime Minister]

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service named 27th November, 2024 as the date for the consideration of the financial papers.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome to Members of Parliament on their return to the House

Mr. Speaker: Let us welcome back the Hon. Members, Ms. Brown and Mr. Ramkissoon to the House.

Observance of International Day of Violence Against Women

Let us join with Minister Dr. Vindhya Persaud as we observe International Day of Violence Against Women – 25th November.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Written Replies]

Hon. Members, there are 14 questions on today's Order Paper. Questions Nos. one to 13 are for written replies and question No. 14 is for oral reply. For the written replies, questions one to three are in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Sinclair and they are for the Hon. Minister of Education. Questions Nos. four to eight are in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson and are for the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service. Questions Nos. nine to 11 are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Flue-Bess and are for the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport. Questions Nos. 12 and 13 are in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan and are for the Hon. Minister of Agriculture. There is one question for the Hon. Minister of Education that she has asked to be deferred, that is, question No. one for written reply. The answers to all of the other questions have been received and have therefore, in accordance with our Standing Orders, been circulated.

(1) Teachers' Salary

Mr. Sinclair:

(a) Could the Hon. Minister inform the National Assembly how many teachers in Regions (1-10), NET salary per month is less than one Hundred and Fifty Thousand (\$150,000) for Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools?

(b) Could the Hon. Minister also inform the National Assembly how many teachers in Regions (1-10), NET salary per month is more than one hundred and fifty thousand (\$150,000) but less than two hundred thousand (\$200,000) for Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools?

(c) Could the Hon. Minister further inform the National Assembly how many teachers in regions (1-10), NET salary per month is more than two hundred thousand (\$200,000) but less than two hundred and fifty thousand (\$250,000) for Nursery, Primary and Secondary schools?

Answers were Deferred.

(2) Management of the GOAL Programme

Mr. Sinclair:

(a) Could the Hon. Minister inform the House whether the GOAL Programme in

the Ministry of Education has a governing board constituted under the Laws of Guyana?

(b) If the answer to 1(a) is no, please inform the House of the following:

Who are the seven highest ranked persons managing the GOAL Programme, and their job descriptions which should include the following:

- Academic Qualifications
- Gross Monthly Earnings
- Work Experience in Education

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]:

(a) There is no governing board constituted.

(b) Responses:

Designations	Basic Salary	Duty Allowance	Telephone Allowance	Total Gross Emoluments
Special Projects Officer	\$1,476,857	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$1,516,857
Programme Manager	\$ 492,286	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$ 552,286
Programme Manager	\$ 430,750	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$ 490,750
Programme Manager	\$ 430,750	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$ 490,750
Programme Manager	\$ 402,570	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$ 462,570
Programme Manager	\$ 402,570	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$ 462,570
Programme Manager	\$ 402,570	\$40,000	\$20,000	\$ 462,570

(3) Cost incurred by the Government of Guyana to the Universities/Colleges offering the GOAL Programme

Mr. Sinclair: Could the Hon. Minister inform the House what is the cost per course per student (in GY \$) to attend each University/College/School, offering the GOAL Programme? Please list these costs for 2023 for Diplomas, Degrees, Masters, and Doctorates for each institution.

Ms. Manickchand: This question was misdirected.

(4) Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre

Mr. Patterson: Assets Group Inc. has announced the construction of the Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre which is to be built on sport grounds formally under the control of Guyana National Service (GNS) and the National Insurance Scheme (NIS).

(a) Could the Hon. Minister please state the method of transfer of ownership of these sports grounds?

(b) If the grounds were leased, could the Hon. Minister provide the National Assembly with copies of the lease agreement?

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

(a) A lease of Government lands has been issued.

(b) I am advised that the lease agreement is a public document and could be accessed from the relevant State agency.

(5) Concessional Agreements for Construction of Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre

Mr. Patterson: Assets Group Inc. has announced the construction of the Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre which is to be built on sport grounds formally under the control of Guyana National Service and the National Insurance Scheme.

Could the Hon. Minister provide the National Assembly with copies of any concessional agreement/s signed between the developer Assets Group Inc. and/or its subsidiaries with the Government of Guyana?

Dr. Singh: There are no concessional agreements.

(6) Copies of the Environmental Impact Agreements Report (EIA) for the Construction of Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre

Mr. Patterson: Assets Group Inc. has announced the construction of the Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre which is to be built on sport grounds formally under the control of Guyana National Service and the National Insurance Scheme.

Could the Hon. Minister advise if an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was done prior to the vesting of the lands and signing of any concessional agreements? If so, can the Minister provide the National Assembly with the copies of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that an application has been submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency for approval.

(7) Copies of Feasibility Study for the Construction of Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre

Mr. Patterson: Assets Group Inc. has announced the construction of the Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre which is to be built on sport grounds formally under the control of Guyana National Service and the National Insurance Scheme.

Could the Hon. Minister advise if a Feasibility Study was done prior to the vesting of the lands and signing of any concessional agreements? If so, can the Minister provide the National Assembly with the copies of the Feasibility Study?

Dr. Singh: This is a privately financed project.

(8) National Park and St. Stanislaus College Sports Ground

Mr. Patterson: Assets Group Inc. has announced the construction of the Georgetown Seafront Resort and Convention Centre which is to be built on sports grounds formally under the control of Guyana National Service and the National Insurance Scheme.

Could the Hon. Minister advise if the final scope of this development project also includes the incorporation of additional public spaces, namely the National Park and Saint Stanislaus College Sports Ground?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that the current scope of the project does not extend beyond the GNS and the NIS grounds.

(9) List of Applicants for the Culture and Creative Industry Grant Programme

Ms. Flue-Bess: Could the Hon. Minister provide a list of the applicants for the Culture and Creative Industry Grant Programme for 2022, 2023 and 2024?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: I would like to thank the Hon. Member for her question. While the Ministry possesses the information requested, it has been the Parliamentary practice and policy that the

names of persons are not shared and/or disclosed in Parliament. The Hon. Member ought to know this. In any event, when persons applied, they did not consent to public disclosures in Parliament, and it would be unethical to breach their confidence.

(10) Shortlisted Applicants for the Culture and creative Industry Grant Programme

Ms. Flue-Bess: Could the Hon. Minister provide a list of the successful applicants who received the Culture and Creative Industry Grant in 2022, 2023, and 2024?

Mr. Ramson: I would like to thank the Hon. Member for her question. While the Ministry possesses the information requested, it has been the Parliamentary practice and policy that the names of persons are not shared and/or disclosed in Parliament. The Hon. Member ought to know this. In any event, when persons received a grant, they did not consent to public disclosures in Parliament and it would be unethical to breach their confidence.,

(11) Follow up on the Usage of the Culture and Creativity Grant

Ms. Flue-Bess:

(a) Could the Hon. Minister state if there was a follow-up to determine how the grant was used by successful applicants in 2022 and 2023?

(b) If follow-ups were done, could the Hon. Minister provide the report(s) of the findings?

Mr. Ramson:

(a) The Ministry receives updates from applicants and some of the projects have had media coverage. In fact, one item produced from the support of the grant was presented to this Honourable House. Following the outstanding success of the programme, a media production will be commissioned shortly, and the Honourable Member will be pleased to know that this will be distributed widely in 2025.

(b) While the Ministry will not be able to provide the full report on the grant for the reasons shared above, the overall finding of the Programme is that the Programme is successful and beneficial to persons in the Culture and Creative Industry sector.

(12) Missing Sugar at Rosehall Estate

Mr. Jordan:

(a) Could the Hon. Minister state whether any sugar went missing or could not be accounted for at the Rose Hall Estate during the last crop period?

(b) If yes, could the Hon. Minister provide the report on the outcome of the investigation of the unaccounted sugar?

Mr. Mustapha:

(a) No sugar went missing or unaccounted for at the Rose Hall Estate. However, there was an error in reporting sugar production rather than physical loss of sugar. Production records were inflated over an extended period. Essentially, the declared production figures were higher than the actual output. This misrepresentation in production data was attributed to lapses in following the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for sugar declaration. This has since been corrected and all actual sugar is now being recorded.

(13) Termination of Contracts

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Minister state what led to the termination of contracts of the Production Manager and the Head Laboratory Technician at the Rose Hall Estate?

Mr. Mustapha: The termination of the contracts of the Production Manager and the Head Laboratory Technician at GuySuCo 's Rose Hall Estate was driven by their roles in procedural breaches regarding the sugar production reporting. This followed an investigation into an "over declaration" incident during the last crop period, where sugar output was recorded as higher than the actual amount produced.

This reporting discrepancy indicated that these employees failed to adhere to GuySuCo's standard operating procedures, which require meticulous accuracy in recording sugar production. The decision to terminate them was made to enforce accountability and reinforce the Corporation's commitment to ethical and transparent practices in its operations.

[For Oral Reply]

Mr. Speaker: For oral reply, we have question No. 14. Hon. Member, Ms. Flue-Bess, please you may put your question.

(14) Criteria used for Selection of the Culture and Creative Industry Grant Programme

Ms. Flue-Bess: Could the Hon. Minister inform the House of what criteria were used to select persons who received the Culture & Creative Industry Grant for the years 2022, 2023, and 2024?

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much. Please allow me, Hon. Speaker, to wish and extend congratulations to Minister Teixeira on receiving her award. I am also sharing in everyone's experience in saying what a privilege it is to share this House with you. I would like to thank you for all the advice you shared with me and us over the years. The one word I would always remember you left with me is the word "stickability", which is not a real word, but it means a lot for anyone who wants to be involved in politics.

I would like to thank the Hon. Member for her question. The Culture and Creative Industry Grant is a very important initiative and has helped so many members and so many persons who are involved in the sector. Every year, we have an open and public invitation for applications for the grant. This is published in the media, along with the inclusion of guidelines for priority areas for consideration. Every year, the same method is followed. The primary qualifications for basic applicant eligibility are Guyanese citizenship and residency in Guyana for a minimum of two years prior to the application submission. The published guidelines for project eligibility are as follows: (a) productions and publications across all creative industries; (b) marketing distribution and branding of creative products; (c) procurement of specialised equipment in support of a particular type of creative production; (d) research and design of innovative new Guyanese products in the creative industries. Applications are submitted online *via Google Docs* form and/or e-mail. We do this particularly so that we can reach the entire country so that no one is restricted by their remoteness. In fact, there is a deliberate attempt to cater for the application to be done online and sharing of that, especially in the Hinterland.

Applications are divided by the administrative regions in which the applicant is resident, as indicated by a field or online application form. The applicant must answer the relevant questions specifically tailored for the purpose of the programme and successful applications are short-listed after being assessed along four criteria, one is adherence to the basic eligibility criteria; two, creative originality of project; three economic feasibility and sustainability of project and four experience of the applicant in the project area. Short-listed applications are then interviewed by a committee and the final successful applications are informed and subsequently awarded. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bills were introduced and read the first time:

(1) **International Measures for the Protection of Children (Hague Convention) Bill – Bill No. 15/2024**

A Bill intituled:

"An Act to give effect to the Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Cooperation in respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children, and for other related matters".

[*Minister of Human Services and Social Security*]

2.40 p.m.

(2) **Acquisition of Lands for Public Purposes (Amendment) Bill 2024 – Bill No. 16/2024**

A Bill intituled:

"An Act to amend the Acquisition of Lands for Public Purposes Act."

[*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the Acquisition of Lands for Public Purposes (Amendment) Bill 2024, Bill No. 16/2024, a BILL intituled AN ACT to Amend the Acquisition of Lands for Public Purposes Act... I put the question that the Bill be read a first time. Those in favour, say aye.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, please, if you would not mind. A Government Bill does not require the support of the House in its First Reading, only the Private Members' Bills. I refer you to the section dealing with Private Members' Bills, that the First Reading of the Bill has to be approved by the House but not a Bill brought by a Government Minister. I would like to correct that, please. We have never done it before and I find it rather strange we are doing it now.

Mr. Speaker: Give me one second to consult with the Clerk. I am absolutely certain the Hon. Minister is correct. Let the Bill be read the first time.

Bill read the first time.

(3) **Wills (Amendment) Bill 2024 – Bill No. 17/2024**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Wills Act.”

[*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

Bills – Second Reading

The Open Data Bill 2024 – Bill No. 13 of 2024

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the use and administration of public data; to provide for public data to be made available in an open format and under an open licence; to facilitate transparency, effective governance and innovation in the use and administration of public data and for connected matters.”]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: A Bill intituled an act to provide for the use and administration of public data; to provide for public data to be made available in an open format and under an open licence; to facilitate transparency, effective governance and innovation in the use and administration of public data and for connected matters. The Bill was read a first time on 9th August, 2024. Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Open Data Bill 2024, Bill No. 13/2024, published on 9th August 2024, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present and advocate for the passage of the Open Data Bill 2024, a critical piece of legislation that positively adds to the bigger picture of this Government's commitment to transparency, innovation and the responsible management of public data. As much as this Bill forms part of our legislative agenda, it is also very much a critical step forward in how we govern and utilise data for the benefit of our people. I wish to begin by contextualising the significance of this Bill. The Open Data Bill is the latest chapter in a series of forward-thinking initiatives including the Data Protection Act and the Data Identity Card Act, both of which this Parliament recently passed. These laws form a comprehensive framework that balances the power of digital innovation with the protection of individual rights and privacy. In passing these laws, we are laying the foundation for a modern Guyana, one that is prepared to lead in the digital age while ensuring data is used safely, responsibly and for the betterment of all citizens.

This Bill seeks to achieve several important objectives. First, it mandates the publication of public data in accessible and

open formats to promote transparency and accountability across Government institutions. Second, it optimises the use of public data in line with international best practices, driving innovation and collaboration between the public and private sectors. Third, it ensures that public data is used in a way that enhances the quality of public services while safeguarding the confidentiality of sensitive information. This Bill represents a firm commitment by our Government to empower citizens and institutions alike, fostering an environment where data becomes a tool for innovation, economic growth and more efficient governance. Naturally, we expect concerns to be raised about the risks associated with making public data more accessible. These concerns, while valid, are adequately addressed in the safeguards embedded in the Bill. Clauses 11 and 15 of the Bill strictly prohibit the disclosure of non-public data assets and impose severe penalties for breaches of confidentiality. This ensures that private, sensitive and classified information remains secure.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the Open Data Bill builds on the foundation of the Data Protection Act, reinforcing confidentiality and privacy safeguards. The Act's principles of lawful and transparent data handling align with the Open Data Bill's requirements of publishing public data in responsible, accessible formats. Both laws impose stringent obligations on data controllers and processors to protect data, with the Open Data Bill specifically prohibiting unauthorised disclosure of non-public assets under Clause 15, ensuring confidentiality remains paramount. The data protection officers mandated by the Data Protection Act complement the Open Data Bill's requirement for data officers to manage public data, maintain registers and enforce best practices while safeguarding sensitive information. Additionally, the Data Protection Act's provisions for rectifying inaccuracies and addressing privacy violations align with the Open Data Bill's emphasis on public engagement under Clause 15, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Internationally, open data initiatives have shown that transparency and privacy can coexist under robust frameworks. The European Union is a great example of this balance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), ensuring strong privacy protections alongside the Open Data Directive, which promotes the reuse of public sector information to drive innovation. Similarly, the United States Open Government Data Act fosters public access to federal data, while privacy laws like the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) protect individuals' sensitive information, enabling innovation but not compromising security. Regionally, the Caribbean nations are advancing

similar efforts. Barbados' Data Protection Act 2019 works alongside its open data policies to enhance transparency and citizen engagement. Jamaica's Data Protection Act 2020 protects personal data while supporting open data initiatives that foster innovation. Trinidad and Tobago's national open data policy also emphasises transparency while safeguarding sensitive information. Globally, Estonia demonstrates how small nations can lead in digital governance, integrating open data initiatives with stringent privacy protections. These examples are testimony to the fact that Guyana's Open Data Bill aligns with international best practices, ensuring transparency and innovation while safeguarding privacy and security.

This Bill also aligns with our broader vision for Guyana's development in the digital age. We are building a modern infrastructure for data and technology that will support our nation's growth. We have already introduced free public wi-fi hotspots across the country, benefiting hundreds of thousands of residents. We are expanding internet access to hinterland and remote communities, ensuring that connectivity reaches every corner of our nation.

The implementation of the Digital Identity Card Act is another critical element of this transformation, creating a secure and reliable system for identity verification. The Digital Identity Card Act and the Open Data Bill will work hand in hand to transform governance and public service delivery in Guyana. While the Digital Identity Card Act will establish a secure, centralised registry for managing identity data with robust encryption and authentication, the Open Data Bill will ensure that anonymised and non-sensitive data from such systems can be utilised for transparency and improved public services. These two crucial pieces of legislation will enable data-driven decision-making, reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and promote greater citizen trust by safeguarding privacy and confidentiality.

2.55 p.m.

One of the most exciting aspects of this Bill is its potential to foster collaboration and innovation. Clause 12 encourages public authorities to engage with citizens, researchers and private sector entities to enable the cocreation of solutions to societal challenges using public data. For example, imagine a scenario where developers and entrepreneurs access anonymised agriculture data from a rural community to design tools and platforms that enhance crop management or predict weather patterns so as to help farmers increase productivity. Researchers can also use open, health data to identify gaps in rural healthcare services, enabling targeted

interventions such as mobile clinics or telemedicine solutions, to bring vital services to remote areas. These possibilities demonstrate how open data can directly address the unique needs of Guyana's communities. It empowers individuals and organisations to create value, solve problems, and drive progress. As Guyana continues to establish itself as a leader in the Caribbean and beyond, we must adhere to international standards and best practices. This Bill reflects our Government's steadfast commitment to these principles.

Clause 9 requires public data to be published in machine readable formats, unencumbered by restrictions and consistent with international standards approved by the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS). This ensures that our open data initiatives are aligned with global practices, making Guyana a competitive and attractive destination for investment and collaboration. For a developing country like Guyana, with a growing oil and gas industry, growing foreign direct investment and rapid economic expansion, adopting these global best practices is vital to ensure sustainable and inclusive development. Open data can provide critical insights from managing the vast resources and opportunities emerging from this growth, allowing for informed policy decisions and efficient resource allocation. Aligning with international standards ensures that our data systems are robust and interoperable, while we position ourselves to attract global investors and partners who recognise the value of a transparent and data-driven governance framework. This is particularly important as we strive to balance development with environmental sustainability, social equity, and technological progress.

We live in a world where the demand for data-driven decision making is growing exponentially. Governments, businesses and individuals rely on data to inform policies, drive innovation and improve lives. The Open Data Bill is our response to this reality. It positions Guyana as a country ready to embrace the opportunities of the digital age while safeguarding against its risks. This legislation ensures that data is a vital resource to foster economic growth and empower our citizens. Moreover, this legislation comes at a time when Guyana's own digitisation is at an all-time high and is evident through initiatives, such as the *Information and Communication Technology Master Plan 2030*, which aims to modernise public services and key industries. This comprehensive strategy includes digitising services under the Ministry of Home Affairs and its subagencies, implementing a national e-identification system and creating a national online portal for digital Government services. Other initiatives include the expansion of the Safe Country

Initiative. The development of the Electronic Health Record System by the Ministry of Health exemplified the launch of the 'One Guyana' Digital Initiative in February, 2024 aimed at equipping 2,000 young people across all 10 Administrative Regions with Information Technology (IT) skills among many others.

The Open Data Bill will align with these ongoing efforts and set a legal framework that ensures data is accessible, secure and used responsibly. This Bill will facilitate innovation, attract investment and enable our citizens to participate more fully in the digital economy. The passage of the Open Data Bill is a decisive step towards a more transparent, efficient and inclusive Guyana. It reflects our determination to harness the power of data to drive national development and improve the lives of all Guyanese. I urge all Members of this esteemed Assembly to support this pivotal legislation as we collectively pave the way for a brighter, data-driven future for our nation. As we debate this Bill, let us remember that it is not just about technology or data. It is about people, the people of Guyana, and their right to benefit from a government that is transparent, accountable, and forward thinking.

Let us seize this opportunity to set an example for the region and the world. Let us demonstrate that Guyana is ready to lead in the digital age. I commend this Bill to the House and urge my colleagues to support its passage. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the Bill be read a second time. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Now for the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: A pleasant afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for giving me the floor to make my contribution to the debate on the Open Data Bill, No. 13/2024, laid in the National Assembly on 9th August, 2024 in the name of Hon. Mark Phillips, Member of Parliament (MP) and Prime Minister of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. May I say from the onset that the Opposition will give its support, but not without highlighting a few concerns contained in the Bill, to which my colleagues and I anticipate that, in the rebuttal, the Hon. Member would be able to provide some degree of clarity. The Bill has 17 clauses and four parts, with an Explanatory Memorandum that has provided a brief synopsis of what the Bill is, and we have just heard the Hon. Prime Minister elucidate the many good things this Bill will achieve.

This Bill introduces a new legislation. It is necessary for me to express my dissatisfaction and disappointment with the Member in whose name the Bill stands. I have conducted

extensive research to ascertain the following: the reasons or purposes for this eminent legislation and whether consultations were conducted amongst and across stakeholders and feedback given. My findings were futile. It is easy for laws to be framed, implemented and amended in this Assembly by its 65 Members without giving many considerations that these laws go beyond the hallow walls of this Assembly. Ultimately, it is our citizens who must face the necessary penalties once they act in contravention of the law. As lawmakers, we are duty-bound to ensure that our constituents are educated and made aware of what the new law is seeking to address. You would recall that since August, 2020, several new laws and amendments were debated and successfully passed in the National Assembly. Many are to be enforced. For example, the Single Window Act, the amendment to Motor Vehicle Act and Family Violence Act.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that I was at a seminar earlier this month with women from religious groupings and one of the presentations was done on the Domestic Violence Act. After the presentations by well-known lawyers in our society, I posed a question, and I asked the audience to let us conduct a survey to find out how many women in the grouping were aware of the new law with regards to family violence, which was passed in August, 2024. I was taken by surprise because many of our women are unaware of this new law, which was enacted sometime in August. We cannot blame the people out there. As I said earlier, it is our responsibility...How many people would listen to National Communications Network (NCN) Channel 11? How many people listen to National Television Network (NTN) 69? How many people listen to Mr. Jagdeo at his regular press conferences on Thursdays? Nobody listens to the news; you will find almost 3.2 million and 3.468 *In the Ring* or on the famous *Melly Mell Show*. The onus is on us not only to make laws and have them passed, but we also have a moral responsibility to educate our people. If we cannot do that, we are failing as leaders in this august Assembly. While I understand the intent of the Bill we are debating here today, I am in empathy with the thousands of people we on this side of the House represent, since I am doubtful that they are cognisant of and alert to this law.

For the purpose of my presentation, I will narrow it to several areas of the Bill. I first turn our attention to Part I of the Bill which deals with the preliminaries. Part I, clause 3 (2) – Application: I noticed under this particular subsection it is exempting the President and the commissions of inquiry issued by the President or information obtained in the course of a probe or examination of audit conducted by or under the

authority of Auditor General until they are finally concluded. I have a little concern with this particular part. The concern I have, honourable famous Attorney General, is that of the.... We would recall that five of our servicemen died in a tragic accident in December, 2023. We keep hearing about the black box. We keep hearing about a preliminary report.

3.10 p.m.

We keep hearing about all sorts of things before a final report can be laid in this National Assembly and bring closure to that fatal accident. Therefore, this particular aspect of the Bill would actually disallow Members on this side of the House from seeking information and from asking for information because this can only be possible when the reports are finalised.

Mr. Speaker, you would also recall that, two years after, this National Assembly is yet to get the final report of the National Population & Housing Census. Am I to understand, from particular area in the Bill that we are debating today, that we as lawmakers can only access information when the reports are finalised? If we are to bring questions on the National Population & Housing Census... Why is it taking so long? The very Member, Dr. Singh, stood up in this very House last year and said that we would get the preliminary report early in the first quarter of 2024. Mr. Speaker, where are we today? We are in the last quarter, and we are yet to receive the preliminary report on the census. I know what is causing the Government not to bring the report. It is because the data is not favourable to my colleagues on that side of the House. They are hiding the information. I cannot understand how the honourable mover of this Bill has said to this National Assembly that this is an innovative Bill, it is a Bill with transparency, and it is a Bill with accountability. Hon. Prime Minister, I cannot accept those lovely words from you.

Mr. Speaker, the next clause I wish to turn our attention to looks at the objects of this Bill. The Bill speaks to four objects:

“(a) enhance transparency and accountability in the dissemination and use of public data while maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of non-public data;”

That is a given.

“(b) make public data open and accessible to the public;

(c) optimise the use and management of public data in accordance with international standards and best practices; and

(d) improve public services and promote private sector innovation and collaboration.”

It is my desire and I guess the desire of my colleagues on this side of the House to see that these very objects work the way they ought to when this Bill is actually enacted into law. We are all aware of the bureaucracies within the Government sectors. So, if he is talking about innovation and technology, I trust the Hon. Prime Minister will let us know some of these new, innovative and technological skills that will be employed.

I would like to turn our attention to Part II of the Bill which speaks about the Administration of Public Data. I am more concerned about section 2 (g) of the Bill. This is what section 2(g) of the Bill states... [Mr. Nandlall: It is clause 2.] It is clause 2, subsection (g):

“(g) liaising with the Commissioner of Information on behalf of the public authority.”

Mr. Speaker, we are fully aware that this particular office.... I am concerned that the holder of this office is not working in the interest of Guyanese and the public. Every year, we have moneys appropriated in the budget to pay this particular office holder a monthly salary of one point something million dollars. Mr. Speaker, you would also recall the many... Based on my research, the leader of.... Let me just say this:

“Underutilised’ Commissioner of Information still up to the task.”

This was carried in the *Stabroek News* on 18th June, 2022, I think. These are not my words I am quoting. I am quoting the Hon. Commissioner of Information, whom taxpayers’ moneys are being used to pay on a monthly basis. In 2013, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson Sr., was appointed by then President, Mr. Donald Ramotar, as Guyana’s first-ever Commissioner of Information, as an independent state official. The Commissioner functions as a conduit for the public’s access to information, as detailed in the 2011 Access to Information Act. The Act further states that any citizen can submit an application to the Commissioner’s office and request his assistance in retrieving information. The citizens have otherwise been unable to access. Yet, he said – not Ms. Ferguson – that his office and by extension his services are underutilised. The office is underutilised for more than one reason. One, being that it is not appropriately

located, Justice Ramson Sr. said on Thursday during an interview with *News Room*. He then further stated that he works out of his quaint East Street, Georgetown house after he was forced out of his previous office in the compound of the Office of the President by the former A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Administration.

Based on my research, I found that the Coalition Government gave this very office holder options to rent a building so that he could have executed his work. By choice, he decided that he was going to utilise his private residence as his office. Justice Ramson Sr. related that for six hours each weekday, he avails himself to citizens who seek information. Mr. Speaker, I have passed East Street more than one time in a week and I have not seen any activities. The place is always locked but the Golden Arrowhead flies outside of the house.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, open data. I understand where you are going with respect to access to the Commissioner of Information, but I think you are prosecuting a slightly different case here. Let us get back on track.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I am just trying to make the link that this Open Data Bill is now going to allow the Commissioner of Information to be a part of the process. My contention here is that you are giving the Commissioner of Information extra duties when you know for a fact that this gentleman is not doing anything.

Mr. Speaker: That is your view. That is why I am saying keep the personal view. When he is here to defend himself, we could go down that road.

Ms. Ferguson: I am dealing with the Bill. The Bill makes mention of the Commissioner of Information. Mr. Speaker, you would recall also that there was a publication by the Leader of the Opposition who also stated that Mr Ramson Sr., the Commissioner of Information, is unfit to hold such an office.

Clause 13 of the Bill speaks about private sector collaboration. Therefore, from the Bill that we are discussing, there are many lingering questions as it relates to the role of the Commissioner of Information, owing to the evidence of his ineffectiveness and incompetence since assuming office in 2013. Millions of taxpayers' dollars are being paid to him for doing nothing but receiving moneys under false pretence. However, as I said earlier, this Bill will bear additional responsibilities on the office holder who performs the function as the Commissioner of Information.

Additionally, we on this side of the House would not hold our breath since we are yet to see a functioning office of the Commissioner of Information and him being accountable to taxpayers. With that said, I think I have made my point, so I want to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Open Data Bill, No.13 of 2024. With that being said, Sir, thank you very much, and may God richly bless us all. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, you have the floor.

Mr. Datadin: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support Bill No.13 of 2024, the Open Data Bill. This legislation brings Guyana into the world that most of the developed countries have already explored. Open data is essential, and this is a monumental piece of legislation. It changes the governance landscape of our nation. This Bill is not just a collection of words. I could not believe the interpretation afforded to it and the emphasis placed upon it by the Hon. Member who spoke before me. The collection of words and all the key features of the Bill seem to have escaped the Hon. Member. In any society, data and open data, similarly, must be managed. It has to be managed by individuals – by people – who hold the offices that are required to do so. To say that you cannot get reports of commissions of inquiry is, in fact, not unusual for this type of data. You will recognise – at least I hope so – that matters such as court proceedings and commissions of inquiry would have specific rules which apply to them. These are specific rules that relate to the evidence that could be admitted and taken into consideration. You cannot have the same rules for those specific instances being applied generally.

3.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, at the heart of the Bill, the fundamental purpose is to instil a culture of openness between the Government and its citizens. In a world that is increasingly driven by data, we should – and this will assist us – make decisions that are driven by data, so the decision makers will have at their disposal data from all of the public bodies. This data would be kept in a format and in a form that could be easily shared and that could be easily received by the citizens and by other agencies, including agencies in the private sector. It will encourage businesses and businessmen to make informed decisions about the data itself. This, Mr. Speaker, would undoubtedly lead to better decisions and more trust. The critical nature of the data is highlighted by the critical juncture we are in our history. If we are going to make decisions about how we are to develop and how we are

to use our resources, it is well advised that we do that upon consideration of the data. By mandating the systemic release of public data in accessible formats, we are laying the groundwork for an informed and engaged population and decision-making process. This is not merely about publishing data.

The Hon. Member before me seemed to think that this is a device for simply publishing data. It is about taking the data/information and having that information fuelling and supporting the decision-making process and fuelling growth in the country. Whether it is healthcare, whether it is education or environmental management, the potential applications are boundless. The Open Data Bill will serve, essentially, as the gateway through which citizens, researchers and even businesses can access vital information to make decisions of innovation and to facilitate growth.

If we take a look at just some of the key sections of the legislation, clause 4, for example, deals with the whole foundation or the principle of open data. It establishes that it should be made accessible to the public. It also caters for matters that are considered to be privacy or security. It respects other tribunals and institutions which may receive information as well. The principle is respecting privacy and respecting sensitive data, while at the same time, taking publicly available data and making it available to all so that it could be better used to advise the decision makers in both the private and public sector. This is the tone of open government; this is the tone of transparency; and this is the tone by which data that is accessible is made useful. The culture of openness will not only encourage accountability, but it will also lead citizens to be able, when they have questions or queries, to check and research the why. It will allow them to understand better why the decision makers make the decisions they do.

Clause 5 of the legislation speaks about publication. It outlines the Government's obligation to publish the data on a diverse range of subjects and to do so regularly. Specifically, the data has to be published at intervals not exceeding one year. The health metrics would be important. Socioeconomic data, education, performance and the indicators of that would be made available to the public. It would give our citizens the capacity to engage in policy and with the decision makers or with the private sector, as they see fit, to better be able to formulate programmes and decisions which better serve them. The regular flow of information will enable citizens to advocate for necessary changes where necessary, improvements if needed, and ensure that the Government meets the public need.

Clause 7 deals with the accessibility standards. It establishes a standard so that it must be useful. It must be in a format that is accessible to all, and there is a standardisation of the format. It provides the data in user-friendly formats that would enable all, whether entrepreneurs, developers or researchers, to have access to and to utilise the information effectively. The ability to harness this data can lead to innovation in products and services, and address challenges that may be local or even national. Agricultural data, for example, can help farmers. It can help them to make decisions about the crops they should grow, where they should grow them, and the duration for which they should do so. This would bolster food security, of course.

There is clause 10 which deals with data protection and privacy, a necessary component of such a legislation. Everywhere in the world, this necessary component of data protection and privacy is required. There is one thing to say that you could share all of the public data, but it must be used in a manner that does not interfere with or affect individuals directly. Acknowledging data privacy is important. The section establishes safeguards. For those who deal with the data, those who prepare the registers and those who prepare the accumulation of the data that is made for publication, it places upon them an obligation as to how they must deal with this data, how they must use it, and, importantly, how they may not use it.

It raises ethical issues and those ethical issues are covered, quite comprehensively, in the legislation. It is done by clause 12 that provides for data officers. It mandates the appointment of data officers within government agencies, those who are responsible for managing and overseeing the open data initiatives. This dedicated role ensures accountability. It ensures oversight on how the data is handled and shared. These designated officers also have obligations. There are statutory offences created, and they can only deal with the data in accordance with the law. This strengthens the implementation process.

The improvements, Mr. Speaker, are several. The enhanced decision making is the obvious one. There is the ability to plan into the future with metrics, such as for health, education and population. It allows for provisions to be made today for things that we can expect and anticipate for tomorrow, which is a critical part of the decision-making process. What should we spend resources on now and what we should provide for in the future since it will come? It strengthens governance because the government itself will be able to apportion its resources in a way that best meets the needs of the population. It cultivates, hopefully, a data

literate society – a society that will embrace open data as a societal norm, that will understand what it means and that will understand why decisions are made but will also encourage citizens to be trained and to be able to analyse that data. So, maybe, they will be able to provide the skills and have the knowledge that would be needed in the future.

Economic Development – open data provides a vital cog for economic development. It increases the population's awareness of what is required, but it also allows the Government to put in place the groundwork and the framework to allow the population to take advantage of what is required.

Mr. Speaker, as we stand on the brink of this significant initiative, it is essential that we all – Government, civil society, the private sector and even the Members of the Opposition – embrace open data, understand the dividends it will pay, understand that compliance with providing data where required is essential, and to allow for engagement in quarters where it is needed. With these few words, I commend Bill No. 13 of 2024 to this House for passage. Thank you. [Applause.]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member, and now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Alister Charlie.

Mr. Charlie: I rise, today, to add my indigenous voice to express my steadfast support for the Open Data Bill, No. 13 of 2024. This visionary piece of legislation demonstrates the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government's commitment to transparency, accountability, innovation and inclusive development. It reflects the PPP/C Government's dedication to modernising governance, empowering the citizens and fostering sustainable economic growth. The Open Data Bill will most definitely enhance transparency and accountability by making public data accessible to all citizens. For too long, information critical to public participation has been marred by bureaucratic hurdles, inaccessible to the very people it impacts. This Bill breaks down those barriers, mandates open formats and public registers that will empower every citizen – Mr. Speaker, every citizen – to hold public authorities accountable, hence, transparency and accountability. That is what our Government, the PPP/C Government, stands for.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as Amerindians, we have faced persistent challenges in accessing essential information on resources, budgets and development programmes, but through this legislation such data will no longer be confined to

inaccessible archives but, instead, will be made available in formats that are practical and user friendly. Empirical evidence supports the transformative potential of open data policies. The *World Bank Development Report: Data for Better Lives* released on 24th March, 2021, highlights that open data initiatives have increased government accountability by 25 % in countries where such policies have been adopted.

For Guyana, this Bill represents an unprecedented opportunity to build trust between the Government and the people. This legislation is not merely about transparency; it is a catalyst for innovation. Clause 13 (1) of the Bill empowers the Commissioner of Information, through the Minister, to partner with the private sector, facilitating the use of public data to stimulate creativity and economic growth. Imagine the possibilities for our local entrepreneurs; developing applications to track public services; monitoring weather patterns for our farmers; and our map resources for Amerindian communities. Globally, open data has driven significant private sector advancement. The *Open Data Institute Report of 2015* has cited that the United Kingdom (UK), for instance, has contributed an estimate of £8 billion annually to the economy by fostering new businesses and streamlining public services. In Guyana, as we embrace a diversified and digital economy, this Bill will attract investment, inspire entrepreneurship and position Guyana as a leader in the region's digital transformation.

As an Amerindian Member of Parliament (MP), I am particularly heartened by what this Bill holds for the Amerindian and hinterland communities of Guyana. Access to public data is a fundamental enabler of inclusive development by providing open access to information on health, education, infrastructure, tourism, hospitality and so many more. This Bill empowers our communities to advocate for their needs effectively. For example, through open data our village councils will have greater transparency into allocations under the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF). We can ensure the projects address the genuine needs of our people. Furthermore, access to data on land titles, environmental resources and climate change will help us better manage our ancestral lands, enabling us to contribute meaningfully to national development. This piece of legislation aligns seamlessly with the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government's *One Guyana* vision – a commitment to ensure that no community is left behind.

We, on this side of the House, understand the concerns about privacy and data security when discussing open data policies

but this legislation strikes the right balance. Clause 11 protects sensitive information, which include personal, national security and confidential contracted data while ensuring transparency in public data. Our Government is fully aware that transparency must never come at the expense of safety or privacy but this Bill reflects that commitment. The Open Data Bill 2024, Bill No. 13 of 2024 is a demonstration of the PPP/C Government's dedication to deliver on its promises. From groundbreaking investment in education and healthcare to prioritising hinterland development, the PPP/C Government have consistently placed the needs of our citizens first. This Bill will complement the PPP/C Government's ongoing efforts, to ensure that every citizen has access to information necessary to benefit from the Government's policies and programmes.

As we deliberate on the Open Data Bill 2024, let us also recognise the Bill's alignment with Guyana's international human rights obligations. Access to information is enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declarations of Human Rights (UDHR) and article 19 (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which affirm the right to seek, receive and impart information as a cornerstone of freedom of expression and democratic governance. By adopting this legislation, Guyana reaffirms its principles, ensuring that every Guyanese regardless of geography or status, has equitable access to public information. This Bill reflects our Government's dedication to advancing human rights, fostering inclusion and promoting participatory governance in line with global best practices. This piece of legislation is a milestone in Guyana's journey towards modern governance. It embodies the principles of transparency, accountability and inclusivity, empowering our citizens and fostering innovation. By supporting this Bill, we ensure that information becomes a tool for empowerment available to all. A well-informed population with access to information, as defined in the Open Data Bill 2024, is a fundamental principle of democracy and democratic governance.

I urge all Members of this august House to support the Open Data Bill 2024, Bill No. 13 of 2024. Let us unite in creating a future where information is power and that power belongs to the people. With this Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, you have the floor.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An open data act is important as acknowledged by the speakers before me.

It is vital for fostering transparency, accountability, and innovation in governance and society. By mandating the release of government data, we empower citizens to scrutinise public policies, detect inefficiencies and combat double-dealing and misconduct – since we cannot say that 'c' word – and fostering trust in our institutions. We acknowledge that open data drives economic growth. It does so by enabling our businesses to develop innovative solutions and supporting researchers with valuable insights to societal advancements. It empowers communities and individuals to make informed decisions and address local challenges. The Hon. Prime Minister (PM) mentioned improving healthcare and tackling environmental issues.

Additionally, we agree that it enhances public service delivery by enabling an evidence-based policymaking and efficient inter-agency collaboration. Of course, it aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Open data aligns with the best practices and supports progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals by increasing transparency and enabling progress-tracking. It invites citizens to participate in ensuring to build trust and alignment with international standards, such as those of the open government partnership. The truth is, without an open data act, governments risk fragmented data-sharing policies, missed economic opportunities and privacy concerns. By institutionalising open data principles, legislation of this nature has the potential to transform data into a resource for innovation, inclusivity and socioeconomic growth.

Let us consider this legal framework. Given all that I have said, we appreciate that getting the legal framework for open data is crucial because it will enable the foundation for an effective sustainable and responsible implementation of these open data principles that we are speaking about. A well-crafted legal framework will ensure clarity, consistency and accountability in how data is shared, accessed and used. It will address potential challenges and maximise benefits. Without a strong legal framework, open data initiatives risk being inconsistent; vulnerable to misuse; and, of course, detrimental to privacy and security. For example, ambiguous definitions or weak privacy safeguards could lead to breaches of sensitive information and that could erode public trust. I know my Colleagues on the other side are in the throes of having such trust eroded, given the sensitive information that appears to be coming out of their camp, but I digress. Conversely, overly restrictive provisions might stifle innovations and limit the act's socioeconomic potential or this legislation that we are envisioning. We have to have the right framework, which is one that balances accessibility with safeguards to ensure that the open data drives

transparency, foster innovation and empowers our citizens, while we uphold the ethical and legal standards. Thus, that is the legal framework that is required.

Let us talk now about the institutional framework. Having the right institutional framework to support an open data legislative framework is essential for effective implementation and governance. It goes *hand in glove*. We know that our institutions play a very key role in translating the legal framework into actionable policies. It is our institutions that will ensure compliance and address those challenges that may arise as we practise. A well-designed institutional framework will provide the organisational structure; it will provide accountability; and it will provide all of the expertise needed to manage data responsibly. Without a strong institutional framework, open data risks becoming fragmented or ineffective. For example, the lack of a dedicated oversight body may lead to inconsistent data standards; it may lead to inadequate privacy safeguards; and it could also lead to poor enforcement. On the other hand, an effective framework will ensure there are clear roles and responsibilities enabling collaboration among government agencies, the private sector and civil society. It will also foster trust by providing transparency; grievance mechanisms; and, of course, regular performance reviews. By aligning our institutional capacity with our legal framework, we will be able to unlock the potential of our nation whilst maintaining accountability and safeguarding our rights.

Having considered these legal and institutional arrangements and what we will consider to be a bare minimum that are required to make sure that this step of enacting open data legislation and that we do it successfully, I regret that this current piece of legislation falls woefully short. This is why I say that... I say this knowing and acknowledging yes, it is the beginning. I am sure that the speaker after me will tell us that there will be regulations, but we are talking here about the enabling framework for all of this. We cannot leave very important details for the regulations.

3.55 p.m.

Let us consider this, because when one talks about data and data sharing, it is not sexy and it is not glamorous work. It is hard and it is work that we have to do if we are going to get it right. I heard the Hon. Prime Minister speak about the two pieces of the provisions that are in here that are intended to serve as deterrents in terms of penalties to the breach of confidentiality, and the prohibition and publication of non-public data. These are two of the elements when one talks

about offences that could occur when speaking of open data. Do we have provisions for the unauthorised modification or alteration of data, the injection of false data into the system, identity theft and fraud? Do we have provisions for phishing and social engineering? Do we have sufficient legal provisions for cyber security breaches? We talked about intellectual property theft; how are we guarding against this? We talked about economic espionage. Are we ready? Are we prepared? I guess the point that I am making here is, it is fine to stand and talk glowingly about what this intends to achieve, but when a framework such as this is enabled or when one enables open data and do not have a sufficiently robust legal framework in place, he/she is literally opening Pandora's box. I want to encourage the Members on the other side of the floor do not just take this as criticism but as criticism intended to make the product better because the product has to be improved.

Let us consider what I would want to point out. My Colleague, the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, pointed out some gaps earlier so I will not spend a lot of time on those. One cannot help but note that, under this Bill, the current Commissioner of Information is tasked with a set of responsibilities. We know the problem that we have currently with accessing information from the Commissioner of Information. Bless his heart, the man is probably in his 80s. By no means I am attempting to be ages but the fact that *we cannot pour new wine into old wine skin*. We cannot attempt to do all of these new creative innovative things and, at the same time, exhibit a reluctance to make the necessary institutional changes that we need to make. To lump more responsibilities onto a Commissioner who is already underperforming is problematic. When I see this type of approach to legislation, it is annoying because we are almost saying to the people of Guyana to '*tek wah eva*'. I think we can do better by the people of Guyana. To do something as important as open data requires a robust and a sound legal framework. It requires much more thought than what has gone into these 17 clauses.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at it, the Commissioner has several responsibilities, but he does not have enforcement powers in the context of this Open Data Information Act. Then, of course, there is limited independence because reporting to the Minister, of course, has an effect on neutrality, *et cetera*. Then, there is this issue of public engagement. We cannot talk about open data and not underscore or acknowledge the importance of public engagement in this endeavour. We are breaking new frontiers in this regard. It requires a robust education mechanism and public education mechanism to take our

citizens along. Again, I express my frustration that sometimes it seems as if we come to this National Assembly to pass laws that are simply intended to tick a box. We have to strengthen the institutional framework to carry this. We have to do it. We have to establish, I say, an independent oversight body because that will be crucial to ensure transparency, accountability and compliance.

Accordingly, I propose the establishment of a data commission which will replace the one-person operation who is currently the Commissioner of Information with a multi-member data commission. This would address the limitations of the current structure and would ensure better oversight, enforcement and public participation. An independent data commission... That is the degree to which we could have an independent data commission, which my Friend, Mr. Ramjattan, refers to as the *control-freakism* that we see from the other side. ...is one that is free from political or ministerial control. It will ensure impartiality in decision-making and oversight. Unlike the current setup, where the Commissioner of Information has limited oversight, a data commission could have comprehensive authority to monitor implementation across all public authorities.

This independent body could enforce penalties for non-compliance in some regard, address public grievances and ensure that the principles of the Act are consistently upheld. The key responsibilities of such a commission will include monitoring and compliance with the Act across all public institutions and authorities, auditing data registers and open data plans to ensure adherence to international standards and legal requirements, publishing its annual report of course, and the state of open data in Guyana, highlighting the successes, the challenges and noting areas for improvement.

That commission could handle complaints and disputes because, make no mistake, when one talks about access, it is inevitable that one will have disputes as it relates to access, the data quality or the non-compliance by public authorities among other things. That commission could investigate breaches in the Act; for example, unauthorised data withholding or publication of restricted data and imposing penalties for the failure to comply. Such a commission could, of course, be actively involved in policy development and advocacy, which includes advising the Government on open data policies and practices, promoting awareness and education about open data and the benefits of transparency. If we are going to do this capacity building it absolutely requires these.

This data commission that I am proposing would be involved in capacity building, which includes providing training and technical support to data officers and public authorities to meet the requirements of the legislation. Of course, a part of that advocacy would be interacting with civil society and the private sector to encourage collaboration and to encourage innovation. To ensure efficiency and impartiality, the data commission should have a chairperson, preferable appointed by the Committee on Appointments of this National Assembly. It should comprise commissioners who will be drawn as representatives from key sectors including civil society; academia; legal experts; information technology (IT); business; as well as, of course, *ex officio* members; representatives from public authorities, including: the Guyana National Bureau of Standards and the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) who will, of course, be important to provide the technical input.

All activities, findings and recommendations should be documented in the annual report and made publicly available. The commission should have its own budget. It should have its own staff. It should have its own decision-making authority to operate independently as far as is reasonably practicable from the Executive branch.

What would be the potential impact of this commission? The establishment of a data commission could have significant benefits, including improved transparency and ensuring consistent application across all public authorities. In other words, no sacred cows. It could serve to increase public trust in governments, by creating a neutral body to oversee data transparency. It could lead to enhanced accountability. Public authorities could face consequences of failure to comply and it could incentivise adherence to open data standards. Of course, there is a benefit in terms of greater efficiency in that we could streamline oversight and we could streamline our dispute resolution processes. This, of course, will reduce delays and reduce inefficiencies in the system.

Fostering innovation is another important significant benefit of this proposed data commission. By ensuring high quality accessible data, the commission could spur private sector innovation and public participation in governance. Of course, it could align Guyana with international best practices.

The Hon. Prime Minister spoke before me spoke, of course, about the Data Protection Act and the Data Protection Office. We also know that there is the National Data Management Authority. Whilst both the NDMA and the

Data Protection Office are integral to Guyana's data governance, they operate independently and rather with distinct responsibilities. As we know, the NDMA focuses on the broader aspects of data management – e-government services and cyber security – whereas the Data Protection Office is specifically dedicated to the protection of personal data and ensuring adherence to data protection laws. The proposed data commission could serve as the body that coordinates national policies as it relates to data; as it relates to open data; and, of course, it will have an inter-related and symbiotic relationship with these other offices and these other bits of legislations as mentioned by the speakers before me.

My very strong recommendation is that we send this Bill to a Special Select Committee. In that Committee, we take seriously this recommendation of a data commission. We cannot proceed with such an important initiative on this. I will read a quote from he who will not be named. It was reported in a news report by the Department of Public Information (DPI) on 23rd October, 2024. It is on artificial intelligence (AI) governance and digitalisation. It states:

“By incorporating AI responsibly, we can empower our students to become not just consumers of technology, but achieve ethical participants in its development and use... Let us focus on how we can accelerate digital learning, reduce the digital divide, and make AI a tool of progress rather than a source of fear”.

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** Who said so?] He who would not be named. We have all of these lofty speeches. Then, we come to this National Assembly with a 17-clause Bill, that in no way, shape or form is adequate to support the seriousness of what we are proposing to embark upon. It is either that the Government does not understand what they are talking about, or they do not care, or they wish to simply tick a box. It is problematic. All of these lofty ideas that this Government have set are going to be accomplished on the back of open data. This talk that we are talking about – AI, *et cetera*... We would like to talk about digitalisation and open data is the cornerstone of that endeavour. A robust legal framework is the backbone for successful open data initiatives. I believe that we, in this House, with more effort could give to the people of Guyana proper legislation to govern this. If I was a betting woman, I would have bet that maybe the order to put this in place would not come into effect until another year from now.

4.10 p.m.

The Government have to prove to the people of Guyana that they are not just about ticking boxes but that they are about delivering serious, meaningful change and betterment to the people of Guyana. We can do it. We could send this Bill to a Special Select Committee and we could have the Hon. Attorney General who will speak after me, take some time from his busy information-disseminating schedule to give proper instructions to the Parliamentary Counsel, so that we could have better legislation. We can do it for the people of Guyana. The people of Guyana deserve it. Thank you, kind Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, please proceed.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My task is to make my contribution to the ongoing second reading of this Open Data Bill 2024. A good beginning is perhaps to apologise to Members of the House and the listening public for the presentation we have just had to endure. The speaker who spoke before me, obviously *googled* data and a number of things came up. The Hon. Member chronicled them in a speech and presented them to us here. Not recognising, only last year, 2023, – I do not know where the Hon. Member was but her Colleagues were here – we enacted, in this House, a Data Protection Act. It has 106 sections in length and 125 pages in length.

Every single issue that the Hon. Member identified missing in this Bill is contained in that legislation – every single one of them. The regime of protection for personal data, the regime of protection for all types of data, the manner in which data is going to be accumulated, the manner in which data is stored, the manner in which data is disseminated and the manner in which data is protected, the entire regime is set out in the Data Protection Act. We heard there was an outburst of complete and utter lack of information. Let me put that this way. The Hon. Member wants a data commission. An overarching data office is established by section 72 of that Act. The Hon. Member asked for a data commissioner. Section 72 of the Act provides for a data commissioner. You did not read the Act. You came here and you made yourself an embarrassment. That is what you did. Accept that and let us move on. We had a total embarrassment here. The Hon. Member came here to speak about data protection but that is a Bill that we have already passed. What is before the House is open data, which is completely different.

We already have a data protection regime in place, so all data that would be collected would be governed by the Data Protection legislation and all the safeguards in the Data Protection legislation will apply to the Open Data Bill. There is no need for us to recite in the Open Data Bill 162 provisions which are already in the Data Protection Act – absolutely no reason. We do things with reason on this side. We do things with sense. We hope that the laws will be interpreted in that manner. The entire presentation of the Hon. Member, we should put one side and discard it.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, made the important point – I must credit her with that – that our population are not aware of the many legislations that we are passing. That is indeed a problem that we have to face. We need more work to be done to bring public awareness to the Bills that we are passing in the National Assembly. That is not the Government's task alone. Every Member of this House has a responsibility to inform members of the public of the Bills that we are passing in this House. It is the Opposition as well who are passing these Bills. The National Assembly does not consist of the Government alone. It consists of both the Government and the Opposition. I mean it is quite a hopeless and useless Opposition but it is what we have and we have to work with. The Opposition have an equal task to help us publicise the work of this National Assembly.

[Ms. Walton-Desir: (Inaudible) an embarrassment.] You have embarrassed yourself for the afternoon already; just be quiet. The Hon. Member wants to do damage control by heckling. After wasting all of our time for 45 minutes speaking on an irrelevant piece of legislation, the Hon. Member now wants to get her way back in through heckling. You had your time and you spoke on a different matter and I... [Ms. Walton-Desir: (Inaudible)] You should be ashamed. You should be hiding your face from the public having wasted the public's time.

[An Opposition Member: Could you say that Mr. Nandall?] Of course, I can say that. I am Anil Nandall; I can say that. *Canoe can never bore punt*, that is what I want you to know. On the Open Data Bill, data has always been a crucial component of decision-making from time immemorial. Policymakers in conceiving policies, in designing policies and in determining the suitability of policies have always recognised that data is important. Why? This is because data guides human behaviour, data guides the approach of the human being in terms of conduct and how policies should be fashioned to ensure that they obtain optimum effect. Data as part of decision-making has always been with the world. What has changed in recent decades is

the availability now of information and technological developments that have made the accumulation of data storage and use of data easy. That is what technology has done in recent times and, obviously, developed countries have grabbed this opportunity with both hands. Every developed country has a modern data policy, some in the form of policy and some in the form of policy coupled with legislation.

It is all part of e-governance. The entire European Union promulgated an e-data policy, a public data policy and an open data policy a long time ago. Individual countries of the Union has moved into legislation and have been legislating in their respective countries. The United States of America (USA) has gone in that direction and India is very advanced. Japan, Hong Kong and China have already moved in that direction. Singapore, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Dubai, *et cetera* have all gone in that direction. The Hon. Prime Minister gave us the statistics in the Caribbean.

Guyana is one of the countries who really has been left behind in this regard. We are now moving in that direction. We have said that the developmental steps that we have to take cannot be done ambling along. I think the President, very articulately, recently said that we are running a marathon at sprint's pace. I believe that aptly captures how we have to move this country forward if we have to reach the place that we would like to go by Vision 2030. We are not moving in an isolated way. We have a multifaceted approach. That is why we have the Data Protection Act that must be read with the open data act. That is an omission that the Hon. Member made.

We have other platforms, legislative and a policy nature that must go in tandem with our drive to modernise governance and modernise the architecture of our country. We have already passed the Electronic Communications and Transaction Act, which is now law. We have the Single Window Act that the Hon. Minister can confirm is now operational. The Hon. Member misled the House by saying that it is not enforced. Not only is it enforced but it is being operationalised and it is in use. That is why when I say that you are useless, I do not mean it in a bad way. It is quite a factual statement. We have the e-governance Bill and we have a number of other legislation that we are bringing, that all are intended to modernise the way that we execute government. This is simply another one of such initiatives, so it is not one in isolation. As we continue to unfold our digitisation plan, as we continue to unfold e-governance and as we continue to unfold the spreading of technology across the length and breadth of our country, we are introducing

these new concepts that will work along with them. Those concepts are the gathering of data, the use of data, the storage of data and the utilisation of this data in decision-making.

This will help the Minister of Agriculture to make prudent decisions. This will help our farmers in terms of looking at weather patterns and determining what crops to plant, *et cetera*. It will allow our transportation sector to look at passenger trends, by knowing when passengers are coming and when they are not. Look at our Amerindian communities as my Colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie said, and look at the weather pattern in those communities and the consumption needs. Our marketing people can look at the consumption trends in the country and make policy decisions in relation to food production, importation, *et cetera*.

4.25 p.m.

I can go on and on but I believe that the value of open data, and the advantages of its use, cannot be under scored, and really does not need me making out a case in relation to that. The countries alone that have been utilising this methodology are large in number and they can speak to the benefits that they have derived.

The Hon. Member is not here; I would have explained a lot of things that she found lacking. It is deliberate that the Bill only has 17 sections, because the protective mechanisms in the Bill are in a 106-section-law already. Why the Bill has 16 sections or 18 sections is to allow the Government a flexible environment in which to develop the data policy. That is why the Bill is almost drafted in abstract. It is simply to create a legislative framework within which the Government will now fashion its own policy in relation to data protection. That is why the Bill authorises every public agency to be a data collector and allows every public agency, cast upon every public agency, a duty to collect data, to store data, and to use data.

The reason why is because you have agencies of such varying nature, of such varying legal character, that it is impossible for you to legislate for each of those public agencies. Some are governed by a board; some you cannot interfere with their functional autonomy by law and by the Constitution. You have to have that flexibility out there and allow each to craft their own strategy. Obviously, there will be a uniform Government policy that would govern public sector agencies that fall under central Government's function. But they are agencies within the superstructure, the constitutional structure, and the legal structure of our country, whose composition is independent, and whose

functioning is autonomous. If you by legislation impose upon them the manner in which they are to function, it might collide with their underlying independence. That is why the Bill, and any Open Data Bill will have that necessary flexibility. An Open Data Bill is never a comprehensive bill. That is why I said that many countries have chosen the method of an open data policy as well. It is to give the desired flexibility in the implementation of open data. That is not a criticism, that is deliberate, but as I said the Hon. Member speaks and disappears, misinforms and disappears. That is the other point I want to make.

The Hon. Member Annette Ferguson expressed some concerns about clause 3 of the Bill and did a great injustice in not reading the entirety of the clause, or even the main sections of the clause, but jumped to adverse conclusions in relation to the clauses. The clause 3 subsection 2 states:

“a) this Act does not apply to the President;”

Go and check the other legislation. The head of state of a country is not subject to data. The president manages a country, the president does not accumulate data. Which president you know walks around as a data collector so that you can make him subject to a data collection act. The president presides over the country and all the agencies under the president obviously are going to be enjoined to collect the data.

[An Hon. Member (Opposition): (Inaudible)] When you win the election, if you ever win an election, you make your president a data collector. Ridicule him if you wish. The second point is clause 3(2)(b). It states:

b) “this Act does not apply to a Commission of Inquiry issued by the President, or information obtained or created in the course of an investigation, examination or audit conducted by or under the authority of the Auditor General, until the investigation or audit and all relating proceedings, if any, are finally concluded;”

There is great benefit; this is a Commission of Inquiry. The Commission of Inquiry is ongoing, and it is going to conclude with a finding that is going to be included in a report. Why would you want, halfway through the commission of an inquiry, data that may relate to the very matter that is under consideration? Do you not understand that you cannot prejudice the outcome of such an Inquiry. There is so much common sense in that that is lost upon the Hon. Member.

The same thing with the Auditor General. The Auditor General, a constitutional office holder, is undertaking a constitutional authorised investigation. You have all types of information. What do you want him to give you, information that he has not concluded on, information that is the subject of his investigation? Obviously, when these processes are concluded, the reports are by law public documents to which the public is entitled. You are not entitled to the document halfway through the course.

The next category right over that is the exercise of the judicial function. Imagine halfway during a murder case the Hon. Annette Ferguson wants to know statistics and evidence that is going on in the court, and the court has not yet made a decision. The Hon. Member wants evidence so she can run around the place to prejudice the trial. They have laws that will lock you up if you do that.

These are sacred areas that are by common sense and by law necessarily exempted from public access. As political leaders you ought to know that. These areas that my friends are asking to be made part of open data cannot. Any open data law or policy excepts defined categories, and our Bill does the same. Importantly, data is authorised to be collected by public authorities and the private sector. The public sector and the private sector have a duty to exchange these data, so that both sectors can benefit from the information that is being accumulated. Decisions, both in the private sector and in the public sector, can be influenced by the data collected. Another important component of open data is that it lends to transparent government. We have heard comments here about people not getting information that they think they need and want. This Bill allows for government data, public data, public statistics, to be made available.

Mr. Ramjattan accuses the Government of control freakism and that we want to keep things to ourselves... [Mr.

Ramjattan: It is exactly *(Inaudible)*. We did not have to pass this. We did not have to pass a Bill that allows us to give you data and make data public. We did not have to. We are passing this Bill that compels us in Government to make public data available for members of the public, for constructive use in decision making. That is the type of governance that we embrace. We face our challenges with open arms. You want transparency, we are putting it in the law so that all the information you need will now be available. These data bases are going to be available for public consumption. If we wanted to control the data, we did not even have to bring this law. Leave the country... [

An Hon. Member (Opposition): *(Inaudible)* Forced by whom? By whom? We are now being forced. Prime

Minister, we are being forced to do this. You know that is why the bunch of you will remain in the Opposition until the next 50 years; you have no common sense, absolutely no common sense.

This is a very innovative piece of legislation. This is the brainchild of President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, because it is his vision to move Guyana to a different place and to make data available to inform the developmental trajectory of our country. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [An

Hon. Member (Opposition): *(Inaudible)* And you will stay there for the next 50 years; I promise you that.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips[replying]: Mr. Speaker, we will all agree that this is the right time for this Bill. All the Members, Members on both sides of the House, are loud in their support of this Bill. It is also the right time for us to design a plan to educate all the people of Guyana including our fellow Members of the House on this Bill.

The first point I would like to make is that this is not a standalone Bill. You would have heard that it is important, if you are to understand this Bill, that you must also have some level of understanding of the Data Protection Act 2023 and the Digital Identity Card Act 2023, in order to understand this Bill. This Bill is more than a legal document; it is indeed a monumental piece of legislation that we all must be proud of. All of us must embrace it and all of us must vote for it. *Ad-nauseam* I must repeat the purpose of this Bill. It is designed to facilitate transparency in governance, efficiency in decision making, and innovation in how we manage and utilise data. The Bill, and if you have read the Bill, you would agree that it is structured in four parts, each addressing critical elements of open data. Do you want me to repeat it? Clause 1 and I know... [Mr. Mahipaul: *Yuh gawn* again with repetitions.] Repetition is good if you did not read the Bill.

4.40 p.m.

If you did not read the Bill, at least you will leave this sitting with an understanding of the Bill. Clause 1 establishes the short title as the Open Data Bill 2024 and specifies that its commencement will be determined by the Minister *via* an order. This ensures flexibility and readiness in its implementation. Clause 2 provides a clear interpretation, as in many other bills. Clause 3 details the application of the Bill to all public authorities, with provisions for certain exemptions, which was made quite clear by the Hon. Attorney General in his presentation. The Minister remains empowered to exempt specific public authorities by order, ensuring adaptability to unique circumstances. Class 4

outlines the objectives of the Bill, which includes promoting transparency, encouraging collaboration, and enabling data-driven decision making for national development. Clauses 5 to 8 establish the mechanisms for effective data management within public authorities.

Part III, Publication and Use of Data – the provisions in clauses 9 to 14 address the critical aspect of making public data accessible and usable. Clause 9 obligates public authorities to publish their data assets in open formats that are machine readable and easy to use. We can go through all the clauses, *ad nauseam*. Clause 13 empowers the Commissioner of Information to collaborate with private sector entities to incorporate their data assets into the public domain, subject to agreements approved by the Minister. There is an important role for the Commission of Information, Hon. Member.

In Part IV, clauses 15 to 17, address additional provisions. Clause 15 prohibits the unauthorised disclosure or use of confidential information by officers, employees, or agents of public authorities. Clause 16 empowers the Minister to create regulations to address emerging issues and ensures the Bill remains relevant and effective. I could have gone through each clause, but I think I went through the important ones.

The passage and implementation of the Open Data Bill 2024 will usher in a new era of governance and national development. Allow me to highlight some of the transformative impacts it is expected to have: one, promoting transparency and accountability; two, fostering innovation and economic growth; three, enhancing data-driven decision making; four, empowering citizens; five, strengthening private sector collaboration; and six, positioning Guyana as a global leader. By embracing open data practices, Guyana joins the ranks of progressive nations that leverage data as a strategic asset. This will enhance our global competitiveness and attract investments in technology and innovation.

I want to thank, again, my colleagues, Parliamentarians who participated in this debate. I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to present this Bill to the House and for accommodating our hectic legislative agenda, which remains the driver of accelerated development throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. Mr. Speaker, this, among other deliverables, represents the delivery of promises made to the people of Guyana – people-centred development – to improve the lives and livelihood of all the people of Guyana. With this, Mr. Speaker, I commend that this Bill be read a second time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Prime Minister.

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, I think this is a good time for us to take the suspension for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 4.48 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.11 p.m.

Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill, 2024 – No.14 of 2024, published on 9th August of this year. We have to get someone to get the Attorney General into the Chambers. We await the Attorney General. [*Pause*] Attorney General, in spite of the immense pressure on me to replace you, I would dare not. Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the second reading of the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill, 2024 – No. 14 of 2024. Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs.

Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill 2024 – Bill No. 14 of 2024

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration Act.”

[*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs.*]

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand to present for second reading Bill No.14 of 2024, the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill, 2024. My task here is a very simple one, and I do not wish to unnecessarily detain the House.

It is common knowledge that when a person dies, that person's assets, including moneys, form part of what in the law is known as his estate and remains as part of that legal entity and cannot be touched, cannot be used, unless a process is embarked upon by a duly qualified person whom the law identifies. If the person dies without a will – that state of affairs is described in law as intestate – then the law stipulates a line of persons in order in which they have a

right to take certain legal steps so that the assets of the deceased can be accessed for distribution to the beneficiaries and also for the liquidation of liabilities that the deceased may have incurred. That line begins with the surviving spouse, then children of the deceased, then it moves to the siblings of the deceased and the chain continues.

If the person dies testate – meaning that the person dies leaving a will – then that will would normally appoint an executor. That person is the authorised person to act on behalf of the estate of the deceased person. If the deceased person dies intestate, normally an application has to be filed in the High Court for what is called Letters of Administration. The administrator, once appointed by the court, then stands in the shoes of the deceased and can access the deceased property for the benefit of the beneficiaries. If the deceased dies, testate – meaning he dies leaving a will – then the executor appointed under the will, makes an application to the court to probate that will for the purpose of being appointed and for the purpose of distributing the assets of the deceased in accordance with the terms of the will.

6.17 p.m.

Many persons here and who are listening to us, would know that the process by which the administrator is appointed, or the executor is appointed, is a legal process and can be a long and protracted process, but more importantly, it is an expensive process. If a person dies, many times there is not enough money available to begin that process, more so to complete it. Our law, prior to 2022, provided that without a letters of administration or probate, one of the authorised persons, if it is intestate, the surviving spouse, or if there is no surviving spouse, a child, or if there are no children, a sibling, and in the case of dying testate, the executor, could have gone to a bank where the deceased had an account and had money in it, but could have withdrawn only \$250 without the presentation of a letters of administration or probate.

When this Act was passed nearly 100 years ago, \$250 was a substantial sum of money. Obviously, in 2022, we, as a collective, felt that was an insignificant sum of money, and rightfully so; and to allow the withdrawal of a mere \$250 from the bank account of the deceased was almost a worthless exercise. What we did, in 2022, was to increase that \$250 to \$750,000, thereby allowing the family of the deceased, through one of the authorised agents, to access from the bank without embarking upon the legal process of obtaining letters of administration or probate of the will, to

access \$750,000, obviously to use for the purpose of wake and funeral expenses. We did that in 2022, and that amendment was welcomed across our country.

Mr. Speaker, earlier tonight we spoke about open data, which is a very advanced method of collecting information, formulating policies for the betterment of governance and the people of our country. A lot of people listening to that debate would feel that is a process that does not relate to them and, obviously, it is our responsibility to ensure they understand these things are all done for their benefit. Here we are passing a piece of what I would describe as a social-type legislation, that every person listening would immediately be attracted to what we are doing here because they can relate to it. They would have, at one point in time, either experienced personally, or heard from their relatives, the difficulties that would have been endured in accessing the deceased funds at some point in time, because the law only confined them to \$250.

That is why when we raised that sum to \$750,000, Guyanese across this country welcomed that intervention because they obviously saw the benefits. Look at the cost of doing a funeral, look at the cost of doing a wake, and all the rituals and processes connected to the eventual farewell of a deceased person. If there is no money, and many times there is no money, because no one wants to put out money they do not know when they will get it back, *et cetera, et cetera*. We grew up in Guyana; we know the internal family conflicts that can arise in relation to these matters. So, the \$750,000 intervention was a very, very welcomed initiative, and it is now being widely used across the length and breadth of our country. However, I will admit that I, and collectively us all, were short-sighted in that amendment. We were short-sighted because we confined the \$750,000 only to bank accounts, not recognising that a deceased person can have moneys lodged at many, many places in our country. As I said, we were short-sighted in confining the amendment to bank accounts.

Based upon public demands from all of our counties, from The Bar Association, from the Berbice Bar and from the ordinary members of the public, I have learned that this amendment, while it is great, is too narrow and obviously does not permit the withdrawal of sums held in many organisations where our people would normally lodge their money. That includes a credit society, a co-op society, the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), and even a creditor, a person who owes the deceased money. This amendment could not have applied to any of those sources. So, while the deceased may be owed, the moneys cannot be accessed in

the way that it should be accessed had it been in the bank account.

Even if the deceased was employed with the State and would have been entitled, *pro rata*, to wages depending upon what date of the month he or she may have expired, or if it was a contracted employee who would have been entitled to gratuity, or gratuity if not fulsome, if not fully fructified, would have been entitled to gratuity on a *pro rata* basis. None of those places where moneys are held for the deceased can be accessed by the amendments which we made. It is against that backdrop, Mr. Speaker, we tabled this Amendment, and this Amendment is simply intended to expand the category of places to as wide as possible, moving it from the narrow focus of a bank account to anywhere else. So, with your permission Sir, I would like to briefly read what this Amendment states:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of this Act...”

The very act tells you how to apply for letters of administration, probate, *et cetera*. So, notwithstanding that process or those processes:

“...a person may pay to a claimant...”

A claimant is a person who makes the request for the money.

“...may pay to a claimant a sum of money not exceeding seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars from monies to which the deceased is entitled or from monies held by that person for the deceased –

(a) in the absence of a grant of letters of administration or probate; and

(b) upon the application in writing...”

Not a sophisticated application. It can be a letter.

“(b)...the application in writing by the surviving spouse...”

That is the first in line.

“... or, heir on intestacy...”

So, if there is no surviving spouse, any one of the heirs on intestacy, in the line the law says, they must come forth.

“...stating that the deceased died intestate or in the case where the deceased died testate, the executor.”

This means if the deceased died leaving the will, then the executor can come forward.

“(2) In the case under subsection (1), the person...”

That is the person who is requested to pay.

“...may call for any proof as to identity or such other evidence of verification in accordance with subsection (1) as the person may think fit.”

We thought it best not to limit the discretion of the intended payor. So, whatever satisfies the intended payor, that is, any form of identification (ID), *et cetera*. Of course, he or she will have to produce evidence of death. If he or she does not have the death certificate, because that would take some time, he or she will have to have at least the registration of the death, which is a form one gets almost immediately upon death, when the report is made and one is required to register the death. That should be sufficient as evidence of death. Then, most naturally, one will have to evidentially establish that he or she is one of the persons in the category contemplated by the amendment. So, one would have to show a marriage certificate. If one is a common law wife, I suppose one would have to show – because a common law wife we have now empowered equally as a married wife – one will have to establish that one was in a common law relationship of the requisite duration. Obviously, if one represents oneself as a child, one's birth certificate should state who is the father, *et cetera*. So, once that process is completed, then one should be paid the money. Subsection 3 goes on to state:

“(3) Where any sum is paid to a claimant under subsection (1), a receipt from the claimant shall be a legal, valid and effectual discharge to the person for the sum of money received.”

Obviously, when one receives the money, one has to issue a receipt and that would absolve and discharge the payor of the liability to that extent.

“(4) The payment of any sum in accordance with subsection (1) shall not affect any claim against the estate of the deceased person and the person who is making the payment shall not be liable in respect of any claim in connection with the payment made in accordance with this section.”

This protects the payor. That money is paid and constitutes a discharge. Any issue that arises after, that person is protected. The section then goes on to define the person, that is, the person to whom the request is made for payment.

“(5) (a) “person” includes, but is not limited to any body of persons corporate or incorporate, any

financial institution or national insurance body, and includes the State;"

So, whether it is an incorporated body, as some credit unions are, or it is an incorporated body, as some lending societies are – they are bodies registered under a different law but not necessarily incorporated bodies – any financial institution like any bank or anywhere else such as any agency performing the functions of a financial institution, or the national insurance body – and I spoke about that – and it includes the State. So, this is where I am speaking about the employment and wages owing. You will note that State here would not exclude, if you are employed by a private employer because that person is caught or would be caught by a body incorporate or corporate, depending on who you are working for.

6.33 p.m.

A Financial institution has the same meaning assigned to it under the Financial Institutions Act. This Bill will have great utilitarian value for people right across the length and breadth of our country, more particularly, our poorer sections of the population because those are the people more likely affected by the inability to access sums of money that may be required to perform testamentary and funeral expenses. This Bill seeks to address that *lacuna*. As I said, it was inspired by public demand. We consulted with the legal profession. They endorsed it. We consulted with the Law Reform Commission, and they endorsed it, and, no doubt, it is going to be a most welcome intervention. I cannot imagine that my Colleagues on the opposite side would have any objection in principle to this Bill. Mr. Speaker, with those few remarks, I commend this Bill to this honourable House. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Ms. Lawrence: Good evening to the House. Today we begin the 16 days of activism against violence against women and girls all across the world. As we gather here this evening, in many other parts of the world, men, women and girls are raising their voices in different forms. I trust that we, the Members of this august House, will continue to raise our voices against violence perpetrated against our women, girls, and everyone in our society. Having said that, allow me to add my voice to Bill No. 14 of 2024, intitule an Act to amend the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration Act by substituting in its entirety section 20 of the Principal Act. What is significant in this legislative particle of the administration of deceased persons' property is that it enables financial transactions involving the estate of an

intestate or testate person without letters of administration or probate.

Mr. Speaker, though long overdue, this amendment is certainly a step in the right direction since it lifts a great burden from family members or executors of the deceased person. I refer here to financial burden, medical expenses, funeral expenses, and legal expenses. Today funeral expenses can be in excess of \$1 million depending on where the person will be interred. We know that in many instances, as the Attorney General said before, family members cannot afford it – too many. Therefore, the persons who are responsible for taking care of this person to his/her final resting place have a very heavy task to accumulate the finances to carry out the order of interring that person. Many times, it causes long delays in terms of the burial of the deceased person and too many times this leads to a lot of conflicts in the family. Persons may not want to share information, but some may know that the deceased had some type of money put up somewhere or was owed some money... You see, while we can plan for death, the Apostle Mark, Chapter 13, Verses 32-36 of the *Holy Bible* reads thus, and I quote:

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

Take ye heed, watch and pray: ..."

Hon. Benn

"...for ye know not when the time is."

The mystery of 'when' can cause not only pain but also great embarrassment for the persons left behind to ensure that the deceased is properly interred. Hence, it is with great satisfaction that this amendment seeks to go even further to provide such transactions that are not limited to interpersonal transactions, but also extend to institutions and, as the Attorney General said, even to the person's last employer. This is because there are instances where family members are running to and fro the employer to acquire that person's last salary or wage in order to contribute to his/her funeral expenses. There are even times when medical facilities will not release the body unless their bills are cleared, and the family members are left to go all over the place and seek to ensure that they find those moneys.

Hon. Attorney General, what we must ensure is that persons in these institutions do not misinterpret this law to make them gods. I say that to say this, there are persons, employers, who would not give the persons money but will

tell them that they will pay the parlour, they will pay for this or they will pay for that. We have to ensure that they understand this is something completely different. We are talking about moneys owed to the deceased, and, therefore, they do not have a right to decide how that money must be spent. It is only the representative, as is written in law, that has that right to decide how those moneys will be spent. I am very happy, also, that the Attorney General has placed on record that the receipt issued by the executor or the person who, according to the law, is authorised to carry out the functions of ensuring that the deceased's expenses are taken care of, that the receipt issued is binding in law. Thus, persons cannot say, 'Well, you could write anything and give me, but I do not know if next week somebody else is going to come here and demand this money from me, and I know you do not have any paper from the court. Do you have to stamp?' This is because, in Guyana, a stamp is a big thing. People even want to ensure that when domestic workers bring a letter to them for some credit or the other their employer puts a stamp on it. If the letter does not have a stamp they say they cannot accept it.

These may seem like little things, but they are very important things that will inhibit this very amendment from being progressive and helpful to the persons whom it is intended to help. Therefore, this Bill saves time and cost by evading a lengthy course of action for matters that clearly express the will of the deceased in settling amounts in favour of the claimants or his/her estate. We on this side of the House, support this amendment to section 20 of the Principal Act with Bill No. 14 of 2024. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Ramson: It is a very great pleasure to be here to support this Bill. As a lawmaker, every one of us here who has the position as a Member of Parliament (MP), the legal system is an important system for the way in which we organise ourselves in life, not here in Guyana only, but all across the world. It is important that laws always continue to evolve as well as update themselves to make life easier for people, especially the ones who rely on us the most, and that is the ordinary man.

This Bill, Bill No. 14 of 2024, with which we seek to make an amendment to the original law, which is the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration Act, the original piece of legislation already contemplated accessing funds in section 20 of the Act, which this clause seeks to substitute and replace. As our society evolves, so must our laws. In this situation, the original Act contemplated accessing those funds belonging to someone who died, whether intestate or

testate. In fact, it was President Thomas Jefferson who said in a letter to Mr. Samuel Kercheval in 1816 that:

“...the laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind.”

He was speaking specifically about the changing nature of society and how the law must reflect that since 1816. The sum of \$215 was a lot of money back then when this Act was passed. I am sure you would recall maybe during your time, Mr. Speaker, where you spoke about a shilling or a penny for a snow cone. The Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, might remember about the penny snow cone. However, times have changed. In fact, the monetary system and the financial system expect prices to change. In this situation, it is not just that we are changing the price and the amount that can be accessed, it is also where and how it can be accessed, which is extremely important.

6.47 p.m.

I came across these circumstances many times when I was in practice or when we were dealing with issues at the Leader of the Opposition's Office. Minister McCoy would recall that. Women who may have just lost their husbands or young people who have lost their fathers and their fathers may have been the sole breadwinners in the family, they come to say that their father had died, or their mother had died and they needed to access a bank account. They would say that the bank told them that they needed a letter of administration, expecting that it was just a letter, when in fact, it required a legal process to be triggered and initiated, and that could take months. Placing yourself also and being aware of the circumstances that a mother or a spouse who was reliant solely on her husband as the sole breadwinner and especially in that difficult circumstance, losing a loved one not knowing where to get access to money. This is an important measure that is available and the scope is widening now so that it is accessible to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). Minister Singh would tell you the numerous circumstances where persons would come, females in particular would come to say that their husbands died, having had these contributions available to them, and they are unable to receive that.

One of our primary responsibilities as lawmakers here in this House is to make or amend laws to make society function better. This is an important circumstance and situation where this amendment will do that, but more particularly it will do that for the people who need our help the most. It is not the people who have access to things and have access to many resources that will rely on this amendment the most. There

may be some instances where that might be the situation, but the reality is that the people who will rely on this simple provision are the persons who need the help the most. That is one of the reasons it is extremely important that all of us, when we come here and share our support for this, the people of this country must know that we are on their side and that the representation that we are making, we are making for them.

I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, signal a warning about how the law could be misused. Allow me to direct the Hon. Member's attention to clause 20, which speaks specifically to that issue. The issue that the Hon. Member raised, even though understandably a legitimate question that could be raised, about whether a person who owes money can make the payment directly to an agency or pay for something, instead of the person who is intended to receive it, who is the beneficiary or the intended executor, receiving that money directly, they would say that they can pay that directly to an agency or for some debt that is owed, the Bill and the clause specifically address that. There is no deltaic interpretation of this, where it states in clause 20:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of this Act, a person may pay to a claimant ... “.

It is not to any other person. In this situation, the claimant is the person who is intended to receive the money as the executor or the beneficiary. They are the persons who have to make the application. If you check clause 20 (1) (a) and (b), it explains the process by which the person will be entitled to receive that sum of money up to \$750,000. It is very clear that it is the claimant in this situation who must receive that money directly and not for them to pay to anyone else. That is an important point that I wanted to address. I am hoping that the explanation mollifies the Hon. Member's concerns. I also want to raise too that the explanation or the definition here for ‘a person’ is wide enough to contemplate any other agency, person or institution that is not specifically outlined or described in this Bill. For example, to explain that, subsection (5) states:

“For the purposes of this section –

(a) “person” includes but is not limited to ...”

This means it gives the explanation of what it is but it can be much further. Importantly as well, as it relates to employment, is that the State is also a party that is mentioned here. This means that if they are owed any sum of money by any agency of the State, whether it is by employment or by any other means, they can access that

money. This is not a very difficult Bill for this House to deliberate, contemplate and give their support. This is because it comes from the very ground, the very grassroots of all of our immediate and direct engagements with people. Persons who have that all the time are aware of this issue that arises where unfortunate things happen in life. People do not expect that someone will die, unless they know that it is coming. Let us say the person is sick and it is likely that they are not going to survive.

In the situation where it is unplanned, especially when the other person is in a vulnerable situation, they must be able to have access to the means to support themselves, especially in the interim. Let us say they have to get letters of administration or probate, I know lots of lawyers, at least when we are in practice, they would say they would do this for free. I know all lawyers would not say that. I know of many instances where a number of the members of the fraternity would say they would do it for free and then, in some instances, may take fees in the back end, but they do it for free in the immediate or *ab initio* just so the persons could get access to their funds and their properties, *et cetera*.

This helps especially when they are unable to go through with that process. It is not just for legal fees. I know some persons may have mentioned that. When persons face the difficulty, the emotional trauma of losing a loved one, many times it is difficult for persons to get on with quotidian activities that they face, being able to carry on their day-to-day life experiences, work and managing the household and managing their children, *et cetera* because of how deeply they feel. At the same time, not having to worry about where they are going to get money from just to get over this period, is something that I believe, for all of us here in this House, we must be able to know that this is something that will benefit everyone. That is why I am very happy to lend my support to this Bill. It is a Bill that is going to help everyone in this country, but particularly the ordinary people. That is why I am not just commending this. It is important that everyone in this House supports this Bill so that the people of this country, the ordinary people of this country, can continue to benefit from our representation. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the floor once again. I think, like the previous speakers, they have said a mouth full. Indeed, this Bill is a timely one. I am actually speaking away from my speech because some of the very points that I have were already made. There is no need for me to regurgitate.

While I hear the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs make mention of the fact that this Bill is going to assist the ordinary Guyanese who might have lost a loved one and that a number of consultations were held with the Guyana Bar Association and other interested bodies, my concern has to do with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. Many of them do not have access to the internet in a timely manner. How am I to understand, Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs that my brothers and sisters in Deep South... [Mr. McCoy: *(Inaudible)*] Mr. McCoy, you know what happened. You all disconnected the peoples' internet that the Coalition put in, over 200 internet hubs. Please, Mr. McCoy, do not upset the spirit now. As I said before, I am thinking about my brothers and sisters in the Hinterland regions. Could the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs say, I guess when you return to give your wrap up, how our Indigenous brothers and sisters will become aware of such an amendment to the principal law?

The other issue I have has to do with ordinary Guyanese. While Minister Nandlall spoke to the issue that the ordinary people are aware of this Bill, I beg to differ. This is because I doubt if we are to do a survey in South Georgetown and in the marketplaces to find out whether the ordinary citizens of this land are aware of such an amendment that will benefit them ultimately.... I am also happy to learn that the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs was able to give clarity with regards to why this particular amendment was not made some two years ago. In my notes, I had a question for the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs. Why wait until after two years to bring such an amendment? I am happy that he was able to give clarity to that. I also want to put my brother at ease, the Hon. Minister, Mr. Ramson, Jnr., who stated that indeed the Opposition or the entire House should give full support to this Bill.

7.02 p.m.

I think starting with my Hon. Colleague, she has already stated the Opposition's position on this Bill. We are not here to not give support to things that we know will benefit our people. I want to let you know that, yes, while I hear you deliberate, we are here deliberating, we contemplated, and we will give our support to this Bill. I do look forward to when this amendment is signed into law that we, the 65 Members of this House, will be able to go into our various communities and bring awareness to our people. In the previous debate regarding the Open Data Bill, I made the point that because of us not doing what we have to do, many

of our people are unaware of the many Bills we passed in the National Assembly.

The other concern I had, I think I made a note of that, and, perhaps, the Hon. Attorney General can bring some clarity. While we speak to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), the credit unions and the workplaces, I am wondering, Hon. Attorney General, what about us having shares? What about shares? How can that be treated? You have Banks DIH and Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL). I am just thinking whether that will form part of this Bill. This is just me thinking aloud so I can be corrected. For the deceased persons, let us say for instance the deceased person has \$1 million in shares, how would his or her beneficiary be able to access the moneys from those shares? Does this Bill allows or caters for that? That is what I am trying to find out.

I think this is what I would want to say for now. I want to say to my Hon. Colleagues on that side of the House that we give our unwavering support to this piece of amendment. Thank you and God's richest blessings. *[Applause]*

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give my support to this Bill, the Deceased Person Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill 2024, Bill No.14/2024. Mr. Speaker, I want to start off with what is written here under clause 5, and it states here,

“For the purposes of this section...”

The Attorney General, I think, spoke to this matter. In fact, I am quoting here from the Bill, which states, and this is going to address the question by the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson,

“5. For the purposes of this section –

- a) “person” includes but is not limited to any body of persons corporate or unincorporate, any financial institution or national insurance body, and includes the State; and
- b) “financial institution” has the same meaning assigned to it under Financial Institutions Act.”

What is covered here is also the concern that was raised as it relates to companies and shares. If the deceased person has a share, then, naturally, this Act here, this amendment, will definitely cover that.

[Mr. Benn: Thanks for the clarification.] You are most welcome, Minister. I am in a unique position to say that I am currently acting as a power of attorney for my sister who lost her husband in July, 2018. It is unfortunate that my business might be concluded before the enactment of this amendment

but, nevertheless, I am very happy to know that persons coming after me will benefit from this amendment. In my capacity as power of attorney for my sister, unfortunately enough, the guy died what we call intestate. There was a Will, she is the executor, and I am executing on that. I had to engage the services of a lawyer, which I did, and I also had to go about getting quotations for the properties and all of that. For persons who are coming after now, they will definitely benefit tremendously under this amendment which follows the amendment which was debated in February, 2021. I think it was 11th February, when members of this House came here and passed an amendment which was titled at that time, the Deceased Persons Estates' Administration (Amendment) Bill 2020, Bill No. 12/2020. The Attorney General did admit some shortsightedness which saw that this part was not a part of that. I am willing to go as far to say that if the Opposition were in the House, I am not betting on it but I will give them the benefit of the doubt, that if they were in the House, they probably might have seen the wisdom of tabling an amendment to add to that which was discussed on that day, 11th February, 2021. I want to take the liberty, Mr. Speaker, to quote what the Hon. Attorney General would have said on that Thursday,

“Mr. Speaker, one of the characteristics that an avid observer will note regarding bills that are coming from the PPP/C Administration, is that, most of these bills, save and except those of a highly technical nature, are bills that have a human face to it, are bills that are intended and are designed to positively impact the lives of the people of our country. That is a fundamental component of law-making.”

Early on, the Attorney General went on to say, to again speak along similar lines, as making targeted interventions at this legislative forum that address the concerns of the ordinary people out there. Again too, I note the concern of Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, about persons out there who might not be knowledgeable. I can say that I was in the Deep South earlier this year and people there are equipped with their mobile phones and devices, and they are very much up to date with what is going on. You will be surprised as to how ordinary people know about what is available through the Government system to bring about assistance. I heard the Hon. Minister, Dr. Anthony, and he must be commended for the moves they have made in the health sector in terms of taking health care into these interior regions and how people are aware of the voucher system. I think you have a voucher system for eye testing, there is a voucher system to assist

with spectacles, and also for cervical cancer testing and all of that.

Similarly, once this amendment is passed, I am certain that the Government will be rolling out an awareness programme that will target persons all over. I am certain that when you are in need, you seek to get advice on how to move about. Again, I am speaking from experience, my own personal experience, where only a few weeks ago I went about seeking to execute on this responsibility that was given to me to handle the estate of Richard Chandra Nandkishore. I learnt so many things even without engaging the services of a lawyer. I am certain that any person who would have been so affected if they were to look after the estate of a deceased relative, I am certain they will pick up very quickly on this type of information. This is good news and people would like to share good news. Much was said about the amendment, the different clauses and all of that, I just want to close by quoting another Minister who would have spoken on 11th February, 2021, and that is Minister Manickchand, who, along similar lines, as was expressed then and was expressed also during this current debate along the Government's intention to make life easier for our people, the part I want to quote in the debate is this,

“This Government is committed to making sure that we address the needs of everybody. There are business people who have great wealth and who help to generate wealth in this country who need our interventions in this House to pass laws and implement policies. But there are people who we will never hear from who really need us. That is the category of persons this amendment is going to serve. We heard from the Attorney General what it is really about. It is an amendment that seeks to offer relief to poor persons whose families have a deceased leaving \$750,000 or less in the bank. That alone tells about the category of persons we are dealing with – persons who have less than \$750,000 in their estate. This is not new to the law. When the law was first made, it was recognised that we should not burden persons with a small estate with the hassles of getting letters of administration, if one dies intestate, or probate, if a deceased die leaving a will.”

This is a continuation. The law recognises that you need to address these concerns of the smaller persons. Even when the first law was implemented about 100 years ago, as the Attorney General said, that law recognises that persons with the \$250 limit or thereabout would need some kind of relief,

so this is a continuation of what the law recognises as was quoted by Minister Manickchand. I will end there. It is not a contentious piece of legislation. It follows from what was started in February, 2021; it is a continuation. As the Attorney General so eloquently said, it was an oversight, we are adding to what was proposed there. The number did not change from the \$750,000 there, the scope has increased. I will end like how I started, to give my unwavering and unlimited support to this amendment. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Ramjattan: I too commend the Bill for support in this honourable House on two grounds: one, on the ground that it was so brilliantly articulated by the Attorney General and the second one his commendable effort at stating how myopic he was three years ago. My full support for the Bill. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs. Sorry. Minister Deodat Indar.

Minister within the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It has been a while since I have been at this podium. I will try to be just a little longer than Mr. Ramjattan but not much longer. The reason I wanted to come to this podium to lend support to this amendment is very simple.

7.17 p.m.

This amendment was designed to fix some gaps in the current legislation that we have, and through the Attorney General's Chamber, this was presented to our Parliament for voting and approval. Only last Thursday, in the space of three hours, I dealt with four separate cases by meeting with the public. Those were four separate cases of persons who have a significant number of problems in their lives because of the absence of a loved one leaving a will; what happens when that person is not there to act on their own behalf, and persons, such as executors and people who have to probate the will and all these things come into play; and the kind of mess that follows that and how it wrecks the lives of the ones left behind.

We all prepare for life, but hardly anybody prepares for death. When you are not there to act on your own behalf to make sure that your assets, wherever they lie or wherever they are located, are going to the intended person to whom they should go, you are left at the mercy of others. I believe this Bill addresses that. On the issue of assets, whatever form of assets you have, whether they are movable or immovable assets, whether they are located here, there, or anywhere, you can always put it in your will. In your will you can state

that wherever your assets are located, they should go to these persons on the occasion of your death. You can put that in your will so there is no contestation of that when it comes to it being executed at a later date. That will cover every single asset that you have, regardless of they are in Guyana, Trinidad, any other country, or wherever they are.

For folks who are watching our parliamentary session tonight who have not put a will in place and own assets and expect it to go to their wives or their children, or their brothers or their sisters if they do not have wives or children, it is best that you put one in place so that you do not have to reach the place where you have to deal with the technical things as the Attorney General laid out. How do you deal with your estate? How does an executor come into place? How do you probate the will? Who is the administrator? How are your assets distributed? All of those things are languages that are sometimes difficult to comprehend for some of our common folk. When there are problems within families and there are assets that have to be distributed among brothers, sisters, and so on, things become messy. I have had to listen to people sit and cry because a rice field that was planted needs to be split in two. People cannot live inside a house that is there because somebody went after the person died and got the property into their name and put out the grandchildren and they have nowhere to go because they have small children. This happened only last week. You have to listen to people going through these kinds of problems simply because nobody leaves a will.

No Bill can solve every problem on earth, but it attempts to solve at least a lot of them. I would just like to say that this amendment seeks to remedy a lot of ailments that we have and the gaps in our society. The education of it, how it can be executed and help our common folk in our country should be explained at a later date. Maybe educational exercises or sessions could be done. This is a perennial problem, and not just in Guyana alone. Everywhere you go in the world, you are finding people with similar problems. At least our Government is addressing it, and I believe that it deserves all the support it can get. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, you have the floor.

Mr. Nandlall (replying): Thank you very much, Sir. I want to begin by thanking the Members of the Opposition, in particular those who spoke, for their support of this Bill. I also would like to thank Members on the Government side,

in particular those Members who spoke in support of the Bill.

I think generally it is accepted that this is a great intervention and one that will benefit the people of our country. The Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, has raised some issues. Again, the Hon. Member has raised the issue of public awareness. The Hon. Member seems to be suggesting that we have to go and visit all the communities in the interior and I do not know, speak about these Bills. We have been doing consultations right across our country in many, many areas. We have ongoing... [Ms. Ferguson: *(Inaudible)*] Contrary to what the Hon. Member is saying, we have internet access across the hinterland region, both on the phones as well as at defined and specified centres. The Hon. Member would be shocked to know that people in the interior, in most locations, are more *au fait* with national affairs and the news than herself. We remember you turning up at the wrong funeral in Pomeroun. The people at Pomeroun knew who the deceased was. You are not as informed as the people in the outlying areas. I thought I would put that on the record.

I agree that we have to do much more in publicising the work of the National Assembly, and in particular, our legislation. As I said in my previous presentation in relation to the other Bill, you have to play your part. When you go into the constituencies, you explain the Bills that you are supportive of in Parliament. No doubt when you criticise a Bill and you do not support it, you go *In the Ring*, you go to all the places and all over the country and you criticise us about it. Similarly, when you support an initiative, you must go and speak about it. You support this Bill. When you go into your constituency, speak about it, and take credit for it, because you have supported it, and that is how you do politics. I do not have to teach you everything.

Another issue has been raised in relation to shares and I would like to explain it for moreso the public's consumption. The Bill speaks only to money and while in law money has a wider definition than cash, it does not include shares. Let us say a deceased person had shares held by a company during his lifetime. A claimant can theoretically present him or herself with a claim, not for the shares – because what will you do with the shares – but with an offer to sell at least \$750,000 worth of the shares. That is not provided here. That is a matter of discretion for the company where the shares are held. If it is a company that is in demand and is a company that is doing well, the shares are very valuable and the shares are very marketable. I presume there should be no

difficulty in accessing purchasers for the shares up to \$750,000.

These are innovations that can be employed in getting to the spirit of the Bill if the letter of the Bill does not permit it, because the letter of the bill is confined to money, meaning real cash. That is how I would answer that query. This is a good intervention, and I thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for supporting it. In fact, it has received unanimous support, and I proudly ask that it be read a third time. Thank you very much, Sir.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 and 2

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

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

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to Wednesday, 27th November, 2024 at 2.00 p.m.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we adjourn the House of Assembly to Wednesday, 27th November at 2.00 p.m.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House stands adjourned to Monday, 25th November at 2.00 p.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.30 p.m.