



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 (2020-2025) 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

95TH Sitting

Wednesday, 29TH January, 2025

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

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+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
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+ Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (16)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
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Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
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+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
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+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
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Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Chinese New Year

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, today is the 29th January, and on behalf of you and myself, I want to wish everyone, especially our Chinese community, a happy Chinese New Year, the Year of the Snake. As they would say in Mandarin – and I have been practicing for one week – *Xīn Nián Kuài Lè*. Yes, we do have a Chinese heritage and many of us in this room can attest to that.

Welcome to the Tutorial High School Teachers and Students

Just a few housekeeping matters. First, join me in welcoming the students and teachers of the Tutorial High School. To the teachers and students, welcome to the National Assembly.

Unparliamentary Language used in the National Assembly

One of the phrases, clauses, and words, that I am hearing constantly is ‘cry of shame’ and ‘shame’. Speaker Ramkarran had dealt condignly with these unparliamentary words.

Circulation of Documents for the Community Service Officers (CSOs)

Secondly, we have sat here for years and heard of the exchanges regarding the CSOs, and I thought that we would secure the records and circulate them. There were two documents circulated. One was a Cabinet decision, signed by the late Dr. Roger Luncheon, that ensured the CSOs were guaranteed their payments up to April, because in 2015 we had an election on the 11th May, if my memory serves me correct and there was no budget. In order to continue paying people, knowing the person Dr. Luncheon was, he would ensure that salaries are paid and the CSOs being a programme, a Cabinet decision was issued to pay CSOs until April. That does not mean that the Government fired the CSOs.

10.21 a.m.

A statement by Vice President Allicock made it quite clear that the Government that was elected said that the CSOs were part of a red brigade, the Government was replacing the CSO programme with another programme and that the CSOs could apply in this programme. There may be one or two other documents circulating, but I think what definitively, for me, settled the matter was the statement by Vice President

Allicock regarding how and what happened to the CSO programme.

Mr. Henry: May I, Mr. Speaker? If you could allow me to make one statement?

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Henry?

Mr. Henry: Could I make a statement? Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to say that one statement...

Mr. Speaker: No. This is ‘Announcements by the Speaker’. I thought you had something very substantive to contribute, that is why I recognised you. You will have to wait for another opportunity for an interjection.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2025 – MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2025

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2025 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 17, 2025, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73.02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each Constitutional Agency be

included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2025 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2025 of a total sum of one trillion, two hundred and ninety-eight billion, three hundred and forty-six million, nine hundred and eighty thousand, and one hundred and eighty-one dollars (\$1,298,346,980,181), excluding eighty three billion, eight hundred and three million, five hundred and fifteen thousand, six hundred and seventy-six dollars (\$83,803,515,676) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2025 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of eighteen billion, nine hundred and forty six million, five hundred and sixty-two thousand, and one hundred and seventy-three dollars (\$18,946,562,173) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2025.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$512,436,702,092 equivalent to US\$2,463,889,710 to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2025 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will continue the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for Financial Year 2025. Our first speaker today is the Hon. Ganesh Mahipaul. Hon. Member, at 10.24 a.m., you may commence.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me join with you in welcoming our students from Tutorial High School. I do trust that they will enjoy these debates. *Budget 2025* did not come as I had expected, and from that standpoint, I must express my grave disappointment. From the outset of the budget process in June, 2024, which began with a circular from the Office of the Finance Secretary (FS), I had hoped for a shift in the consultation process. A shift away from the outdated, archaic practice of engaging solely with Government agencies and party supporters and towards a more inclusive and meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders and the people of Guyana.

I distinctly remember sharing my views with individuals who I believe have influence over the Commander in Chief, with the hope that his leadership would reflect the promise of a departure from the divisive and partisan practices of the past. Unfortunately, what we see today is not the 'One Guyana' he claims to want, instead, it is a one-sided Guyana. We cannot speak about unite...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not want, and I do not like to interrupt, but a good attempt. We know who the Commander in Chief is, and you are actually now criticising the actions of the His Excellency, the President. We have Standing Orders which deal with the actions of judges and the President and are not subject to such comments.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you for your kind guidance, Mr. Speaker. Guyana is right now a one-sided Guyana. We cannot speak about uniting our people while actively excluding the political opposition forces from meaningful participation. We cannot champion inclusivity in public while engaging in divisive and harmful behaviour behind closed doors. The 'One Guyana' slogan, which is pirated from a second-to-none political opponent, the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R), could only be meaningful if it is accompanied by genuine inclusivity, mutual respect and a real commitment to collaboration. It cannot truly be 'One Guyana' when selected communities with supporters of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) are getting economic upliftment by way of materials to build chicken pens and hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash grant distribution to open and expand their small

businesses, while other communities are kept in economic stagnation with no financial assistance, apart from one or two paved roads and a couple of lights on their playgrounds.

Why is it that places like Den Amstel, Bagotville, Uitvlugt, Stewartville, Sisters Village, and so many others are not in receipt of the same treatment as places like Wakenaam, Leguan, Tuschen, Parika, and Leonora? Village shops exist in these Afro-Guyanese communities too, but the owners of shops in these communities never, in the last four years, got any cash grant to help them economically. Why is it that hundreds of thousands of dollars in assistance were given to cash crop farmers who look like me and suffered by way of flooding, but thousands who look like Hon. Ministers, Todd, Benn, Edghill, Waldron and McCoy are still begging for a small piece? Added to this, is also the discrimination against several ordinary, poor, hardworking Indo-Guyanese who are equally awaiting their assistance. Poor, hardworking Indo-Guyanese fisher folk are still awaiting their financial assistance. The Hon. Sherod Duncan would recall that several of them told us that their names are on the list of recipients, but they never got any of the money – fisher folk from Meten-Meer-Zorg, Salem, Wales, Vreed-en-Hoop and several other villages – but all the big fisher folk received millions. Small Rice farmers are still waiting for their little assistance, while the big farmers collected millions.

We are living in a one-sided Guyana – the rich versus the poor, the connected versus the neglected, the friends, families and favourites of the PPP/C versus the rest of us, and where the Government is facilitating the growth of oligarchs. It was Henry Truman who said, you cannot be in politics and get rich without being a crook. If *Budget 2025* had been the result of a truly consultative process, one that involved a wide cross-section of Guyanese stakeholders, ordinary citizens, community and religious leaders, civil society organisations and the Opposition, I am confident that it would not have been a document of intellectual circumcision, laced with mendacious propaganda. It would have been a budget that made every Guyanese proud, as opposed to a document that reflects limited input and falls short of the transformative potential.

As politicians, we must recognise the urgent need to chart a new, different, and more secure approach to governance. At a time when our nation stands on the brink of unprecedented economic growth, we have a responsibility to move beyond the political and economic stagnation of our past. Guyana is no longer a poor third world country. We have the resources and the opportunity to rewrite our story, but that requires bold leadership, mature decision-making, and a commitment

to inclusivity and equity, which seems to elude this Government. Democracy demands Opposition participation, yet this Government has repeatedly excluded 49% of the population from decision-making processes, seeking our support only when it suits their convenience, like during the Guyana-Venezuela crisis. This selective engagement is not democracy. It is double standard. The oil wealth we now possess could either propel us to greatness or doom us to regret. That choice depends on how we govern. I assure this nation, here and now, that with us in Government, the Opposition, in the name of the PPP/C, will be a part, and will be parcel of the formation of budgets because they too, though in opposition, must be heard for Guyana belongs to all of us. A true united Guyana requires the inclusion and genuine participation of all.

Building roads, bridges, and other infrastructure projects are necessary. Any government could do that. Those blueprints have existed for decades. The PNC Government, in its 28 years of Government, built several roads and bridges, constructed several multilateral schools, provided free education from nursery to university, built several hospitals, promoted agriculture and pushed for the grow-your-own initiative. The PPP/C, in their 23 years, built the Skeldon Sugar Factory, built some schools too, and engaged in several wrongdoings. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government (APNU/AFC), in its five short years, did way better than the PPP/C's 23 years. All these years went by without any oil money, but the last five years provided a fiscal space for lots more. This Regime, sadly, is not embracing true development. True development requires more than concrete and asphalt. It demands a shift in our political dynamics and attitudes, embracing greater transparency, stronger accountability, and a willingness to lead with inclusiveness and unity. Since I have known myself, the political climate has been one of confrontations rather than compromising and finding consensus. That needs to change. The emergence of oil wealth has only exacerbated this situation. The PPP/C needs to stop conveniently ignoring their 23 years of mismanagement in Government, pre-2015, during which little or no transformative development occurred.

Today, instead of focusing on the pressing needs of our people, we are subjected to endless, unfair comparisons, buttressed with questionable statistics between a pre-oil era and the present oil-rich economy and reality. This is neither constructive nor reflective of the leadership we owe the people of Guyana. If the Government cannot rise above pettiness and division, we risk squandering the tremendous opportunities before us. The people of Guyana deserve

better. They deserve a Government that acts in their best interest, not one obsessed with unfair comparisons or scoring cheap political points. It is time for us to adopt a governance approach, rooted in transparency, accountability and genuine unity for the sake of this generation and those yet to come. The current crop of APNU/AFC leaders is committed to leading with unwavering transparency, accountability and a genuine sense of unity.

10.36 a.m.

I am confident in this assurance, particularly considering our current stance on the composition of the National and Regional Tender Boards of this nation. It is our strong conviction that there must be an Opposition representative on all tender boards where billions of dollars flow through daily. If we are to ensure the highest standard of transparency, the presence of the Opposition on these boards would reduce suspicion of misconduct and the pilfering of the people's money, as their oversight will contribute to fairness and vigilance. Regrettably, the current Government, with only 10 months left in Office, does not share this view. As a result, the people of Guyana will rightfully remove them from Office, for their own good and the future of our nation. When they are in opposition, we in government will ensure they have a presence on all State boards and commissions. In any democratic society, checks and balances are paramount to ensure there are no policies for public pilfering and cronyism. There is no policy for public policies and public pilfering and cronyism, p-p-p-c – public policies and public pilfering and cronyism. Such mechanisms exist in nations led by governments genuinely dedicated to their people, and they must become a cornerstone of governance here in our beautiful Guyana.

The PPP/C has a golden opportunity to do the right thing but, after five years in power, we continue to witness a blame game that undermines the necessary steps toward real progress for everyone, especially our ordinary, hardworking, tax-paying Guyanese, and not just for the elite few. When it comes to accountability, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change has already signalled our unwavering commitment to strengthening the Auditor General's Office. We will not stop there. A thorough review of the Audit Act will be undertaken to ensure that the Auditor General's Office is empowered to conduct audits that go beyond the mere 10% of any agency's expenditure. In cases where significant malpractice or questionable findings arise, we will demand a deeper investigation. If proper explanations are not provided, heads will certainly have to roll. We will not engage in empty rhetoric, making public

promises of accountability while secretly socialising with those who should be held responsible. Unlike this Government, we will not call for early in the morning 5.30 meetings to stage a performance on accountability, only to let matters languish months after. We refuse to paint a Shakespearian display of concern for accountability while nothing tangible is ever done.

It has been years now since Meten-Meer-Zorg, Charity, Pouderoyen, Belle West, Belle Vue and Black Bush Polder the pump stations, amounting to billions of dollars, where millions upon millions were already paid to contractors and for several other critical infrastructures that remain incomplete. In many cases at the sites, there is no work. Do we see anyone, more precisely, Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, being held accountable? The 5.30 a.m. meeting was a sham. We see every day how sports utility vehicles (SUVs) continue to break the law by having blue and red flashing lights with sirens on the road, disrupting the smooth flow of traffic, among so many other issues in the Guyana Police Force with the Brutus scandal taking front stage. Has anyone been held accountable, more specifically, the Hon. Robeson Benn? The 5.30 a.m. meeting was a sham.

Look at the matriculation rate in our school system. It was at 49% in 2020, when the APNU/AFC left Office. Today, with billions more and moneys invested in the sector, the Hon. Priya Manickchand has it at 26%. Was she or is she being held accountable? The 5.30 a.m. meeting was a sham. A doctor from the Timehri Health Centre had to appear on camera and tell this nation that, in 2025, there is no *Panadol* at the health centre and inhumane working conditions. Was the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony held responsible? The 5.30 a.m. meeting was a sham. There is a \$15 billion office complex, where over \$7 billion was already spent, but still no one can locate where the structure is. I know the Hon. Annette Ferguson is looking all over and cannot find it. Roads are being constructed poorly and no consideration for sidewalks. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent on a third-hand boat that continues to burden this nation with huge maintenance costs and constantly must be moored for maintenance. Several contracts were awarded *via* handpicking contractors. Do you see the Hon. Edghill or Indar being held accountable? The 5.30 a.m. meeting was a sham.

We see the abuse of the procurement system, where several contractors are awarded contracts that have not been evaluated as the lowest and most responsive bidder. Several engineers have complained about being instructed to use the three-quote system by way of calling in three or at most, five

contractors and let the five of them bid for the projects, with the guarantee that the five projects will be shared among them. Is that what the Procurement Law was intended to do? Certainly not. Do you see the Hon. Ashni Singh or the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board's (NPTAB's) Chairman being held accountable? That 5.30 a.m. meeting was a sham.

The Hon. Todd got very upset when Sherod Duncan, the Hon. Member, spoke about the Venezuela issue, but he, as Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, is not calling a meeting of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations Committee. Guyanese want guidance and leadership on this matter, but Mr. Todd, the Hon. Member, is silent and wants us to shut up. We, as a unit, agreed to several actions which included regular meetings for updates and to maintain a together approach on this matter. It is not happening. Do you see Hon. Todd being held accountable? That 5.30 a.m. meeting was a sham. We read in the press that the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs was going to appeal a decision which awarded only \$24 million to the family of the late Quindon Bacchus. We remember the infamous VICE News recording with Sue. Who Sue? Sue? Who Sue? Mr. Speaker, that 5.30 meeting was a sham.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. With respect to a meeting happening at 530 a.m., there is only one that I know of so you will desist from now. This is because Standing Order 41:08 talks about the conduct of Members of the National Assembly, the President and judges being raised here, except on a motion.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I cannot leave out the mendacity of the Ministry of Housing and Water. We have complaints from over 15,000 people not knowing where their lands are. They paid in full but still do not know. Did the Ministry really give out 40,000 plus house lots? No, they did not. I believe the Hon. Gail Teixeira is tired of fighting with her Colleagues for them to just do the right thing. I believe she has been fighting with them all her life just to get them to be honest, decent and transparent. Sadly, she is getting nowhere with that. She may very well be retired from politics and they still will not be honest, decent and transparent. In relation to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), we will reverse the decision that weakened the quorum requirement and ensure that more frequent meetings are held. These meetings will be in step with current realities and aligned with the most recent Auditor General's Report. Unlike the current Regime, which continuously evades true accountability, we will stand firm and embrace our responsibility to the people of Guyana.

The new government in November of 2025 will usher in a new era of genuine unity, with a significant increase in resources allocated to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. This will be aimed at fostering stronger social cohesion and ensuring greater participation from all sectors of society. Let us not forget that the current Regime has consistently excluded the Opposition from key events that are meant to promote national unity. For every Flag Raising Ceremony, held under this Regime, we were often invited only a day before, with no consideration given for travel or accommodation, particularly when these events take place in remote regions. We all know, as every Guyanese does, that receiving an invitation a mere day before makes it clear that our presence was never truly desired. This is more than enough for us to recognise that unity has never been a priority of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. The days of petty political games and *tit-for-tat* will be over. A new era is on the horizon, one focused on a renewal of national spirit, dedication to unite our people and for the greater good of a great nation. Guyanese, take note, the endurance of this current Regime is limited to just 10 more months. What we are longing for – a truly united Guyana – is fast approaching.

Last year, I did not speak in depth on the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, primarily because it was only fair to give the Hon. Sonia Parag the chance to prove her worth. Like my Friends on this side of the House, I had to ensure that I fulfilled that promise because we will keep our promises. Today, one year after, Cde. Speaker, I believe the Hon. Sonia Parag deserves an A Grade. I honestly do believe that she deserves an A grade, Sir, for being the most incompetent Minister in the history of Ministers at the Ministry. From my research, even previous PPP/C Ministers were achieving their targets, except for the immediate past one. No target that was set by this Ministry was achieved under Hon. Sonia Parag.

The Local Government Sector Strategy – not achieved; the completion of a Sanitation Sector Plan, not achieved; establishment of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, not achieved; completion of the Ministry's Strategic Plan, not achieved; completion of the Regional Strategic Plans, not achieved; and training staff in specific areas targeting 760 staff, not achieved. As for their Manifesto promise, substantially increasing the subvention to the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and towns was not achieved. We left in 2020 with the subvention for NDCs and Municipalities at \$5 million and \$18 million, respectively, and the Mayor and City of Georgetown with \$30 million, in addition to the Georgetown Restoration

Programme, which saw a clean green Georgetown restored to the Garden City. Today, in 2025 there is no increase in those subventions, and Georgetown is back to being the 'Garbage City'. The target of a clean city and modern Municipalities and NDCs was not achieved, and these are among every other target that were all not achieved.

10.51 a.m.

We are committed to municipalities and NDCs that, in our first budget, we will double the subvention. We did it before and we will do it again. We are committed to overseers, chairs and vice chairs, councillors, a significant increase in their salaries and benefits. We did it before and we will do it again. We are committing to the National Pathway Workers to create an avenue for them to develop their skills and truly have a pathway to real development, not to just be stagnated at \$40,000 for 10 days. We will reopen the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service and develop programmes to incorporate those very Pathway Workers for their smooth entry into the public service where they will be able to be at the pensionable establishment so that they could get a better salary and, at a time of retirement, a pension for their continued survival can be guaranteed. We will develop a structure for the regional economic transformation programme and explore the feasibility of a recycling plant for our country. Once feasible, a country-wide campaign to educate our citizens on the separation of waste and the utilisation of solid waste via recycling for economic and environmental benefits to our country.

Yes, we saw some work done on the Parika Market and we saw some work done on other markets. Sir, let me tell you about the Parika Market. Can you imagine after spending over \$700 million on the Parika Market, thinking that the country will get a final and finished project, vendors, ordinary people of Guyana, vendors who sell, who ply their trades there are now instructed that they must do all the electrical work for their respective stalls. If they cannot afford to do it, their stalls will be taken away from them. A vendor, Mina Rampersaud, told me to call her name, along with several others cried in front of me because of this move. She said to me that 'business is slow, people are not shopping like before and every essential for basic survival is expensive. How do they expect me to survive Mr. Ganesh?' My response to her and all the others was to bear with us for a few more mornings. *Long time done short time left.* Ordinary people are crying out, the pressure is real, the reliefs are too small, and the Government *just don't give a damn.*

Several promises were made by this Regime to the people of Guyana, and they have not begun to see the light of day. Let me list a few for you: one, on page 49 of their Manifesto, "pass campaign financial legislation". Where is the campaign financial legislation, Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs? Where is it? "Ensure that the procurement laws are rigidly upheld". Do we see procurement laws being rigidly upheld in this country? "Ensure non-interference by the Executive in the work of the Constitutional Bodies". I wish we could agree with that...

Mr. Speaker: I agree with that, and I want to ensure that you can continue. Hon. Chief Whip, you have the floor.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Thank you very much. Cde. Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue and conclude within five minutes.

Mr. Mahipaul: "Create a non-partisan national youth corps". Where is the non-partisan national youth corps, Hon. Suresh Singh? "Provide a special Fund for upgrading of sports and cultural facilities." Where is that special fund? "Ensure that each region has a premium, multi-purpose sporting facility that could be used for multiple events." Where is it? Where is it, Cde. Speaker? "Support trade unions in the training and development of workers." Where is the communication with trade unions and the Government?

On page 22, for oil and gas, "Establish a regulatory framework which is independent of politicians". The PPP/C said to us, in their Manifesto, which they claimed the people voted for them and that they have delivered everything, they said on page 22 that they will establish a regulatory framework which is independent of politicians. What are you doing in here, Hon. Vickram Bharrat? You are not a politician. Leave. That is what they are telling us in their document. "Engage in renegotiating the oil contract." Where is that? Where is the process for renegotiation? You said it in your manifesto. "Training of thousands of Guyanese at every level to create a national core of managers and workforce to chart the future direction and effectively..." management of the oil sector.' Where are they?

I have to take the opportunity to respond at this point in time to what Joseph Hamilton said, Hon. Member. He said, 'the Opposition Member spoke on oil and gas, but the APNU/AFC trained no one to enter the oil and gas sector.

They trained no one to supervise oil. They did not train a single occupation, safety and health expert'. There is a reason why the PNC does not want him anymore and I am going to tell you that reason. Let me tell you, it was reported here on the 29th December, 2019, that Guyana's Senior Health and Safety Experts Inspectors' Training Programme was held in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Neville Nicholls and Mr. Roydon Croal were two beneficiaries. Another one is here that was held in November, 2019. The headline was 'More Successful Guyanese Delegates in Health And Safety Training'. Sir, look, this was 2019 – 2019, Hon Joseph Hamilton. In 2019, they went to Trinidad, and they were trained in oil and gas and health and safety. That is why we do not wish to have Hon. Hamilton back on our side. He is mendacious.

I listened intently to Hon. Hamilton's rambling about the Coalition not training anyone to provide oversight on oil and gas and health and safety and could only arrive at one conclusion, and that is, either the Hon. Minister has been grossly misinformed, or he is grossly misinforming the Guyanese people. Here are the inarguable facts. First, in 2019, before the first barrel of oil was produced, the Coalition took the prudent and proactive step to initiate a collaboration of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Energy, the Mexican Ambassador and the World Bank to set up a strong oversight body for oil and gas. The World Bank provided a grant of US\$1 million to bring in a Mexican consultant who had set up the Mexican oversight programme to lead the setting up of the EPA unit. The consultant made several trips to Guyana, which were highly publicised, including interviews with the news media. This effort resulted in a World Bank-EPA document dated 25th October, 2019, before first oil, establishing a petroleum unit in the EPA comprising of 36 members highly specialised and experienced petroleum staff, including health and safety professionals with responsibilities to include 24/7 Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) on board presence.

In concluding, I say to my Hon. Friends on that side of the House, 'Oh fighting men oh fighting men farewell, farewell'. In order for Guyana to grow, the PPP/C must go. I thank you, Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul. Now for the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, the Hon. Sonia Parag. Hon. Minister your time starts now.

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Ms. Parag: For the sixth time since the PPP/C Government took Office in 2020, I proudly rise in this honourable House to lend my unwavering support to a budget that yet again reflects our Government's timeless commitment to progress and prosperity. I extend my sincere appreciation and congratulations to my Colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his dedicated team at the Ministry of Finance, my other esteemed Colleagues and their staff and my own staff from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. I say thank you to all of you.

I do find it quite disturbing and unsettling to say that before me, I had an individual, a Member of this House who has the title of Shadow Minister of Local Government and Regional Development. The truly disturbing part is that I cannot imagine how a relatively young and vibrant person as myself is capable of casting such and enormously uninspiring shadow. That was the most disappointing budget speech I have heard from the Hon. Ganesh Mahipaul in all of the presentations that he has made. Perhaps, that was not a performance for the people of Guyana or for the PPP/C Government but for maybe the Leader of the Opposition. Before I even get into the budget, I will speak to Mr. Mahipaul, Hon. Member – dispense with him and move on.

When I came into local government, I heard the chatter of Mr. Mahipaul being an officer in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. It prompted me to do a little research of my own to see what exactly the Hon. Member had as his functions at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. You would be surprised to know, or perhaps not, that he carried the title of Regional Information Officer. In the ordinary context, it would mean someone who has a public relations duty, but this particular Member, Hon. Mahipaul, was bringing and carrying news. That was all it was, bringing and carrying news.

[Mr. Ramkissoon: Fake news carrier.] And fake news. Further, Mr. Mahipaul's designation changed from Regional Information Officer to Community Development Officer (CDO), so I went even further. I called the Regional Officers to find out whether there was, in fact, a file. This is because, you know, Mr. Mahipaul comes to the honourable House and he pontificates and brings a 97% artificial intelligence (ai) speech. He comes like he knows everything that is going on and that he is the most pious individual. So, I thought that, perhaps, he had a file that had all these sacks of immaculate and well-thought-out processes of what he was doing.

Did you know that the Regional Officers could not find one thing that he did in the communities of Region 3 as the Community Development Officer – not one thing. Collecting a salary from the Government of Guyana at the time and doing nothing to develop any community in Region 3. Do You know what is more? It is that I even visited the communities to find out whether, in fact, he did anything and he knew anyone. One man said, yes, I know him. But do you know what he was doing in there? He was not developing the community. He was getting the resources from Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and using them – the sugar.

11.06 a.m.

When he was finished with that, he did not talk about development for the community. This is what it was. Hear his biggest and brightest aspirations. It was not to be the President. It was not even to be the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development but to be the Leader of the Opposition. That is his biggest and brightest aspiration to this country. There was not a single thing as a Community Development Officer.

This Minister is the first female Minister in the history of Guyana to sit in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development because the Government, the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C), had the foresight to see that women can play a great leadership role in Government. The gentleman who is on the other side, an officer in the very Ministry for years, did nothing to contribute to the development of any community. Do you know where the evidence was? It was when they *licked* them up in Region 3, in all the communities, in the Local Government Elections and in the General Elections in 2020. There is a principle in law that states when you come in equity, you must come with clean hands. The Hon. Member stood up here this morning and spoke about the misuse of funds and about everything under the sun, about what the PPP/C could not do, did not do, should have done, and did wrong.

[**Mr. Nandlall:** Procurement fraud.]

Procurement fraud. I remind you that when you come in equity, as in the principle of law, you must come with clean hands. I will go further. This Hon. Member, who stood up in this House and made allegations by shouting and pontificating, misused the funds from the University of Guyana Student Society (UGSS).

Mr. Speaker: Minister, we will have to not go down that road because you are imputing, unless you have something to bring to the House...

Ms. Parag: I beg your pardon, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It is imputing. Unless you have something to bring to the House...

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, I will lay over the newspaper articles that I have from *Kaieteur News* online. I am going to speak on it and I will lay it over. This is the headline from *Kaieteur News*, 8th May, 2013, which I will lay over:

“UGSS President ‘admits to misusing funds’”

“To be sent on leave to facilitate internal audit”

There is a trend over there, please, Mr. Speaker, because when the former Minister of Finance was asked about a signing bonus, it was hidden. When he was asked about it, caught red-handed, he said it was a gift. when it was brought to the public's attention and the Hon. Member admitted to misusing funds, he then retracted and said that he borrowed it. There is no credibility coming from any one of them over there. They do not stand any credibility whatsoever. What is more, Mr. Speaker, I will go further down the line. This Hon. Member, again, is an officer who was being paid by the Government in 2020. His Excellency was sworn in 2nd August, 2020. On Monday morning, no Minister of Housing from this Government had been sworn in as yet, but he was there at the door at 6:30 a.m., waiting for it to open so he could collect his house lot. That is what it was. He was waiting at the door to collect it right after the President had been sworn in on Sunday; hurrying to get it. You talk about taking care of the people. You took care of yourself first.

I will go down the road. I sat in this facility for 33 days during the five months that they were trying to steal the elections and for all 33 days, this gentleman – the Hon. Member – stood in this House and aided and abetted the rigging of an election in 2020. Do you know when the people knew who he was? It was not as a Community Development Officer. They knew him from going on the media, outside of this facility, trying to justify why they were rigging an election. Now, he comes into this honourable House and uses words like democracy when he has committed the worst, the most heinous crime against our Constitution and our people in this country. Do you want to stand on the legs of credibility? Come with clean hands first. I will now move on. The Hon. Member can come to this House and say whatever grade he believes anybody can get but that Hon. Member has never sat where I am sitting. That Hon. Member has never achieved what I have achieved – even as an officer in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. I will tell this honourable House just what the Ministry of Local Government and Regional

Development has achieved over the years. [Mr. Duncan: Tell us.] Hold on.

I am moving on now to the Hon. Mr. Jordan, who also spoke about everything under the sun and Region 5. Let us talk, Hon. Mr. Jordan. I was assigned earlier as the ministerial representative for Region 5 and the Hon. Member lives in one of those villages. Now, there was an outreach – this is for all the youngsters – that was held where a resident of Belladrum asked that a community building be used as a computer hub for the development of the youths in that area. I called the resident and I went back to that community hub so that she could show me how we could rehabilitate it. Lo and behold, the Hon. Mr. Jordan drove himself from Lovely Lass to Belladrum and stood in front of the door to block me from entering the community building, under the guise of not having the keys, of it being robbed, them having to do an inventory and so on. God knows if they swallowed the keys, threw them away, or whatever it was, but they stood there and he not only blocked the door but he blocked the development of the youths in Belladrum. Why do you not go back and tell them that?

When I went live about it, the Hon. Member Mr. Jordan jumped on a live of his own and changed the story from a missing key to claiming that the PPP/C wanted to establish an office in Belladrum. Well, I want to tell you something, Sir. The PPP/C can go to any corner or any community. They do not have to set up an office. They will be effective anywhere they go. The Hon. Jordan was the one who stood up there and blocked the development of the youths in Belladrum and then came to this honourable House and said that nothing was being done for Region 5. I am there every week, and I can tell you about the development under agriculture. I can tell you about the development under education. I can tell you about the development under the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, when the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, was speaking, he had much more respect from the House. I want to say to those Members who are shouting and are not in their seats, if you want to engage, go back to your seats. Hon. Minister, please continue.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Region 5: The Hon. Member spoke about pensions, about people sitting for a long time and about people travelling from far away to collect their pensions and get medical care. However, the very area he spoke of, the APNU/AFC did nothing from 2015 to 2020 to develop any health centre. The PPP/C established the Esau and Jacob Health Centre, which

now services the very same people he is talking about. Development never came under them. It came under the PPP/C at all times. When they want to talk about development, they must come with clean hands, please, Sir. Do you want to know something else, Mr. Speaker? In all of the years, 2015 to 2020... They talk about the Bush Lot Secondary School. They did nothing. They rehabilitated the Belladrum School and up to now, this Government is expending money to maintain that school because of the poor job that was done on that school. In addition, we are building three more schools in that region. Do not come here and tell me that we have done nothing. Do not come here and tell me that. This is another gentleman – the Hon. Jordan – who is disconnected from the rest of his colleagues. Everyone else is talking about closing the sugar estate that cannot be revived. Yet, he stood up here like a big joke and said, we will resuscitate the sugar estate. So disconnected from the rest of your colleagues.

I will move on now. That is only a part of their track record and a lot of ours. We have much more. Allow me to move. I heard them talking about showing the evidence of rigged elections. Well, here is what, Mr. Speaker. Let us go to this: This is for the Hon. Chief Whip of the Opposition. The *Human Rights Watch* report of 1990 on electoral conditions – and if you cannot find that available, just Google it. Just Google it and it will come up – said:

“In the 24 years since independence, massive, systematic electoral fraud has denied the Guyanese people their right to freely elect their government. Unable to express themselves politically in free and fair elections and constricted by the repressive pressures of a single, dominant party, hundreds of thousands of Guyanese have sought freedom by emigrating, principally to the United States and Canada.”

That is what you did. You drove the people out of their own country. Fast forward to 2020. They transparently tried to steal the election on television (TV). Imagine, back then, you did not have a TV, you did not have a phone and they were throwing ballot boxes in the trenches. In 2020, on TV, with observers in their presence, they tried to steal elections and held hostage the Guyanese people for five months, collapsing our democracy in our country and placing our country on a global scale of embarrassment. And they stand here and want to talk about credibility and democracy? You are not qualified to speak on those two terms.

11.21 a.m.

Over the past few days, I have listened, not without discomfort, as Members on the APNU/AFC benches put forward, over and over again, wholly misguided assertions, selectively manipulating data in an attempt to convince the Guyanese people that all the benefits that they have enjoyed since the PPP/C returned to office are not good and real.

[**Mr. Duncan:** Tell the people some of those benefits.]

I shall get to some of those just now.

[**Mr. Duncan:**

When?]

I shall get to it. Hold on. You have to listen. The phrase that keeps resurfacing is track record. It seems as though these Hon. Members are either intent on rewriting history by word of mouth or are under the mistaken belief that the people of Guyana will not hold them accountable for their own track record. Let us be clear: there is only one party in Guyana – and I say this without fear of contradiction – whose track record boasts of progress, development and unity, and that is the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

Every time we bring the facts to this House, the Opposition Members scramble for cover and cry that we are going back to the past. Let us be clear: it was in 2020, in full view of the world, that they proved beyond a doubt that the very electoral fraud they denied for decades was, in fact, their *modus operandi*. This time it was not hidden behind closed doors or whispered in political circles. In the 27 years between 1965 and 1991, while the economy of Barbados grew by 1,100%, Trinidad's by 400%, and Jamaica's by 260%, the Guyanese economy, under the People's National Congress (PNC), reflected zero growth with an external debt as a per cent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) being 729.7% in 1991. That is their track record. Compare that with when the PPP/C left office in 2015 when we made no attempt to fraudulently hold up the country. The external debt stood at 26.7% of the GDP.

Over the last couple of days, it was not only the policies and programmes of the PPP/C that came under attack by the Opposition, but the people of Guyana have also been on the receiving end of the vitriol. We had the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, who opened the debate on Friday, looking down...I found it quite reprehensible that a Hon. Member would come to this House, purport or pretend to represent vulnerable groups in our society – such as the working class and young people – and strip them of their dignity because they chose to have honest employment in the hospitality industry, under the part-time programme, as a garbage collector, or however you may look at it. What is even more is that following that speech, there was a disturbing trend that was developing, attacking all of those who were seeking to make an honest living in our economy. Do you know what? We are proud of them that they can make an honest

living. We are proud of them that we can create the environment for them to be financially stable.

Their attack on the part-time workers' programme, under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, is not just an attack on policy; it is an attack on the thousands of hardworking men and women who now have a means to provide for their families. Let us be clear: when the Opposition belittles this initiative, as the Hon. Ramjattan called it a slush fund, and belittles the people who are working in these positions, they are effectively telling over 15,283 workers, 75% of whom are women, that their effort, their dignity, and their financial independence mean nothing. They are telling these women, who now have an opportunity to earn income they previously did not have, that they are simply wasting time. This is coming from the very same people who kept quiet when, in 2015 to 2020, they were telling people to fry plantain chips and sell and sell dog food. Do you know what? Even if you sell plantain chips or dog food, are doing an honest job.

[**Mr. Duncan:** Now you know that.]

You all did not attack it then, but you are attacking the people who want to upgrade themselves. Numerous persons in Region 3 have moved on from the part-time programme and have become nurse aides. They have taken the opportunities that the Government has given them to upgrade themselves. Some of them have gone into permanent employment. So, Hon. Members, when you are looking down on these people, be careful what you do because they are the very same people you are going back to for their votes.

Let us talk about what this so-called waste of time looks like. Through the Pathway Workers Project, 2,558 of the 15,000 workers are from the hinterland – Region 1, Region 7 and Region 9 – who have been able to secure employment and contribute meaningfully to their households and their communities. This Government has invested billions annually to ensure that these workers are not only earning a living but are part of an inclusive economic structure that values their contribution. What does that mean? Over 11,000 women – listen carefully – now have financial autonomy with billions of dollars flowing into their hands each year. This programme has gotten \$11 billion this year, which will see the expansion of the programme, including bringing in more persons who were previously unemployed who can now be gainfully employed for 10 days a month and can get a second job if they wish. That is development. This is what the Opposition considers a waste of time. Is supporting our mothers, daughters and sisters in achieving financial stability something to scoff at? I think not. This Government, on the other hand, values and respects every worker in every sector.

In Region 5, Ms. Aneesah, due to her ten-day job, was able to supplement her earnings from her kitchen garden which was enough to leave her abusive home. They do not know the stories of young Christopher in Region 2, who works a ten-day job just so that he can both earn and physically take care of his sick mother. These are the people you are knocking every time you come in here and belittle them. If the Members on the other side did their due diligence, they would know that many of these part-time workers have upgraded themselves through the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) initiative.

I want to go into another sphere of this: Dr. Ashi Singh, they talk about not having oil money from 2015 to 2020 and they could not have done what we are doing because we have oil money. The truth of the matter, Dr. Ashni Singh, is that they lacked the competence to do anything in 2015, and I will show you how. This Government awarded nearly 30,000 ordinary Guyanese scholarships online to pursue tertiary and technical education. Do you know that while crying that they did not have oil money, over \$70 million – wrap your minds around it – was spent on three Ministers and one Minister's two children on scholarships, while Region 8 and Region 9 got no scholarships in 2018 and 2019? None. You did not have oil money, but you could have taken that money and used it. But no, you did not want to do that. You used it on yourself. In the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development... [Mr. Duncan: Yes, tell us about your Ministry.] ...here you go. Most of the money went into recurrent and not capital from 2015 to 2020 and that was a trend throughout the other sectors. Do you know why? They were using the money for their benefit – medicals abroad and the President had the most expensive vehicle of any President in the history of Guyana.

I have another one for you. Do you want to talk about misusing funds and not having oil money? Here is the biggest one, Dr. Ashni Singh. You know this. You were in Parliament. A sum of \$150 million was spent on a feasibility study for the Demerara Harbour Bridge. When an Hon. Member for the PPP/C stood up in the previous Parliament and broke it down, it was \$2.5 million per page for that feasibility study, a feasibility study which they did not use. Do you want to talk about misusing funds? Do you want to talk about the Hon. Minister who had bedsheets, bangles, brooches and whatever else from his Ministry? Do you want to talk about the Hon. Minister who gave herself contracts through Video Mega? We can talk about all of that. Do you want to talk about the Regional Executive Officer (REO) in Region 5? In 2017, out of \$90 million for drainage and irrigation, \$59 million was given to one contractor. It is in

the Auditor General's report. Do you want to check that? Do you want to talk about it? We can talk about it. Again, when you come to this honourable House, come with clean hands. Do not come and tell us that you did not have oil money, and you could not do this and you could not do that. Minister Ashni Singh and Minister Gail Teixeira, on any given day a Guyanese wants a good laugh, they can pick up this.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I laughed the whole way last night. I laughed for hours. Do you know what? The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development did not exist from 2015 to 2020; they merged it under the Ministry of Communities with four other Ministries. [Mr. Duncan: What have you done since then? Tell us that.] Why? Is it because you cannot take the blows? Do you not want me to go on? Let us talk about this. Page 17 of the AFNU/AFC's Manifesto – Regional and Local government – Local Government priorities. Here we go. They announced the date for...

Mr. Speaker: Minister, before you go, you will need an extension.

[Interruption]

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker. I cannot hear myself.

[Mr. Speaker hits the gravel.]

Mr. Speaker: I cannot hear you either.

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her statement.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Minister Parag, you have five minutes to conclude.

Ms. Parag: Let us talk about the Manifesto. I will jump straight to Page 21. Look at the strategic plan for Region 10. Listen to this, Minister Ashni Singh. This is point one: create a strategic development plan for Region 10, rescue and modernise the bauxite industry, invite and support foreign investment from reputable and known multinationals to develop an aluminium industry in Guyana, and create new jobs. These are the same people who closed down the call centre and locked people out of jobs. When the PPP/C came into the Office, they restored the call centre and 250 persons now have jobs in Region 10. And they talk about job creation. Develop 200 hectares of intermediate savannahs for citrus and cattle. Mr. Lowenfield, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the rigging machine of the Guyana

Elections Commission (GECOM), gained most of that land. Intensify block-making capability to support the APNU/AFC housing programme. Transform Linden to make it the main entry point for eco-tourism, [Mr. Ramson: What?]

Yes. Establish a University of Guyana (UG) campus in Linden offering courses relevant to the development needs of Region 7, Region 8, Region 9 and Region 10. This Government made the University of Guyana free.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will improve on its solid waste management this year. They have gotten a budget of \$13.2 million. We have engaged the people of the community. We do not sweep issues under the rug. We have the political will, we have the competence, and we will take the political responsibility to get it done.

11.36 a.m.

With that, we will have new compactor trucks equipping the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). We will now also have the fire-fighting mobile vehicles that were procured by the Ministry of Home Affairs to assist the Local Democratic Organs in the communities as a first response – 40 of which are here already. We will continue to create landfill sites. Thirteen have already been created from 2020 to now. We will also go from Region 2, Region 3, Region 4, Region 5, Region 6, Region 9 and Region 10 with new landfill sites from the 2025 Budget. We have finished the Charity Market, the Parika Market, the Hydronie Market and the Lenora Market, and we will start with the Suddie Market. We will continue creating economic viability for the communities.

We want to talk about subventions and what you gave. Do you know that every year since 2021 the NDCs, inclusive of the APNU/AFC controlled ones, have been in receipt of a grant of \$4 million and in some cases \$5 million in addition to their subvention under the subvention programme, taking them to \$10 million and \$9 million? You do not know this. You do not know this because you do not do anything. For this year, \$2.8 billion is under the subvention programme and we will ensure that the NDCs can utilise them to enhance and upgrade their communities. We will strengthen the regional system by putting the Citizens' Desk in the NDCs to accommodate all those pensioners and those on public assistance to access the services offered by Government in terms of accessing information, and where they can go. Pensions right now are being paid in the communities.

The bare minimum standards will be established and are already being established at the health centres and the schools across the country. One of the first service meetings we had this year was with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the Regional Health Workers (RHOs,) the Regional Executive Officers (REOs) and the Regional Education Officers (REdOs) to ensure that we implement these things. What are they? Putting a shed; ensuring that we have proper sanitary blocks; making sure the buildings are painted; making sure the facilities are working; ensuring that we have proper seating; and creating a register and giving three months' supply of medication at a time to those chronic patients and residents of those health centres. This is excellent. All the schools will be painted. The walkways will be done. The tarmacs will be looked at and facilities, including the sanitary blocks, will be done. Do you want to know where the regional money is going? That is where it is going. If we are to just take Region 3, there is the upgrade of health centres at [inaudible] Belle Plaine, Belle West, Blenheim, Caledonia, Zealandia, Canal No. 1 Polder, Canal No.2 Polder, De Kinderen and Fort Island, Goed Intent, Greenwich Park, La Grange and Louisiana. We can go on and on from every single region that we have, Mr. Speaker.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, spoke earlier about the things that the APNU/AFC did. His biggest accomplishment was the Five Bs programme. Do you know that the bus from the Five Bs programme in Region 1 has been down since 2018 and cannot be taken care of because of the maintenance cost since it was bought? [Dr. Singh: The Five Bs include bangles and bracelets.] We are going to add one more, brainless. We are going to add one more word to that Five Bs. We are going to make it Six Bs – brainless.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, you have 30 seconds to wrap up.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much. In all the regions, we have done tremendous work through the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health. At this point in time, Mr. Speaker, I will close by saying, that no weapon formed against the development and progress of this country shall prosper. No amount of noise, distraction or political theatrics can erase the fact that this Government is delivering real results for the people of Guyana. We stand resolute and unwavering in our commitment to progress. Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I wholeheartedly support this budget. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, join me in welcoming the students from the old school of Minister Teixeira, myself and a few other Members – the Dolphin Secondary School – who are sitting to our left. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, you may proceed with your contribution.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me join you in welcoming the students here. I do hope that – well, not after the last presentation – with the time they spend there, they learn something that they can take back to their school.

Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2025*, as is customary, allow me to extend thanks to the committed staff of the Ministry of Finance and all other ministries for the hard work that is involved in crafting this, as always, the largest budget. Let us pause for a moment amidst all the chatter and fanfare surrounding *Budget 2025*. I rise today not just to provide a critique but to paint a picture of the budget's reality – a reality that is far removed from the lofty rhetoric of a secure, prosperous and sustainable Guyana. Beneath the polished presentations and grand promises lies a document riddled with mismanagement, favouritism and decisions that benefit a select few, while most Guyanese are left grappling with inequality, stagnation and frustration.

This budget, while bold in numbers, is a disappointment in substance. It fails to provide a vision of sustainable development that includes every Guyanese, regardless of ethnicity, region or socio-economic status. It is a budget designed to serve the interest of the powerful and not the needs of the people. Today, I will address the glaring shortcomings in the oil and gas sector, the missed opportunities in public infrastructure and the troubling patterns of governance that plague this Administration. As we head into the 2025 election campaign season, several alternative versions of history surrounding one of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) so-called transformational projects will be repeated. Permit me to address, once and for, all the issues surrounding Amaila Falls. In his Budget Speech in 2025, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service made the following statements:

“The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP) would have formed a critical element of a comprehensive solution to the problem [which is power]. History would record that the AFHP was derailed by the APNU/AFC, otherwise, that project

would have been supplying the national grid with 165 megawatts (MW) of power currently.”

Since the beginning of this parliamentary session, we on this side of the House have challenged the Government to bring a motion on Amaila Falls. If, as they like to claim, the project was derailed by the APNU/AFC Administration, they should have been willing to present the facts for the records. Of course, they have never risen to this challenge. I would like the parliamentary records to reflect these facts, for the benefit of the nation and future generations, about the disaster from which we, the APNU/AFC Administration, saved this nation.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic has always informed the country that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) was supportive of this project. As I have always said, *the devil has been in the details*. The Opposition, from 2011 to 2015 in the National Assembly, particularly the Alliance for Change (AFC) component, indicated to the people of Guyana that we would have reserved our approval until the IDB had completed its due diligence. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service has never informed this House that the due diligence was completed nor has he ever reported the results of this due diligence process. Allow me to place on record the results of the IDB due diligence, Sir. The IDB due diligence completed its report on the project and presented it to its Board on 19th March, 2014. This, Sir, is a copy. The Board was informed that relevant experts had done extensive work on the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. The report listed several meetings. There were at least 12 high-level meetings and reports, which commenced in March, 2010 – this lasted for a period of four years – and concluded in January, 2014. In fairness to the bank, it did its best to make this project viable. However, even the best experts cannot make a rotten apple good. On the very first page of this report, this is what the IDB's conclusion was:

“IDB's ... loan would entail a credit rating of RC7, which exceeds risk tolerance as defined for all ... projects and the Bank has never approved a loan with this rating;”

Let me repeat that, Sir. The IDB, in its 66 years of existence, had never approved such a project – after four years of diligence – with low credit rating as the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. The IDB gave this project the second lowest possible ranking on its scale. You can only use your imagination to determine what type of project would get a

ranking lower than this – the second lowest ranking on its scale. This is the report, Sir.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

I will let the people see, Sir – this is the highest; this is the lowest and right up there, is the Amaila Falls. Second lowest ever. The report was not only based on financing but also listed other factors including issues such as the counterparts involved in the project, project-specific risk, contractual arrangements risk, overall risk allocation and cash flow sensitivity. All these culminated in the second lowest possible rating by the IDB. For 10 years, the IDB informed that this project was a non-starter. Yet, in every budget, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service comes to this National Assembly and presents this project as a solution to our power needs. In fact, in an e-mail (Electronic mail) to the same Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, the Vice-President of the IDB had this to say to him:

“As such, the considerations related to the project’s credit rating as well as those related to a palpable threat to Guyana’s hard won and jealously protected fiscal stability, should be taken into account as to whether it is the best alternative for Guyana to continue to pursue ... financing for the project. This mandates a frank and creative consideration of alternative forms ... [of] support to the GoGY Guyana in the sector.”

Sir, which other Government anywhere in the world would try to saddle its country with a project that independent experts have ruled as unsustainable? Of course, they would use the same claim that the APNU/AFC derailed the project.

11.51 a.m.

The truth is, this country dodged a bullet and that was the reason when the former President, Brigadier (Ret’d) David Granger, met with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 2015, they begged him not to touch the project with a 10-foot pole. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) did not derail the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. It was never ever on the right track. Fast forward to 2025, they are at it again with another so-called transformational project – the Wales gas-to-shore project. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) have to be given credit. When the PPP/C *dips their hands in the cookie jar*, they do not take out a couple of cookies, they empty the jar. Let me remind this country of

the history of the Wales gas-to-shore project. I am quoting from a media briefing that was held by – he who I cannot name, at the State House in April 2021. This is the presentation he made. This is what they presented to the public. He stated: ‘the offshore pipeline would have cost \$570 million. The onshore pipeline would have cost \$80 million. The Natural Gas Liquids (NGL) and gas plant would have cost \$120 million, and Infrastructure would have been US\$40 million, totalling \$180 million.’

The final studies, which never happened, would have completed in 2022. The cost of power from the gas was expected to be US7¢ and all of the components of the project are written here in black and white would have been completed by October, 2024. Here is the current status of that project as I stand: the pipeline costs \$1 billion dollars, which is 55% more; the power plant is 117% higher; the infrastructure cost is 157% higher; and that excludes the two new claims. The entire project has been pushed back to the end of 2025. The entire project, according to the Government’s record, has risen to US\$2.4 billion which is an increase of almost 200%. That is what they have done. When they started this project of US\$810 million, the PPP/C claimed that they would supply power at US7¢. Now, with a 200% increase in project cost, not adding on what it would cost for the operations and maintenance (O&M), with the exact amount of power they projected in 2021, they are still claiming they would be able to supply power at the same US7¢ with a project that has increased by 200%. *The maths is not mathsing*. They have several minutes. Here is an open channel to the PPP/C during this debate, where they can explain to the people how it could be possible for a project that the cost has increased by 200% be the same cost per kilowatt-hour without heavy subsidies and bailouts.

I am moving on. Of course, the Hon. Prime Minister – I must mention him – will talk about transparency and accountability. To date, three years after committing to this very Assembly to lay over certain documents, the Hon. Prime Minister is yet to lay over the documents on the project. The Hon. Member came into this Assembly as an officer and a gentleman but he will not leave with the same title.

The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) – In 2015, GPL was ailing; it was on life support. However, the APNU/AFC Administration were not a complaining government. We did not go around the country crying like little children and blaming the PPP/C for what they did with the company for 23 years. They had 23 years to deal with it before we took over. Instead, we rolled up our sleeves. We

gave GPL a bolt of energy. We had it functioning and operating in an acceptable manner – not perfect but acceptable. The PPP/C returned to Office and did absolutely nothing for three years, other than fire competent people, and installed their friends and families. When *the bottom fell out of the boat*, they commenced emergency spending and still cannot get it right. The PPP/C will try to defend. I know the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, will try to defend their handling of GPL. We will hear about the challenges the company is facing, which includes increased power demands; climate change; the Panama Canal; the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19); and, of course, the APNU/AFC Administration – blah, blah, blah. We agree that demand has increased and that was expected. Both the GPL and APNU/AFC Government forecasted this demand. Our forecast numbers were errantly spot on but, as per norm, GPL ignored all of the previous advice.

In May, 2018, seven years ago, the APNU/AFC Administration commissioned a study in association with the IDB. This is the forecast of the anticipated demand for the Demerara Berbice Interconnected System (DBIS): in 2020 – 125, 2021 – 133, 2022 – 154, 2023 – 195, 2024 – 210 and for this year, the demand was anticipated to be 225 megawatts (MW). Here are what the actual demands were according to GPL: in 2020 – 120, 2021 – 136, 2022 – 156, 2023 – 167 and 2024 – 194. We are saying that the Government were aware of the increased electricity demands since 2020 but did absolutely nothing. Under the APNU/AFC Administration, we left GPL with excess generating power ahead of demand but the PPP/C sat back and did nothing for three years. This is a lesson for the young persons. There is a theory that when a person wants to full his/her pockets and wants to become a billionaire, the simplest way is to engineer a crisis and then use emergency funding to fix the crisis that has been created. That is exactly what the PPP/C did with our energy sector. By the end of 2023, after sitting on their hands for three years, the system collapsed and it was time for emergency spending. Poof, just like that out of thin air, there were no public spending, no public tender and no assessments. It was announced that GPL was buying 27 third-hand generating sets in Honduras. It was a friends and families deal. Then, they gave the contract to install the containers to a software company who publicly admitted that it knew nothing about electricity.

Next, the PPP/C found a Power Ship from Cuba to rent. This is interesting. During 2018 some of the same middlemen approached GPL to rent the exact power ship. At that time, it was in Puerto Rico and it was going its way to Cuba. We declined the offer, since it was deemed in 2018 as not

financially viable. Instead, we purchased our own brand-new generators. Low and behold, the PPP/C returned to Office and the same middlemen who came to us in 2018 reappeared. Poof, just like that, GPL found it economically viable and rented not one, but two power ships. Last year, GPL was given \$18 billion in taxpayers money for emergency spending. As I said, there is a theory when a person wants to become a billionaire. This year, a sum of \$18 billion is budgeted. This has to be compared to GPL under the APNU/AFC's Administration where not a single penny was given as a subsidy to GPL and we kept the lights on. Moreover, not only did we not give GPL a subsidy but GPL commenced repaying loans and subsidies that were taken under the PPP/C's Administration. The company repaid \$1 billion a year for each year, from 2016 to 2019, and we were able to provide less blackouts. I just want to place on record a simple fact. When the Government profess to have electricity this year, they have not explained what they would do with GPL's in-bill cost. These are the costs that GPL has incurred and, obviously, we have a lot of them coming. Maybe, one of them would be able to explain.

In November, 2024, GPL's administrative cost was 5¢ per kilowatt-hour and 1¢ per kilowatt-hour was expended on transmission and distribution, while 25% to 30% of electricity generated was lost, which equates to another 5¢. In total, to deliver power to the consumer – irrespective of the generating cost you have – GPL has an inbuilt US11¢ added to the cost of generation. Whatever magical cost the PPP/C arrived at for generation, this US11¢, I challenge them to come and dispute that.

I am moving on. The Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) continues to expand in size but not in results. Year after year projects are delayed, costs are overran and promises are broken. The people of Guyana are tired of waiting. They deserve a government who delivers, not one who hides behind excuses. The Ministry of Public Works have received hundreds of billions of dollars over the last four years and, yes, we would readily admit that roads have been constructed – some of questionable quality but roads have been done. We applaud them for the roads that they have done. They have reduced the roads in people's neighbourhoods from two lanes to single lane with a pedestrian crossing. They told the people to be contented with that. As I always say, *the devil is in the details*. Let us examine what this Ministry achieved with all of the mega projects announced since 2020. Yes, they have done roads and, yes, they have given contractors contracts – great job. Let us see the mega projects that they have done. We have a different story, which clearly demonstrates that the country

is not getting value for money. I did not even look at the 2025 promises. I went back to 2022 and 2023 when they launched their great mega transformational development project portfolio. These are the promises made that were since 2023 and they have not been delivered but, they are coming for more money.

12.06 p.m.

The office complex – mentioned before – started in 2022 and was listed for two years with \$7 billion spent. It was supposed to be finished in 2024 but it is still incomplete. The new Demerara Harbour Bridge was awarded in 2022 with a two-year construction project and it is still incomplete. The East Bank and the East Coast Road linkage was launched and awarded in 2022 – with two years of completion project – is still incomplete. The railway embankment – from Sheriff Street to Orange Nassau – is still incomplete. The East Coast road – from Belfield to Orange Nassau – is still incomplete. The Corentyne Highway – Palmyra – is still incomplete. The Linden-Mabura Hill road – four years and counting – is still incomplete. The Parika-Goshen-Makouria Creek Link – \$2 billion – is still incomplete.

Soesdyke, Grove to Timehri; stelling in Kumaka, Paramakatoi (PK), and Mabaruma – are incomplete. Ekereku Bottom airstrip is still incomplete. The Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) – four years and coming – is still incomplete. There is the Wismar Bridge. Aubrey Barker Street is still incomplete. Thomas Lands is still incomplete. The Bartica Stelling and the Kato Hydropower project are all still incomplete. There are a lot of works that you promised. When they are all added, cumulatively, they are over \$3 billion, yet they are still incomplete. This year, the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, will get up and tell us that they expended 95% of their Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) in 2024 but, the question must be asked, where is the money going? Then, of course, having not finished anything, they are coming to build two more new bridges. They have not even finished the ones they started. They want to build a new airport, but they cannot even finish the one they started. Under the PPP/C, this Ministry should be renamed the ministry of incomplete projects. [Ms. Desir-Walton: Under the Bishop of Infrastructure.] Yes. There you go.

In oil and gas, the Government's handling of the National Resource Fund (NRF) is akin to a child let loose in a candy store – greedy, shortsighted and oblivious to the consequences. Oil revenues which will serve as a bedrock for intergenerational prosperity are instead being squandered on short term political gains. There is no clear idea to

mitigate the volatility of oil prices to protect our economy from the over reliance on this single source. A responsible Government would establish a robust Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF), guided by independent oversight and clear rules of withdrawals. It would invest oil revenues in areas that deal long term returns – education, healthcare, renewable energy and infrastructure – that benefits all Guyanese. Instead, what do we see? We see reckless spending with no vision for the future.

Under the Ministry of Natural Resources, the oil and gas unit – I know my Hon. Friends, Mr. Shurwayne Holder and Mr. Ramsaroop, dealt with the other [inaudible] – has been comatose over the last budgeting period, delivering nothing, simply operating on auto pilot or awaiting the Vice-President's press conference for directions on how to proceed. To date, the results of the first two orders have not been finalised and the public was informed of the moneys owed by ExxonMobil has been remitted to us. The promised Petroleum Commission has not been established. The revision of the Local Content Act to correct the loopholes, which we on this side of the House warned them against and they ignored, which...

[An Hon. Member (Government): Did you warn us?] We warned them. We warned them for the record, Sir. You could go back. We tabled the amendments about the rent to citizens to ensure you guard against that, but they ignored that. They are yet to table any amendments.

Much was made of the new Petroleum Act and the new bidding ran under the revised PSA – much was made. To date, nothing has happened. Several promises were made on studies – gas monetisation, baseline studies – and, to date, nothing has happened. Nothing has been done in keeping with their manifesto's promise to renegotiate the existing Stabroek contract. There are no policies to ensure that our Indigenous brothers and sisters benefit from the oil sector. To whom much is given, much is expected.

The new Government, come November, is set to launch, on this side here, an ambitious integrated urban development and modernisation plan to target the entire structure of our urban and regional areas. The overall strategy of the plan will coordinate mega projects through a structured inclusive approach, encompassing strategies, principles, policy directions and initiatives, regardless of the size, scope and impact on the structural space. The objective is to disrupt the unwise and unsound practice of a few people locking themselves in a backroom, creating projects without the requisite consultation with relevant supporters and without

rigorous feasibility studies being conducted to guide the final decision.

Mr. Speaker: To guide, you might need an extension to continue.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Chef Whip. Hon. Member of Parliament (MP), you have five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Patterson: Major areas of focus under our new Government – Georgetown. In collaboration with the Georgetown Mayor and City Council (MCC), our plan aims to complete the development and modernisation of the capital. This includes upgrading the drainage system, redeveloping and upgrading recreational areas, improving waste management through waste-to-energy conversion, enhancing traffic management and the construction of multistorey car parking facilities. In Linden, the plan includes to transform Linden into a major economic and commercial hub, in collaboration with the Linden City Council. This transformation includes the creation of a free zone, the establishment of a transportation hub along the Linden-Lethem highway, development of a deep-water port facility for containers and product movement, and the construction of new roads to support the timber and logging industries.

In New Amsterdam, the plan includes upgrading and expanding the internal road networks, building new wharfs to serve the Berbice River, introducing a new river ferry for goods and passengers' transportation, in collaboration with the New Amsterdam City Council. For other townships, the plan also involves major upgrades to ensure better economic activities across all townships. We will construct a new transportation network, introduce a state-of-the-art state-run bus service with scheduled services, linking major residential areas as well as subsidised transit for the elderly, schoolchildren and essential public sector employees. We will construct the Guyana orbital highway and construct a ring road network linking Linden, Parika, Georgetown and Berbice, including a light rail system similar to the London orbital network.

In the transmission and distribution network, we will complete and upgrade the transmission and distribution network of the Demerara-Berbice Interconnected System (DBIS), reducing technical and commercial losses by at least 20%.

Bridges – we will build bridges linking communities such as Kwakwani, Mahdia, Lethem, *et cetera*. We will develop new regional airstrips at Linden, Essequibo, Berbice and Lethem to serve passengers and cargo hubs. We will invite existing oil operators to commence discussions on a more equitable distribution of our oil resources.

Budget 2025 paints a disheartening picture of this Administration's priorities. It is a Budget that entrenches inequity, perpetuates mismanagement and serves the interest of a few at the expense of many. It is not a Budget for *A Secured, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. It is a Budget for division, exclusion and short-term political gain.

The people of Guyana deserve better. They deserve a Government who listens, delivers and cares. They deserve leadership who invests in their future, protects their resources and builds a nation that works for all. Only then we can fulfil the promise of a Guyana that is truly secured, prosperous and sustainable for generations to come. In 10 short months, the people of Guyana will have that government. I thank you and I end by telling everyone, Better Must Come. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Patterson. Now, for the Hon. Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill.

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand here today, I think with the passing of time, a little wiser than I have been. In that approach, I chose to do a lot more listening. In my listening, I must admit that I am extremely disappointed that the persons who would like to offer themselves as an alternative government or the next government as they are purporting have been vacuous, incoherent, and sometimes even laughable in what they are presenting.

Mr. Patterson left the Dome/Chamber.

[**An Hon. Member:** Keep running.] Go ahead, Mr. Patterson. That is your normal trend; go ahead.

[*Mr. Speaker left the Chair.*]

[*Mr. Charlie assumed the Chair.*]

I will address a number of matters that have been raised. I would like to thank the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, for admiring the successes of the PPP/C over the last four years. He is admiring them but he is admiring them awkwardly. I want to address a couple of comments that were made. Yesterday, both the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira

and Mr. Devin Sears, – out of Linden – spoke and ask that specific things be done for Linden.

12.21 p.m.

In some instances, they misrepresented the truth. The Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, asked that the tolls for the Wismar/Linden bridge be immediately removed. That sounds appealing to the people of Linden. I would like to tell the House what the cost of those tolls are. The cost of those tolls are \$40 and \$60. Mr. Figueira did not tell this House that under the APNU/AFC, the Municipality of Linden imposed a toll on every truck and goods transportation passing through Linden costing \$5,000 \$7,000 and \$8,000. Every car that is carrying goods and greens to sell in Linden has to pay \$2,000 at Kara Kara. A canter that carries in food and bread for people in Linden has to stop and pay a toll of \$2,000, \$3,000 and \$5,000. He did not tell this House that and did not call for the revocation of those tolls. What is worse is that while they are collecting the tolls that says they are to improve infrastructure in Linden but, under their tenure and even now, they are still controlling the Region and the Municipality, and not even \$1 from those tolls built a road in Linden.

What are we doing here? The Hon. Member, Mr. Sears, stood and said that the people in Kwakwani want to know when their roads are going to be finished. He is alien. He is definitely alien. He has not been there in a long time. The people of Kwakwani will post the pictures to Mr. Sears and all the people of Guyana to see that every single road in Kwakwani is under construction right now and many of them are already completed. Let me help him. Every road in Ituni is being completed right now – every single road. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, is saying that when he comes back into government, he will build roads in Linden, in New Amsterdam and in Georgetown. There will be no roads left for him to build, because there are 505 contractors in Linden right now building roads for the people in Linden. There are 42 contractors who are building the roads in Ituni and more than 100 contractors in New Amsterdam are building the roads in New Amsterdam. Not to do is being done.

Mr. Speaker, I did tell you, it is laughable. In Georgetown and in Region 4, 947 contractors are at work building roads. There are some that have already been completed – 300 on the East Coast Demerara. Let me come now to Mr. Dolittle who definitely, while he was at the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, suffered from inertia. He spent a lot of time talking about Amaila Falls and how the IDB did not agree with Amaila Falls. I would like to read from the Norconsult,

Review of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project in Guyana Final Report, which was commissioned, Minister, Dr. Singh, I want to be clear, by the APNU/AFC. Section 9.2 states:

“Reasons for retaining Amaila Falls

Although the certain design aspects of the AFHP...”

That means Amaila Falls Hydro Project.

“...should be reviewed and revised, we regard the soundness of the AFHP as evident and in order to follow up the intentions of the LCDS as fast as possible. we recommend the preparations for the AFHP to be resumed.”

[**Dr. Singh:** That is correct. That is correct. That is Norway’s report in 2016.] This is Norway. Listen to this, the same Report commissioned by the APNU/AFC states at section 8.4.3:

“Conclusion

From a financial and economic point of view, development of Amaila Falls seems to be the optimal solution for meeting the electricity demand in Guyana. The project should be financially restructured in order to make it more attractive for GOG and potential investors. Since the perceived risks of investing in Guyana are high, mainly due to political and regulatory reasons...”

Let me explain to Mr. Duncan who runs out of the House why this is so. I sat in Parliament. I was serving as Minister within the Ministry of Finance alongside Dr. Singh. [**Dr. Singh:** You served with distinction.] Thank you, Sir, with distinction, because I am a man of distinction. Blackstone, one of the biggest multinational listed corporations on every stock market was going to finance the Amaila Falls Hydro Project with not one cent of taxpayers’ money being required. The sum of US\$80 million from the \$250 million we had earned from Norway through the Low Carbon Development Strategy would have been put in as equity. All that was required was for the National Assembly of Guyana to vote to increase the debt ceiling to give the necessary guarantees to the investor to invest. It was Mr. Patterson and his Party who got up in the National Assembly with the scissors.

Let me explain to the Guyanese people, because this is about the people. They knew that if we had gotten Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and the cost of electricity went down, they saw no chance of ever getting back into government. It is their same modus operandi that they are doing now with a

Gas-to-Energy Project, because they know that once this issue of the cost of electricity is addressed and Guyana takes off, the people will never, ever listen again to the APNU/AFC. That is the reality of what we are facing. Mr. Patterson, just now, listed what was incomplete.

[Mr. Patterson entered the Dome.]

I am glad you are back, Sir. Stand and correct me if I am wrong. Did you not serve as the Quantity Surveyor to give valuations to some of the people who are in alignment of the road where you told them they could get multiplied millions and you are using it for political purposes to block this project? Deny it. Deny it if it is not so. You then come here to say the project is incomplete. It is incomplete because you were working with other lawyers from the APNU/AFC to stir up the people and to sabotage the programme. You are against everything that is big, good and transformational. Your sordid history is that everything that is big, transformational and will benefit the people of Guyana, you stand in the way of preventing it, but we will not allow it. The people of Guyana will not allow it. The people of Guyana will stand with the PPP/C and ensure that Guyana is modernised and transformed. Do not come here and talk about what is incomplete. Let me help, Mr. Patterson, but at the same time, bring assurances to the people of Guyana as to what the \$252 billion allocated for the Ministry of Public Works will do for them and how it will better their lives, because it is not just about the money; it is about the impact on people's lives; it is how we make communities better; and how we prosper this country.

Right now, all of the bridges in Karasabai, Region 9, all the way through to Paramakatoi in Region 8, will be under construction. The bridges would bring, for the first time, a smooth link between Region 9 and Region 8. *Budget 2025* provides for that. Let me explain to you why I am saying this. The cost of a sack of cement in Lethem is \$2,800 to \$2,900 there about. By the time it gets to Paramakatoi, it is \$14,000. Do you know what that means? It is because of that transportation link that will become more accessible. The cost of development in those communities will be significantly reduced. People will have better homes. There will be better infrastructure and the livelihoods of people will be improved. The cost of food will also go down. The cost of living for the people of Region 9 will be reduced just by improving that road link. All the Members of the Opposition who said they cannot support the Budget must tell the people of Region 9 and the people of Region 8, 'we do not want you to have those 29 bridges and we do not want that road to be built'. That is what you are saying. Let Mr.

Cox, the Hon. Member, go back and tell the people of Region 9 that he voted against a budget that links Region 9 and Region 8.

As I speak here today, Mr. Patterson will be pleased to note that the bridge across Bonasika Creek will cause the direct link, which was committed by the PPP/C to be completed; Parika to Goshen is now going to be possible because *Budget 2025* provides the financing for the Bonasika Bridge. Money is in the 2025 Budget to build the Makouria Bridge that will link Region 4 with Region 7, from Sand Hills to Foul Mouth, the Makouria Bridge... As a matter of fact, the contract has already been awarded for this bridge. I would like the Hon. Members, Ms. Hastings-Williams, Mr. Cox and all of those to tell the Amerindians people who they represent that they voted against this Budget and that 51 airstrips that exist and we maintained as Government, they do not want money to go to upgrade those airstrips. There are 74 but 51 are currently active. There are about 128 in total. Accessibility to interior locations must be improved and this Budget does that.

12.36 p.m.

I would like the Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, from Region 2 – He is not in the House. He is having lunch early – to tell the people of Region 2, that has 177 contractors currently working in upgrading all of the remaining roads in Region 2, that he is against the Budget because he does not want their roads to be built. Where is Mr. Mahipaul? He says he is from Region 3. He has gone to eat. I want him to tell the people of Wakenaam and Leguan and Hubu and Parika, and the people who live on the West Bank where the new road is being developed from the Harbour Bridge all the way to Patentia, he is against the Budget. I want him to tell the people of La Parfaite Harmonie and Onderneeming, and all the other villages in there where the Special Projects Unit has already paved 28 kilometres (km) of road, and there are more than 90 contractors in there doing every road in La Parfaite Harmonie and Onderneeming, and all the roads in there, you are against the Budget. Tell the people over there, go and campaign and tell them, 'I am against the Budget' when the Budget is bringing development for them.

I want you all, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, Ms. Philadelphia, the Hon. Members... Mr. Roysdale Ford should be coming after me. I want my special friend, Ms. Annette Ferguson, to go in Sophia, go in Sophia and tell the people 'I am against the Budget' when the people of Sophia are seeing their roads being built; and, as a matter of fact, walk on the new road and go tell them that. I want you to tell the 947 contractors,

almost 30% of them women, single women, I want you to tell those women I am an advocate for women rights, those women who are building the roads. Do you know something, Mr. Speaker? Some of the women are finishing ahead of the men in some of these projects. Go on the East Bank and tell the people, and all the people on the Linden-Soesdyke Highway where you used to go and tell them stories about the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) hates you, go now and tell them. They have black tanks for their water, they have roads, they have proper schools; listen, go and tell them that you do not support the Budget. Go and tell them that the new secondary school, that Minister Manickchand commissioned out there, you do not want it anymore, you do not want teachers there. [Ms. Ferguson: (Inaudible)] Ah *hah* and Mr. Jordan, he is gone.

Region 5: go and tell the people in Region 5 that the 700-plus roads from Mahaicony all the way into Ithaca... Let me tell you, I would like Mr. Mahipaul to continue tell the people how the PPP/C Government is discriminating. Yes, we are discriminating in favour of bringing development to people in every region, in every village, in every local authority area.

I do not know who *gunn* go to Region 6. Mr. Ramjattan, the Hon. Member, is my very good friend. He *ain't* come today. Go and tell the people of Region 6 that you are against the Budget, and you do not want the Palmyra to Moleson Creek Road to be built; you do not want the municipal airport in the Palmyra-Canje development area to be built; tell them you do not want the stadium; tell them you do not want the hotel; tell them you do not want the houses that the Ministry of Housing has being built; tell them you do not want the new...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I will tell you will need an extension to conclude already. Sorry, Minister, you have ten minutes on the original time.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I know it is human to make errors, but I was just concerned. So let us go across the country. Mr. Cox... [Mr. Mahipaul: Hon. Member.] Hon. Member; some of us could only have that title here. I, your humble servant, have been to Imbotero several times, so do not come here and pontificate. I am sure Mr. Patterson, the Hon. Member, as Minister of Public Infrastructure, cannot say he has visited every village between Karasabai all the way to Kurubakari. I am sure the Hon. Minister Annette Ferguson cannot tell you that she has visited every village in Region 9. So, do not come here and talk as if you have this in your hand and you know what is going out. Go and tell

the people that are getting their information and communication technology (ICT) hubs that you do not want the Budget.

The moneys that are allocated in *Budget 2025* for the Ministry of Public Works will see a significant continuation of what was started in 2020. No one single budget can be a silver bullet and an answer for everything, but if you look at the strategic implementation of the PPP/C's economic policy you would recognise that we are strategic, we are purposeful and, more than anything else, we are focused on pro-poor, pro-people initiatives, and we are doing this in an environment of inclusivity, maximum participation, and in consultation with the people of Guyana. In the history of government, I do not believe we have ever had a government that has been so active in communities, a president that is so active, ministers that are so active; and we do not just listen, we respond. It is at this stage that I would like to express deep gratitude to my colleague and friend of many years, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and his staff at the Ministry of Finance for the excellent work that they have been doing in not just budgeting but managing the implementation of the budgets over the years that we have been in government. Congratulations to you, Sir, and the Ministry of Finance.

I would ask the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson to take a look behind me. The same people that he worked with are the same people I am working with. It had nothing to do with the lack of competence of the staff, it had nothing to do with the qualifications of the staff. The underperformance of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was as a result of lack of policy direction, lack of vision, and lack of capacity to implement vision. Same team, and let me tell you what they are doing. From 2020-2024, 4,322 kilometres of roads was constructed. From 2020-2024, 150 bridges were rehabilitated whilst 66 bridges were maintained, and these are not putting back wooded bridges, these are putting in concrete bridges. From 2020-2024, 25,783 km of sea and river defence structures were constructed whilst 328,751 km were maintained. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, from Region 5, talked about a breach at Dantzig that we came in and corrected. *Ow, leh* we be fair with the people of Guyana, they *does* listen to we, they *gat* sense, they could see *fuh* *theyself*. Since we are in Government, there has not been a breach at Dantzig. As a matter of fact, there has been no sea defence breaches in the whole period; we have had overtopping, but we have not had breaches.

The moneys that are being spent on infrastructure came in for a lot of criticisms, as if to say we are spending too much,

and then we have this narrative that is being peddled that we have oil money. So, we have a budget that is over \$1.3 trillion, or for the people who do not understand those numbers, one thousand three hundred and something billion; \$512 billion out of that money is coming from the Natural Resource Fund. So, oil money is not answering everything here – \$512 billion. In the Ministry of Public Works alone is \$252 billion and, if you go to your Budget book, those of us who know how to analyse it, the Capital Profile of this Budget is about \$700 billion. So not even all the oil money that we could get could fund the Capital project of this Budget. Why are we fooling? Why are we telling people things just like the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, who gave people valuations that are out of the window, so that they could stay on land to obstruct the bridge. Why are we selling people dreams that are not factual? Listen, when you are in public life and you are public officials, we must be mindful that everything we say could be fact checked, everything we say people could go and inspect it and see it for themselves. Why is it that we behave like this?

There is an argument that is going on out there that people are tired of the 28 years of the People's National Congress (PNC) and the 23 years of the PPP/C because some people do not like to hear of the sordid record of how this country was damaged when there was no democracy. Our 23, 1992-2015, they would like that to disappear. Let us say that it is possible, let us examine 2015-2020, 2020-2024, just for argument's sake, and that is where my colleagues who are loud, whether in the ring or out of it, will have to start ducking for cover, because the young people will say *yuh dellulu, yuh dellulu*. This Budget and the moneys that are available will do about – I will look at it and say – 10 essential things to benefit the people. It would improve connectivity in our country – the roads and the bridges, the seas defences, the air strips that are being built. Once you improve connectivity, boom, areas develop; government does not have to do everything, government just has to put the infrastructure in place

12.51 p.m.

When we bought the motor vessel (MV)Ma Lisha, which was money remaining since 2014–2015, that the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, sat on for five years and did nothing, including the Ogle to Eccles bypass Road – US\$50 million available from the Export-Import Bank of India (India Exim Bank) – and did nothing, and you are going to come and tell me what is behind. We are behind because we are doing something, and you are seeking to block it.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, now you need the extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his statement.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister, you may continue.

Bishop Edghill: The people of Region 1 and the people of Region 2 would be proud to hear that *Budget 2025* has an allocation for the purpose of purchasing additional ferry vessels. The MV Ma Lisha is there. We are now in the dockyard coming out with the MV Kimbia, which will be dedicated to the transportation of cargo. We have the MV Barima, taking it to Region 1; we are about to buy another vessel to put on the Region 1 route, even though we have moved from going twice a month to now several times a month. You heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Juliet Coonjah, stand here last night and thank the Ministry for what is happening on the Parika-Supenaam route, where on some days up to eight trips are being made. The people of Region 2 must know that in *Budget 2025* moneys are in it to purchase another ferry vessel for Region 2 to ply between Parika and Supenaam.

The people of Bartica will tell you, the Bartica stelling that was started under the APNU/AFC, where almost 100% of the contract sum was paid to the contractor even before work started under the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, the stelling, the linkspan bridge has already been tested and we are getting it ready for opening before the end of March. Bartica is getting their stelling. The Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, will be pleased to know that the people of Leguan, despite all the trouble and the *fandangling* that took place... **[Mr. Ramson: I like *duh* word.]** The *fandangling*. ...the stelling at Leguan is up and running.

Budget 2025 will also improve people's lives. We all know the story. I thought it was just the East Bank, but outside of the construction zone on the East Coast, the congestion in the morning on the East Coast is as much. That is why we are putting in the four lanes on the railway embankment. That is why we are putting a road from Aubrey Barker that will take you all the way through to Ogle. So, when you are coming off the East Coast and heading outside of Georgetown – whether across the river or to the airport – you do not have to come into Georgetown, Hon. Member Mr. Figueira. You come down the Ogle four-lane road and connect. If you want to go in South, Aubrey Barker brings

you all the way there. If you want to head away, you take the Eccles bypass and go all the way there.

I saw on social media a lady who was saying, ‘I am not necessarily a supporter of the PPP/C but I went out of the country for four months and I come back, *meen* know *weh* I *deh*’; is Red Road she *taaken* bout. [Dr. Singh: Correct.

She ent know *weh* she *deh*.] *She ent* know *weh* she

deh; place change; four months. This Budget will improve the quality of life and access to services. *Budget 2025* stands to support Minister Frank Anthony and the Ministry of Health so that his doctors and medical professionals could get to locations quicker, faster, and safer, so that the people of Guyana could have access to specialists. The roads, the bridges, the airstrips that we are building, and a new ferry, are to help the Minister of Education and her competent staff at the Ministry of Education for more effective delivery of education across the country.

One of the big issues that is bothering us, and I know I am almost out of time, is traffic safety. *Budget 2025* has an allocation for about \$2 billion for traffic lights. The Hon. Prime Minister is heading a Cabinet subcommittee that includes traffic officers from all across the country discussing traffic safety. While we are doing geometric improvement of roads to keep the flow, we are also studying the movement of people. More than 4,000 kilometres of sidewalks are being built to take pedestrians out of the motorised traffic for the safety of people. We are also looking at the issue of the trucks and, in support of the Ministry of Housing and Water, special areas are to be developed for the parking of trucks outside of the road shoulders and outside of the roadways to encourage commercial development, but at the same time the safety of people.

Please, Hon. Members of the Opposition, you have had your say, you have done your job of opposing. We have to move now from just the rhetoric and let us look for what is good for Guyana; and because of what is happening in Guyana, continue your politics but support development; continue your politics but support prosperity. Be responsible, be reasonable and be rational, and let us work together for the development of Guyana. I am out of time, Mr. Speaker, and I have to go, but thank you very much, and God bless Guyana. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Bishop Edghill. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.58 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 3.16 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please be seated. I have as the next speaker, the Hon. Member Mr. Roysdale Forde. Ms. Volda Lawrence, any update?

Ms. Lawrence: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, but Hon. Mr. Forde will not be joining us this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: So, we may have to take him later on, if he is going to come back.

Ms. Lawrence: I am not sure.

Mr. Speaker: Now let me invite the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the Hon. Mr. Anand Persaud.

Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin my budget presentation this afternoon, I would like to respond to the three words that the Hon. Member Mr. David Patterson ended with:

“...better must come.”

Let me inform this honourable House that the best is on the side led by Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. I quote:

“Then the Lord said to me, “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.”

Quote from the Holy Bible, Jeremiah Chapter 14, verse 14. That is how I would characterise the Opposition’s lacklustre and weak budget presentations. I have been listening day after day, and it seems to me like they are singing the same busted rhythm and record. Budget after budget and it is the same old recycled arguments on a new paper to capture headlines and cheap political points. These honourable men and women come to the House and seek to unjustly criticise this Budget when they have not done any preparations. The People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R)/ APNU/AFC Opposition is a stranger to the truth. They are like the verse in Jeremiah – false prophets who only seek to preach unto the people false visions and delusions of their own minds.

The Opposition Members were elected not to grandstand and oppose the Budget for opposing sake. We have sat and listened to some of the most strange, ignorant, and visionless debates about *Budget 2025* from the APNU/AFC parliamentarians. Their remarks have been illogical and ravenous, failing to recognise the tangible benefits of *Budget*

2025. The only exception has been the Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond. Mr. Speaker, through you, I want to say to this Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond, it was a wise person who said, it is better to walk alone than follow a crowd going in a wrong direction. I have participated in Budgets for 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. It bothers me that the Members on that side fail to comprehend the tremendous impact these Budgets have had on the livelihoods of our people. Something is wrong here. It is as if they are completely oblivious to the fact that ordinary citizens are benefiting from these developments. The people of Guyana can attest to this. After all, the speakers from the opposite side of the House can try to save face, but I can foresee that 99% of them will not be here for *Budget 2026*, including the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Aubrey Norton. They are nothing more than seat warmers.

This is an election year. Maybe the Hon. Member, Mr. Norton, and his seat-warming crew's minds are elsewhere. They might be obsessed with orchestrating a plan or plot to attempt to rig the 2025 Elections. Mind you, we are still waiting for the APNU/AFC to present their Statements of Poll (SOPs). Hon. Member, Mr. Norton, we and the whole world are still waiting on you and the AFC to produce your Statements of Poll. Five years is not enough time to prove the PNC/APNU/AFC was cheated. Do not be like the prophet Jeremiah described in that quote; either prove your word has value or zip it.

3.24 p.m.

We are still waiting on Mr. Ramjattan, the Hon. Member, to report and prove that Russians were attempting to meddle in the elections. It was at earshot, the ruckus and fish market-like presentations of the Hon. Opposition Members Ms. Juretha Fernandes, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, 'Chronicle fraudster Sherod Duncan', 'dishonourable University of Guyana (UG) fraudster' – I am referring to the Hon. Ganesh Mahipaul. They come here to bring us the tails of untruthful stories of their phantom people who they have claimed that they have visited and consulted about the Budget.

Let me tell you what the ordinary, real folks are saying about the Budget. A student, Ms. Shina Williams, said, and I quote, 'this budget certainly has goodies for me; it has the right measures and fiscal policy that will take Guyana forward. I do not think the PNC or AFC or APNU/AFC would have done so well'. A construction worker, Mr. Dave Persaud said, 'a lot of people are happy right now, we will have a better future with this Budget'. A housewife and

mother of three, Ms. Angela Scipio, she said, 'I am thankful because I have three children, and the money will help me to send them to school and look after my family'. These are just three examples. There are countless persons throughout Guyana who are praising the PPP/C Government for *Budget 2025* which provides these incentives that can lead to household prosperity.

The Opposition Members seem to be good at criticising, but where are the recommendations? They would have been more effective if they had examined the Estimates of *Budget 2025* in a wholistic and macro way. After all, it was the Opposition leader, Mr. Norton, who said in the *Kaieteur News* article dated 18th January, 2025, that this Budget is "garbage". This is disrespectful, myopic, and unbecoming of an Opposition leader who aspires to someday lead our country. This is even more disrespectful to the Guyanese people. However, instead of giving credit where credit is due or acknowledging the sound fiscal plans laid out for the year 2025, the Hon. Opposition Members come to this House telling us tails laced with a healthy dose of fiction, half-baked stories, concocted fantasies and manufactured narratives. They have brought nothing of substance and value to this debate.

It was heart wrenching to know that the APNU/AFC Regime crippled the sugar industry by shutting down three sugar estates and displaced over 7,000 workers which affected in excess of 32,000 persons indirectly. It was the PPP/C Government that restored workers' dignity, decency and pride. Sugar like rice, like bauxite, are important commodities in sustaining the Guyanese economy. Much has been said in this House by the Opposition that over the years the PPP/C Government has wasted moneys in resuscitating the sugar industry. Regardless of what the Opposition said here in the National Assembly, sugar will become profitable, it will not fail; sugar is too important to fail. I wish to laud the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service for his allocation of \$13.3 billion dollars this year for the continued progress and mechanisation which will definitely change the future of the sugar industry. Further, I wish to laud the injection of \$430.9 million allocated to the rice industry, and \$2.9 billion for other crops to support agricultural expansion.

I now shift my attention to the taxation of the previous regime, which implemented a slew of tax measures, doubled them on the hardworking Guyanese population. These include a variety not limited to water and electricity bills: motor vehicle registration increased; taxes on agricultural machinery, machinery for mining; value-added tax (VAT)

on pharmaceuticals; VAT on used tires; new fare structures for huskers; educational material, data, all increased. To add insult to injury, I believe they even introduced licence for horse carts, donkey carts, dog licences, chicken licence, bicycle licence, VAT on toothpick, and VAT on baby foods. Their tax measures covered from cradle to grave, but we in the PPP/C Government will take care of our people from cradle to grave with zero taxes – increase in taxes. Importantly, not forgetting the attempted larceny of the US\$18 million signing bonus which they claimed they thought was a gift. I can now go on listing almost every scandal during the APNU/AFC time in Office, but I will not save for time.

I now wish to refresh the minds of all Guyanese who suffered immensely under the PNC Regime of rigged elections. In excess of three decades – to be precise 33 years – the PNC and APNU/AFC rigged elections to stay in power: undemocratic executive lawlessness, highway banditry, barefaced thievery, subversion of our Constitution, moral and fiery destruction of our economy, and to recall their words, ‘slow fire, more fire’, lack of democracy, and holding on to power at all costs. The Guyanese people were morally reduced to a state of submission.

How can I and the people of Guyana forget the Opposition’s agenda in rigging countless elections. It is obvious that rigging of elections is in their deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). The elections of 1953 were the first free and fair elections won by the PPP. In 1964, elections were won by the PPP, but the PNC coalesced with the United Force (UF) forming the government and every other election thereafter would be rigged. The rigging architects of the PNC created phantom voters, fake lists, fake overseas voters, voter impersonation, hijacking of ballot boxes, flaws with the electoral commission and its personnel, thuggery, protest, political killings, *et cetera*. This was how the rigging DNA evolved. People were denied basic food items such as flower, split peas, cooking oil, sardines, potatoes, and if caught can be jailed.

There are serious consequences when elections are rigged. It resulted in undemocratic rule which drove our country into bankruptcy and crippled essential services. After lobbying the world leaders for free and fair elections, in 1992 the PPP marked the return of democracy to Guyana and the beginning of a new era. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic toiled to bring Guyana back, build Guyana strong, restore pride and hope in our people, and champion the good governance structures and institutions up to 2015. A strategy had to be conceptualised to put Guyana back on

the developmental path. While this reconstruction was ongoing the political Opposition was undermining in making life hard, miserable, and Guyana ungovernable, through street protest, which led to the burning of businesses, government institutions including schools, the looting of stores by criminal gangs, and beating up on Guyanese people.

I now turn to the five dark years, the 2015-2020 period. In 2015 they formed the government and occupied executive office, the PPP/C departed peacefully. The APNU/AFC immediately brought economic hardships to these shores. On the 21st November, 2018, the Hon. Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, now Vice-President, led a successful no-confidence motion against the APNU/AFC Regime. They were defeated hands down, and in accordance with the Constitution the Government had fallen, and elections were to be held in 90 days. This turned into the darkest period in our country’s history. The authoritarian APNU held Guyana hostage with a heavy foot on the necks of our people, and overall the nation. Guyana was under undemocratic rule as the PNC/R, APNU/AFC were slumbering illegally in Office. During the said period, the APNU/AFC was planning the rigging of the general and regional elections. This APNU/AFC, the sanctimonious gangsters, tried to steal our freedom, elections... [Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker] ...and democracy in broad daylight; that is their legacy... [Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I rise Mr. Speaker to bring...]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I have the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, on her feet.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand on Standing Order 41, that refers to content of speech. You would recall that a list of unparliamentary words were circulated as a reminder. The Hon. Member just made reference to “gangsters”; just used the word “gangsters”, in reference to the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: Upheld.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will have to withdraw that.

Ms. Ferguson: He is so uninspiring.

3.39 p.m.

Mr. Persaud: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker. I have articles and documents that talk about the rigging and electoral theft that took place in this country. As warned in a Good Book, all Guyanese must remain vigilant and not get excited about the

unrealistic and irrational promises, as Vice President, Bharrat Jagdeo puts in his article dated 28th January, 2025.

After the no-confidence motion, the election of 2020 morphed into a dark period in our country's history. The PNCR/APNU/AFC Government failed on constitutional reform, education, national security, public infrastructure, health, finance and agriculture. Let us review the achievements and outline what we propose to do in *Budget 2025*. We have already increased salaries and wages, doubling them by 46%. We have increased the income tax threshold. Mr. Speaker, \$9 billion will go towards cushioning the effects of the cost of living this year, in addition to countless measures that we have already pursued; rolled back the taxation policy of the APNU/AFC Government; doubled old age pension; restored the children's cash grant, bringing it to \$50,000 per year; created over 50,000 jobs, new and part-time; distributed over 30,000 scholarships to the Guyanese people; made the University of Guyana tuition-free, writing off millions of dollars in student loans; reformed and introduced new local content legislation, strengthening laws and the Representation of the People Act (ROPA) to deal continuously with threats to our electoral freedom; and revolutionised the oil sector, bringing sweeping changes.

A \$10,000 universal health voucher for each Guyanese will be rolled out this year. A historic \$100,000 cash grant for every newborn will commence in 2025. Another \$100,000 is budgeted for every Guyanese over 18-year-old to help secure their future, which has already commenced. This is just the beginning. The PPP/C Government is committed to building a prosperous future for all. Under the APNU/AFC Government, 1,972 Community Service Officers were dismissed, leaving those Amerindian youths without employment. In stark contrast, the PPP/C Government has not only revived this vital programme but has expanded it, employing 2,759 CSOs to date. These young people have now been empowered with valuable skills in tourism, garment manufacturing, small engine repairs, information and communications technology (ICT), solar installation and farm equipment operation.

With an investment of almost \$12 billion from 2020 to 2024, under the Amerindian Development Fund, we have made youth empowerment a top priority. This initiative has restored hope and ensured that Amerindian villages continue to thrive with dignity and purpose. Let us not forget that this Government has also allocated over \$27.1 billion in direct support to Amerindian communities, transforming lives through education, transportation, agriculture, culture

preservation and encouraging Amerindians to actively participate in these economic programmes.

Under the previous APNU/AFC Administration, not only were the Amerindian communities neglected but the entire country was left economically bankrupt. Guyana's economy was in shambles, with no clear vision for growth or development. The previous Government failed to provide the leadership and foresight needed to move this nation forward. Further, I wish to highlight that \$91.5 million has been invested in women-centred projects, further demonstrating our commitment to fostering inclusive growth and development across all sectors. In every one of our budget presentations, we have created the fiscal space for Guyanese to benefit overall, who are, of course, our friends, families and favourites, including you, the Members of the Opposition. This Government's priority has always been to ensure that all Guyanese share in our growing prosperity.

I will now illustrate how *Budget 2025* unfolds. Roads and Bridges – \$209 billion for the commencement of work on a new Corentyne Bridge and the ongoing expansion of the Linden to Mabura Highway.

Health – \$143 billion for six regional world-class hospitals, along with a state-of-the-art paediatrics and maternity hospital at Ogle.

Air transport – \$7 billion for the construction of a new world-class terminal at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) and the rehabilitation of hinterland airstrips. River transport – \$9 billion for the construction and rehabilitation of stellings and ferries. Police – \$34.4 billion for the advancement of works on a modern state-of-the-art police training academy, the construction of the Brickdam Police Station and the construction of several police stations and outposts countrywide.

Solid waste – \$13.2 billion for the investment in new landfill sites, compacter trucks, mini-excavators and a hazardous waste cell. Water – \$23.1 billion for several new water systems and wells. Human services – \$58.5 billion for ongoing support for senior citizens, including subsidies for water, electricity, along with the construction of a new facility for the elderly. Energy – \$88 billion for the completion of Phase One of the 300-megawatt gas-to-energy project, expanding the renewable energy initiative countrywide. Housing – \$112.6 billion, with over 40,000 house lots already distributed, with 25 house lots for additional distribution. This will surpass our Manifesto promise. Promises made and promises delivered.

A sum of \$175 billion for education. The education of our children is our top priority. Several initiatives are underway, including the expansion of the National School Feeding Programme and the provision of reading and workbooks for nursery schools, along with textbooks for primary and secondary schools. Agriculture – \$104.6 billion to enhance food production and sustain food productivity for our local and export markets. Those were just a few of the big-ticket items in *Budget 2025*. I have heard on many occasions, Opposition Members speaking about how we cannot eat roads and that is a fact. That is a fact, Mr. Speaker. Let me enlighten the Opposition members and the naysayers that the building of roads and bridges connects people and goods, it drives economic growth and development, provides access to essential services and serves as a lifeline. We are building out our country's infrastructure and laying the foundation for generations to come.

I now turn to Local Government and Regional Development. In 2025, all local democratic organs will continue to get enhanced support, which is aimed at creating unified and strong community-oriented bodies that respond to the needs of the people. Is that not what we are here for? The construction of markets, providing financial support through subventions and ongoing support for the Community Enhancement Workers Programme and the National Pathway Workers Programme. Additionally, we will further support investing in a number of garbage compactor trucks and mini excavators and strengthening the local democratic organs. There is no doubt in my mind or even the mind of every objective, non-partisan and non-biased Guyanese, that this year's budget is progressive, pro-working class, pro-private sector, pro-poor, realistic and people centred. Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Member of Parliament (MP), you will need an extension to continue.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: Mr. Speaker, I humbly request that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to complete his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Walrond. Hon. Minister Persaud, you can continue.

Mr. Persaud: *Budget 2025* is the embodiment of carefully crafted policies and projects to continue our brisk and bold agenda for the transformation of our economy. What good is sight without vision? It seems to me that those on that side of the House are lacking both. The PPP/C Government is creating an environment where young people and Guyanese

of all ages can work hard, attain their dreams and accomplish their visions. In the words of former President Barack Obama,

“A budget is more than just a series of numbers on a page; it is an embodiment of our values.”

This *Budget 2025* is a budget with promises, values and a commitment to the Guyanese people. It is not an election-year budget, therefore, there is no election gimmick. What you see is basically what the Guyanese people deserve at this time in our history. This budget prepares all of Guyana to benefit from a reduction in electricity prices by 50%. This PPP/C Government is a caring Government. We will remove all bridge tolls at the new Demerara Harbour Bridge, Wismar Bridge and the Berbice River Bridge, benefiting, according to *Budget 2025*, over 50,000 daily commuters. On this side of the House, we do not just talk about achievements, we demonstrate them through actions.

3.54 p.m.

This budget is proof of our unwavering commitment, and, under the PPP/C Government, we will not only meet but exceed every promise made. We are fully committed to ensuring the success of this budget and securing the prosperity of every Guyanese. The rapid growth and development we are experiencing today are the direct result of the PPP/C's dedication to good governance, in sharp contrast to the APNU/AFC, which was defined by bad governance that stagnated growth and destroyed the economy. We are now democratically guiding this country towards a prosperous and sustainable future.

A tree is known for its fruit. Therefore, a person can be judged by the results of their actions. Judge the People's Progressive Party/Civic by our track record. I project 2025 will be no different because we have the winning Statement of Polls (SoPs). Mr. Speaker, please permit me to offer my sincere congratulations to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Kumar 'Prince' and his competent staff for the stellar performance in the sector for bringing this PPP/C budget to this Assembly. Let us get down to business as I commend this budget to this House. Guyana has become a nice place; Guyana is a nice place; and Guyana is a nice, nice place. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Persaud. Now for the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the acknowledgement. I rise this afternoon from this side of the

House to passionately contribute to the crucial budget debate of 2025. As this is my first address of the New Year, I want to take this opportunity to extend my best wishes or heartfelt wishes to you, your family, your dedicated staff and all Members of Parliament, alongside every Guyanese citizen for a year filled with productivity and prosperity in 2025. Let us embrace this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to respect one another amid our differences. I urge each and every Member of this House to grow in maturity and demonstrate steadfast unity as we navigate the challenges ahead. Together, let us serve our nation with unwavering determination and a spirit of collaboration that will inspire all Guyanese.

Budget 2025 arrives at a pivotal moment for our nation, a year when every Guyanese faces crucial decisions that will safeguard or jeopardise our national wealth for future generations. This is not just another year. It is the year when political parties, movements and various interest groups will fiercely compete for the heart and soul of our beloved nation. We must remember the wisdom of Proverbs 14:34, and I quote:

"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people."

Let us reflect on Proverbs 29:2:

"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: But when the wicked beareth rule, [Bishop] the people mourn."

This is taken from the *King James* version. Undeniably, many Guyanese are ready to rise to the intellectual challenge, especially in light of the no-child-left-behind policy that ravaged our educational landscape in 2010. Over the past five years, we have witnessed two contrasting Governments, one leading from 2015 to 2020 without the benefits of oil resources and the other from 2020 to 2025 or 2024 harnessing these resources. One focused on empowering the people and creating a pathway to a better life, while the other prioritised infrastructure that has unfairly enriched select families and allies of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Thus, it is imperative that my budget presentation offers a clear, compelling overview of the Budget Speech, followed by a thorough analysis of the sector I oversee, Mr. Collin Croal, an evaluation of current measures and my earnest recommendations and suggestions to guide us further for a brighter future.

Mr. Speaker, I urge you to critically assess the Budget for 2025 unveiled in this honourable House on Friday, 17th

January, 2025, set at a staggering \$1.38 trillion. It is evident that Dr. Singh, task with this presentation, was not in his usually spirited form, his discomfort was palpable. It is my belief, echoing the sentiments of many Guyanese, that this budget fails to demonstrate the necessary foresight and strategic planning essential for fulfilling its professed theme: *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. This theme, echoes that of the previous years' budgets, with hardly any innovation.

In 2020, *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting Our People in a Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Environment – Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law – Strengthening the Economy: Increasing Jobs and Advancing Our Development Agenda*; in 2021, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism, and Resilience*; in 2022, *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*; in 2023, *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*; and, in 2024, *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All*. Thus, I pose these crucial questions to the Government: who exactly will you be securing in 2025? Who stands to benefit from this promised prosperity? How will our nation ensure sustainable growth? Every responsible Government must grapple with these questions I fear that the theme for *Budget 2025* neglects the marginalised and vulnerable individuals who live well below the poverty line in our oil-rich nation. This is not an anti-poverty budget. Instead, it appears to secure the interests of the affluent, enabling the wealthy to strive while neglecting those in dire straits.

As I listened intently since the presentation of the budget, I pondered whether our nation truly began anew on 16th May, 2015, coinciding with the Coalition Government takeover, or if the People's Progressive Party/Civic returned to power on 2nd August, 2020, signified a regression. The history of our nation is fraught with the mismanagement of the PPP/C, categorised by two decades of incompetence and inefficiency that the Guyanese populace has not forgotten, Dr. Ashni Singh. I will not waste my precious time in detailing their dismal track record, which is all too familiar to us. Instead, I must assert that they have reverted to their old ways, with a familiar horse with no name, it begins with 'C' and ends with 'N', haunting every sector.

I would like to share a profound observation from a thoughtful young Guyanese who reached out to me while Dr. Singh was speaking. This is what the youngster sent to my *WhatsApp*: 'Why is he only discussing the APNU failures? This man has launched his campaign right there' *via WhatsApp* 17th January, 2025 at 14.58 hrs. I implore you to

consider who will be the true beneficiaries of this budget and to advocate for a future that uplifts all Guyanese, not just the privileged few. This is the moment to demand a budget that genuinely addresses the needs of our people and fosters a Government that prioritises everyone, those living in poverty and also those who are affluent. We are all familiar with a well-known quote from the second President of the United States of America (USA), the late John Adams, in the year 1770, and this is what he said:

"Facts are stubborn things."

In borrowing this famous quotation, I can without contradiction apply it to the People's Progressive Party/Civic who, despite being confronted with the facts and evidence, still finds it in their nature to be mendacious, striving to prove themselves superior. Therefore, in paragraphs 1 and 8 of the Budget Speech on pages 2 and 3 of 111 of his Budget Speech, the Hon. Singh could neither restrain himself nor refrain from repeating the usual rhetoric that Guyanese have grown wary of from the PPP/C's chief priest, the Hon. Bharat Jagdeo, whose only attendance in the National Assembly seems to be to meet with select individuals outside of the Chambers and when Appropriation Bills are up for passage. The record of this Twelfth Parliament will prove me right.

In examining paragraph 110 of his speech on page 3 of 111, Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, listed several purported achievements of the People's Progressive Party/Civic over the last four years. I am pleasantly surprised that the PPP/C constantly boasts about delivering some 50,000 house lots, a Manifesto promise delivered. However, in examining the speech, I have not seen anywhere the figure 50,000 listed. Furthermore, the term house lot was absent. I will address housing substantively. I found paragraph 11.4 of the Budget Speech to be quite intriguing. Why is that? The Hon. Member stated:

"Since August 2020, successive budgets have outlined the main pillars of the modern and prosperous Guyana that we are building for the long term."

I must respectfully disagree with the Hon. Member. Over the last five budgets, four of which were funded by oil resources, there has been accumulative budgetary allocations six times greater than the Coalition Government, whose programmes and projects were not funded through oil resources mind you, Mr. Speaker.

4.09 p.m.

I am still grappling with the idea that these budgets have been successful and are contributing to a modern Guyana when Guyanese have yet to witness the successes on a personal and individual level. Under Sectoral Developments and the Agenda for 2025, in paragraph 4.32 on page 30 of the Budget Speech regarding Bauxite, Dr. Singh is being disingenuous in claiming that the Bauxite Industry suffered a tragic blow during the period from 2015 to 2020. It would be remiss of me not to remind the House and the people of Guyana of what transpired well before May 2015.

"The confusion in the bauxite industry"

This is the *Kaieteur News*, 28th April, 2010. Who was the Government? It was not the Coalition. Mr. Speaker, this is another headline:

"The bauxite workers are at a disadvantage"

This is a letter to the Editor carried in the *Kaieteur News*, dated 12th May, 2010. Who was in the Government? It was not the Coalition.

"Guyana Bauxite Workers' Union Bitter at RusAI, Government"

This was carried on the 25th January, 2010. Who was in the Government? Mr. Speaker, you would remember quite clearly because you were the Minister of Labour. You were the Minister of Labour, Mr. Speaker, based on...

Mr. Speaker: I did a fine job too.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

"Bauxite workers refuse to eat food from 'Cockroach' kitchen"

This was the 16th of November, 2010. Who was in the Government? It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

"The bauxite workers struggle is about workers' rights..."

Who was in Government on 11th December, 2009? It was not the Coalition Government. It was your Government, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. Mr. Speaker, I want to put it on record because, you know, oftentimes we continue to hear 200 taxes, 380 taxes and then we hear 400 taxes. You know, these people are good at fiddling with and adding numbers. You would recall in this honourable House, a question was put to the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh by yours truly, Mr. Speaker. This is what was recorded in the *Hansard* for Thursday, the 20th July, 2023. The Minister was asked the question:

“Can the Hon. Senior Minister provide a detailed list of the 200 taxes and fees on items, as claimed to have been imposed by the Coalition Government, during the period May, 2015 to August, 2020?”

This is what the Hon. Member laid in the National Assembly as his response:

“The list of taxes and fees imposed by the APNU/AFC Government, during the period May, 2015, to August, 2020, has been extensively reported on and ventilated in the public domain.”

This is the disingenuousness of these people and the deceitfulness of this Government but we on this side of the House would be able to.... I urge you to turn your attention to pages 57 and 58 of 111 in the Budget Speech, particularly paragraphs 4.139 and 4.140, under the heading, Housing. It is essential to acknowledge that these paragraphs contain significant inaccuracies and unfulfilled aspirations. Furthermore, I assert that, while the PPP/C previously resorted to allocating bush lots or swamps for housing schemes without a thorough and cohesive strategy, the Coalition Government has diligently prioritised the development of cohesive and sustainable communities. This shift represents a commitment to not only meeting the housing needs of our citizens, but to also elevating the quality of life within our neighbourhoods. Let us embrace a vision. I believe the Coalition Government would have left a blueprint at the Ministry of Housing and Water.

The housing and water sectors are not just crucial, they are the very foundation of human existence. In my academic pursuit, I have delved into Maslow's Hierarchical Theories of 1943. This is a powerful framework that outlines our society's universal needs. This is what Maslow states – ascending towards the most profound human emotions, we are all familiar with the five essential components of this theory: self-actualisation, esteem, love and belonging, safety needs, and physiological needs. These components are not mere concepts. They reflect our intrinsic desires for security and fulfilment. They can be powerfully applied to underscore the importance of robust housing and water systems. Investing in these sectors is not just a necessity, it is an imperative for achieving a striving society where every individual, Ms. Priya Manickchand, can reach their fullest potential and experience true well-being.

Let us champion the cause for accessible and safe housing and water, for it is by addressing these fundamental needs that we cultivate a richer and healthier society. It is essential that we frame this conversation not with clarity and purpose.

In his recent presentation, Dr. Singh resorted to his theatrical style, making baseless accusations against the Coalition Government for doing nothing in the housing sector. Mr. Speaker, when I heard this term, ‘nothing’, I had to go to *Google* and try to get an understanding of what this word ‘nothing’ means. This is what *Google* said to me, *Google* said, ‘nothing’ means ‘not anything or no single thing’. Well, I got news for them over there. That is to let them know what the Coalition did between 2015 and 2020 in the housing sector. So, I am going there.

In sharp contrast, the Coalition, even in the absence of oil resources, has demonstrated unwavering commitment and strategic acronym by effectively utilising funds. You are hearing this thing – ‘Oh, the Coalition Government did not come to the National Assembly to get funds to drive the housing sector’. Let me remind the Hon. Members, Mr. Croal and Ms. Rodrigues that the housing sector has a revolving housing fund. Rather than us coming to this National Assembly between 2015 and 2020, we utilised the housing funds to correct many of the defects that we found in the housing sector. This diligent investment not only addressed immediate housing needs but also supported our visionary goal. What were we doing? We were building cohesive and sustainable communities. Together, we were deriving real change and progress in the housing sector. That is what we were doing.

Furthermore, the previous PPP/C Government treated the housing fund like a slush fund. That is how they treated it. Our Administration had prioritised genuine and impactful solutions. The evidence speaks for itself, unlike our predecessors. We have never stood before this House shifting blame for the over 60,000 in backlog we inherited or the substantial number of unprocessed titles of the many new areas awaiting integration into local authority jurisdictions, along with a dreadful state of infrastructure. As a responsible and visionary Government, what we did was, we rolled up our sleeves and we are proud to have invested over \$2 billion from the Housing Fund to rectify the large number of issues we found in houses built before May, 2015, which were left to languish due to the People's Progressive Party/Civic's negligence.

The Hon. Members, Mr. Croal and Ms. Rodrigues, over the past four years, are yet to present a clear and comprehensive plan to tackle the pressing housing needs of our citizens. It is disheartening to observe that their focus seems to me, and I guess to many Guyanese limited to mere photo opportunities with allottees during the identification of their house lots. Just go to their *Facebook* pages and you will see what is

happening. I must ask, have these Members truly taken time to engage with the detailed documents left by the Coalition Government? If I were to question them, would they even be aware that, in December, 2016, through Housing and Urban Development (HUD) we were able to get a loan for US\$517,250 from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to support our housing development, the national strategy for our housing sector? This technical cooperation, executed by the Housing and Urban Development Division (HUDD) IDB was not just a formality, it aimed to bolster Guyana's Central Housing and Planning Authority CH&PA) in developing a robust national housing strategy in alignment with the broader Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of creating inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements.

The urgency of a strategic approach to housing cannot be overstated. Our communities deserve tangible action and leadership that moves beyond temporary photo opportunities. It is imperative that we hold our representatives, the people of Guyana must hold that Government responsible or accountable when it comes to housing development. It is essential to recognise that Guyana's urbanisation trends exhibit two critical characteristics that pose significant challenges for our housing and urban development policies. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? These urgent needs are seldom acknowledged by the People's Progressive Party/ Civic. Do you know why, Sir?

4.24 p.m.

The PPP/C's intent is not to study what is happening in the housing sector. Their intention is that if they have to convert playgrounds and communities into house lots, that is exactly what they will do. They have no strategy and no coherent plan for the housing sector.

Mr. Speaker, I have so much to say on this housing thing, but do you know what? I will speak a bit off record. The Hon. Collin Croal came to this House and said, in his budget speech of 2022, that his Ministry and the Government had started to look at the informal settlements – those are the persons who are squatting – and that a report and a study were being done, which would be presented to the National Assembly. That was reported to this House on 26th January, 2022. We are now on 29th January, 2025, three years later, and we are yet to see that report coming to this National Assembly, where we all could have our input and devise a strategy for how we could deal with the informal settlements.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is currently struggling with significant shortcomings in governance, particularly in their reliance on comprehensive data analysis to inform decision-making. While they proudly proclaim 50,000 house lots delivered, a manifesto promise, it is imperative that we critically examine the truth behind these assertions. As a former Minister who dedicated my service to the housing sector from 22nd April, 2019 to 2nd August, 2020, I am especially concerned about the contents in paragraph 4.14, on page 58 of 111. The Ministry claimed to have developed a total of 85 new housing schemes. Well, I challenge Mr. Croal, this afternoon, to lay over a list of all of the 85 new housing schemes that they have developed. Mr. Speaker, you are hearing that the Coalition did nothing between 2015 to 2020, but the truth behind this...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the truth is that I have given you two minutes more so let us get the extension of a further five minutes.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Available lands for housing in 2019: This is what we left at the Ministry of Housing and Water. We left La Bonne Intention (LBI); we left Prospect; we left Cummings Lodge; we left Parcel 115 Providence; we left Block WW Plantation Mon Repos; we also left Experiment; we left Skeldon Number 75 Village; we left Block Y Number 75 Village and the list can go on. Mr. Speaker, because of time, just a couple of days ago, I took a walk in LBI and several other housing schemes in this country. I know Mr. Colin Croal will come after me to boast about the number of houses built... [Ms. Rodrigues: Hon. Member.] Hon. Member. Thank you...but this is what is currently happening in LBI – unfinished work.

[The Hon. Member displayed pictures.]

So, for you to come to the House to say to the people of Guyana that you have allocated some 50,000 house lots is far from the truth. The evidence will show... [Mr. Nandall: How does that picture prove that?] You will see just now. How could 50,000 house lots have been given out when you have people since 2010, 2011 and 2009 waiting, who have never received a call from the Ministry?

[*The Hon. Member displayed documents.*]

These are the evidence of the people who are yet to receive a call from the Ministry of Housing and Water to be given their house lot.

[*The Hon. Member displayed documents.*]

I know that the Ministry never issued 50,000 house slots. We left approximately 68,000 house lots. If you are claiming that you gave out 41,000 house lots... Do you know what they did? When they came to power, the lands that we had given out in Prospect, Experiment, LBI and Diamond, they shifted the numbers. So, if you got Lot 1 under the Coalition Government, they moved you to Lot 10 in the very area. That is what this People's Progressive Party/Civic did. Therefore, they will come here to say that we gave out 7000 house lots, but do you know what? They are claiming ownership of the very 7,000 house lots that we gave out. There is no way this People's Progressive Party/Civic issued 50,000 house lots.

As I prepare to wrap up, the Coalition is on record as saying that we know our people are finding it difficult to access loans from banking institutions. I believe what the Government should do is apply, as a pilot test, the idea by the Coalition at this moment. We are speaking about rent-to-own. They have Venezuelans living in those chicken coops in Diamond, not paying any rent and living free. Why is it that the Government cannot give those people the houses and allow them to pay a monthly rental into a special account? They do not like the people. They do not want Guyanese to own their own homes. They want Guyanese to rent apartments and squat. That is how they have Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker, let me touch quickly a bit on water. The water situation in this country is atrocious. We approved over \$22 billion in 2024. We heard about all of the treatment plants being built, and this is the state of water flowing through people's taps. I would like to suggest to this Government that they need to do better in the housing sector. As I prepare to conclude, there is so much I want to say on housing, but this 30-minute plus 5 is not working. As I conclude, I stand here firmly guided by the immutable principles of our Creator God Almighty. The scriptures remind us, in Micah 6:8, to act justly, and to embrace mercy. In Isaiah 1:17, we are called to learn justice and combat oppression. Leviticus 19:15 stipulates that we must not indulge in injustice or show favouritism, regardless of wealth or status. Proverbs 31:9 compels us to advocate for the vulnerable, ensuring they receive their rightful justice. Today, I have done precisely that by fiercely advocating for the poor and

powerless against this oppressive document known as *Budget 2025*, hastily assembled to secure the wealth of the people for those on the opposite side. This budget will not bring prosperity to our citizens in the oil-rich economy under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. We must take a stand for justice and the rightful use of our nation's resources.

In conclusion, I, Annette Natasha Ferguson-Collins, unequivocally cannot support *Budget 2025* as it stands. I urge Dr. Ashni Singh and his Government to withdraw or make significant amendments to this budget. It is essential that we prioritise the needs of the poor and fatherless, rather than cater to the interests of the wealthy and prominent. Let us refocus our efforts to ensure a budget that truly serves our most vulnerable citizens. I pray that God grants my colleagues on that side of the House uncommon eyes. May God continuously bless us and bless our nation. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, and now for the Hon. Member, the Minister of Housing and Water, the Hon. Collin Croal.

[*The Hon. Member played the song, The Mace.*]

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]: Mr. Speaker, we just heard the previous speaker, the Hon. Annette Ferguson. In winding down her many conclusions, she alluded to the tenure or the time that she served as Minister. The fact is her legacy will always remain that *she run with the Mace*.

It is with a deep sense of duty and overwhelming commitment to helping to make the lives of our citizens better that I stand here today to support *Budget 2025: A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. *Budget 2025*, which was presented in this august House on 17th January, 2025, by our esteemed Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, the one and only, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, outlined our Government's forward thinking and ambitious fiscal plan that will build on the strides that we made in the last four and a half years, or 54 months, to be precise, and the sustainable expansion and extension of the rapid economic growth that Guyana is undergoing. It is a fact that Guyana's remarkable growth, while largely due to the increased oil production and a rapidly growing oil and gas sector, has allowed us to make significant gains in every sector, particularly, in infrastructure development.

4.39 p.m.

This is from farm-to-market and community roads to highways, bridges and wharves to modern schools and health facilities to new housing areas and newly constructed subsidised houses that are available to low, moderate, middle and high-income applicants to tax reforms that increased disposable income and stimulated economic activity in all of the sectors. All of this was while maintaining fiscal sustainability, by carefully and prudently navigating the pitfalls that could so easily beset us. We have indisputably demonstrated throughout our stewardship that we are more than capable of managing the affairs of this great nation. Even while we have invested aggressively and heavily in key sectors like housing, infrastructure and public services, we have ensured that every Guyanese benefit from the social safety nets that we have introduced – from cash grants to public assistance and education subsidies. We have and continue to include young people and young professionals in our nation's plans as we help to realise their dreams – from home ownership to higher education, lower taxes, and generally providing a strong, stable, and enabling environment that could foster their personal growth and development.

While you think about this, cast your mind back to 2015 to 2020, when we witnessed, firsthand, the confusion that the Coalition Government visited on this land. From the ridiculous 2 a.m. curfew to the unimaginative and lazy approach to the housing sector, it was musical chairs at the Ministry of Housing and Water, and every one of them was off-key. Not a single effective strategy came from them. Yet, today, while we are busy developing new housing areas, building affordable housing and expanding our infrastructure portfolio, these people look for every reason to complain and criticise without offering anything tangible. They see the *jumbie* of wrongdoing everywhere, even though it was their Minister with responsibility for housing who was found to have been giving contracts to her husband and was subsequently removed from the Ministry. They were so bad that their own Member of Parliament (MP) supported a no-confidence motion against them. They were so bad that they were saddled with an incomplete monstrosity in the form of D'Urban Park. They were so bad that we had to face international embarrassment and risk having our country become a pariah because of their brazen attempt to steal the 2020 elections.

It is our Government that, after the madness of 2020, breathed new life into our country. It is our Government that had to restore confidence in our economy. These past four and a half years have seen our Government commit to the task of rebuilding and re-energising the country as we lead a

transformation that has never been seen in this dear land of ours. It is a privilege to be on this side to witness and be part of these achievements, as *Budget 2025* is an excellent blueprint for us to build on the gains we have made and to continue to lead this great nation.

I turn quickly to the period before 1992. As we are approaching the middle of this, the fifth year in Government, it is necessary to consider, as the young people say, how it started and how it is going. Firstly, let me make it clear that the housing crisis that engulfed Guyana started before 1992 and stemmed from years of neglect, mismanagement and underinvestment before 1992. It was not just a crisis of inadequate infrastructure, but also one of access and affordability, which had left thousands of citizens without proper shelter and hope for stable conditions, and high rental costs. There was a significant shortage of houses, particularly for low-income families. Many families were living in overcrowded conditions with inadequate access to basic amenities, such as potable water, electricity and sanitation. Squatter settlements littered urban and peri-urban areas. The public housing programme was underfunded and failed to meet the growing demand. Widespread poverty further exacerbated the housing crisis. Additionally, because the programme was poorly designed, young professionals, single parents, and vulnerable groups were all shut out. Housing in the hinterland was non-existent. The lack of Government intervention resulted in many communities having poor quality houses, and little or no access to a reliable supply of clean water and electricity.

I turn your attention to 1992 - 2015. On our assumption to Office in 1992, the PPP/C Government made the housing sector a top priority. Recognising the gravity of the crisis, the Government allocated millions of dollars to launch a robust housing programme, at a time when we were still facing dire economic circumstances – another legacy left by the then PNC. That is what we did under the PPP/C. Under this programme, more than 100,000 house lots were allocated to low- and middle-income families. This initiative significantly reduced squatting and informal settlements and allowed citizens to legally own their own homes. We introduced turn-key homes, targeted young professionals, and expanded access to utilities. Access to water increased from 25% to over 80% by 2015. We invested in water treatment plants, and distribution networks, and upgraded the quality and availability of water. We also established the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), consolidated and modernised water services, which, in turn, provided better management and delivery of water. As a result of these initiatives, the housing and construction sectors were

booming by 2015. The International Building Expo had become highly anticipated, and it provided a platform that showcased local and international building and construction products, including new technologies in housing, and catalysed suppliers and investors, especially the local private sector.

I turn your attention to 2015 to 2020. In 2015, the Coalition Administration inherited a robust housing programme from this PPP/C Government, and almost as if history was repeating itself, they ran it into the ground again. Bear with me as I remind this honourable House of their promises. Their manifesto, for example, promised the following: that they would initiate a campaign called 'Renewing the Dream', which would expand and upgrade housing development away from the seaside and facilitate home ownership and not only house lot distribution; and that they would ensure that basic infrastructure, such as electricity, drainage, roads, water, and other facilities were in place as house lots were issued. Their achievement was that only three new areas were developed under the APNU/AFC. Let me name them for you, Mr. Speaker. We have Peter's Hall, which was transferred in 2011; Providence, which was transferred in 2011; and Prospect Track A, which was transferred to the Central Housing & Planning Authority (CHPA) in 2012. If you noticed the years, APNU/AFC allocated lands that were already acquired by the People's Progressive Party/Civic prior to 2015.

They promised to facilitate a process whereby credit union savings could be used as collateral for low-income housing loans – achievement, nil. They promised to support a national volunteer corps that would help the needy build their homes – achievement, nil. They promised to establish new communities and towns in the hinterland. All they did was build 20 houses in Georgetown to relocate the broad street residents – credit to the previous speaker – and a few houses in the hinterland. The very Inter-American Development-funded project that you inherited from the then Minister of Housing and Water for the hinterland programme is what you executed. You promised to establish a special fund to provide subsidies to mortgage companies for low-interest loans to low-income families. What did you achieve? Nil. You promised to build starter homes for single parents and other vulnerable persons in society in every housing scheme being developed. What you did were the very 20 houses I spoke about. You promised to build retirement villages with all the appropriate amenities. What did you achieve? Nil.

You promised to upkeep the national beautification drive – green spots and parks would be established in each new housing area and village. What you did was upgrade four community grounds. You promised industrial development and production to be tied to housing, with the private sector being given tax incentives to develop locally produced housing materials. What did you achieve? You achieved nil. You promised to standardise the building codes for new buildings and provide free standardised house plans. What did you achieve? You achieved nil. You promised to develop a national housing database for strategic planning. What did you achieve? You achieved nil. You promised to create a new commercial and industrial zone with new housing areas, to enable easy access to these industries by a suitable workforce. What did you achieve? You achieved nil. Maybe, Mr. Speaker – let us wait – we can use D'Urban Park as their green space promise that has been fulfilled.

Not a single one of these promises did they make good on. They had time, they had money, and they had a successful housing policy on which to build. They had an enabling environment, investors and local private sector support. Yet, they failed miserably. Now, you want to come and lecture us here. They were incompetent and lazy and wasted valuable time witch-hunting. Like a true bureaucracy, they spent much of their time on meetings which produced no real results. Housing became an afterthought while citizens were left waiting. They dreamt that their promise had become a nightmare. Under the Coalition Government, the housing sector suffered from a lack of vision and urgency. Instead of accelerating land allocation and home construction to meet the growing demand, the sector was practically paralysed. Housing schemes were abandoned or left incomplete, while thousands of applications languished. Families were stuck in limbo, waiting for allocations that never materialised, while still paying exorbitant rents. Those who could not afford to wait resorted to squatting on unregulated lands. They even suspended the International Building Expo. Then what? Like *Tweedledum* and *Tweedledee*, they spent more than a year coming up with a new name and location for the event, which inevitably failed. It was sheer madness. The Coalition's approach was just careless. It was callous. Their inability to prioritise the basic needs of our people was nothing short of an insult to the Guyanese people.

I turn your attention to 2020 to the present. By the time the PPP/C Government assumed Office in 2020, after the election debacle, the housing deficit had escalated – and listen, Hon. Ms. Annette Ferguson – and more than 70,000 applications were pending. Housing schemes that began prior to 2015 were either halted or poorly executed. The

installation of roads, water systems, and electricity was ignored or delayed. What was once a sector with momentum had, in the space of less than five years, become a stagnant landscape of missed opportunities.

4.54 p.m.

Once again, it was up to the PPP/C Government to bring the housing and water sector back to life. Like the fighters and champions we are, once again, we went straight into battle. Our manifesto promised to create 10,000 house lots annually within this, the first five-year period, to invest in infrastructure for new and existing housing schemes, to remove value-added tax (VAT) on building materials, and to facilitate affordable financing for home ownership. We committed to promoting homeownership among youths and young professionals through tax and other incentives. We committed to promoting partnership and incentive private sector involvement in the sector and reinstating water subsidies to pensioners. We committed to expanding treated water to more areas. We committed to upgrading the distribution and transmission of water in urban, rural, and hinterland areas. We committed to reducing losses in the distribution system. We committed to improving access to enhanced quality of water. We committed to creating the institutional mechanisms to rationalise Guyana's water resources.

In 2020, this is what we promised the people of this country what we will do. It is January, 2025 – 29th January to be exact – and I can confidently say in this House today, that we are on the cusp of full achievement of these targets. We have now completed over 95% of those commitments that we have just outlined. Let us give some numbers. We have allocated a total of – listen good – 40,808 residential house lots. That does not include allocations for commercial and industrial lots. We have completed infrastructure works in over 50 new housing areas and existing schemes. We have installed over 3,123 light-emitting diode (LED) lights on the West and East Bank and Coast in Berbice. We have constructed and completed major highways on the East Bank and the West Bank. We removed the VAT from locally produced building and construction materials, including sheetrock, concrete boards and cement.

We have built roads, bridges and culverts in new and existing communities in more than 50 communities across the country. We have drilled 157 wells, of which 130 are in the hinterland and riverine areas. We are completing the construction of seven new water treatment plants. We have

installed 87,000 water metres, and we are on track to increase the treated water coverage before the end of 2025.

We have collaborated with the Ministry of Finance, the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the banking sector to raise the ceiling for Mortgage Interest Relief and lower the residential mortgage interest rates to make low-income mortgage rates more accessible and affordable. We have introduced housing subsidies and housing grants for vulnerable communities. We have provided employment by contracting more than 100 private contractors to construct houses and infrastructure works. We have provided more than 40,000 residents with first-time access to potable water and increased access in the hinterland from 46% in 2020 to 91% as of 31st December, 2024.

We have collaborated with the private sector to provide over 824 commercial and industrial developments in Regions 2, 3, 4 and 10. That does not add, as be reminded, to the residential house lots. We have recalibrated the way the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) approves construction permit, by establishing the Electronic Single Window System. This intervention has reduced processing time and paperwork.

We have restored the pension subsidy to over 28,000 pensioners. We removed VAT on water consumption, and more than 182 customers are benefiting from reduced water tariffs as a result, to the tune of \$523 million annually. That is what the subsidies cost. We have importantly, too, despite the bad-mouthing and the exaggerations by the Opposition, succeeded in reducing squatter and unregulated settlements. I heard the noise first yesterday from the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul. He is not here. He challenged me. I just heard from the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, who, by the way, boasted about the period she served. What the Hon. Member did not say was that she was so eager to be appointed but it took her nine months to access the office, to even go in the office because they did not transfer the chairs, the sofas, the blinds and the room to green.

Let me give some facts today. There were 40,808 residential, regularised lots. Listen, Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson. Let us go together. You asked for the list of schemes. Because they are so numerous and in the interest of time, you will have to go with me. Let us go. In Region 1, we are completing that programme this year. I will go to what we have accomplished. Region 2, Plantation Buxton and St. Joseph, we have allocated 791. Region 3 – these are all schemes. Write them down. Go and check – Plantation Edinburgh, Anna Catherina, Cornelia Ida, Stewartville, Meten-Meer-

Zorg, Stewartville East and West, Leonora, Vriesland, Laurentia Catherina, Vive-la-Force and De Kinderen. We have allocated in Region 3, 9,172. Region 4 – La Reconnaissance, La Bonne Intention, Vigilance, Strathspey, Bladen Hall, Mon Repos, Annandale, Good Hope, Two Friends, Lusignan, Non Pariel, Enterprise, Plantation Cummings Lodge, Little Diamond, Prospect, Great Diamond - Blocks 1,5,9,18,3,7,11 and 13, Plantation Hope, Plantation Lusignan, the extension to De Endragt, La Ressouvenir, Plantation Success, and we have just started. Silica City. In Region 4, there were 24,519 allocations. Region 5 – Plantation Baltia, Shield Town, Burma, Experiment, Phase Two and Bath Block A. In Region 5, there were 1,959 allocations, Region 6 – Number 75 and Number 79, Ordinance Fortland, Williamsburg, Hampshire, Blocks 3 and 4, 76, Palmyra and Moleson Creek. We have allocated 1,959 in Region 6. Block CHPA Bartica and Bartica Extension, we have allocated 132 in Region 7. Region 9 – Track CHPA and Lethem, we have allocated 676. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson and Hon. Member, Mr. Sears, the Region 10 that you said we were neglecting, there was Amelia's Ward, Phase Four, Fitz Hope, Conception and Wismar. We have allocated in office some 1,598 in Region 10 to date, when you did, in a whole five years, 404 allocations. Mr. Speaker, I know their mathematics is not good, but let them go back to the tape, and that will give you 40,808.

Somebody asked about Region 8. We have designed the area, and we are ready to allocate, and you will hear about that in our future plans. These are our achievements to date. We still have a few months to go. They are real achievements. They are real fulfilment of the promises we made to the people of Guyana. They trusted us and we delivered. Today, our Government is working tirelessly to ensure that every Guyanese has access to affordable and sustainable housing and a reliable supply of clean and safe water. We have delivered on every front to the Ministry of Housing and Water. Did we have challenges? Yes. Did we throw up our hands and complain? No. Why? It was because we promised the citizens of Guyana that we would give them a better life, that we would help them to realise their dreams of owning their own homes and provide safe communities where they are raising their families and developing themselves. The Hon. Member threw up a few pictures and called some names. Let me pause here now.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I present to you the top part of this picture which is Cummings Lodge. The Hon. Member referred to Cummings

Lodge, the very Cummings Lodge where they proudly said that they made some allocations. This was the status of Cummings Lodge when the PPP/C Government came into office. Look at the bottom here. These are all persons who have now signed and are able to build. If you want to know how beautiful it looks in Cummings Lodge, just look at this. Look at the houses that have been constructed in Cummings Lodge. And you come here to speak about Cummings Lodge. I will give you one more example. Let us go to the East Bank Demerara. The entire East Bank Demerara is now allocated. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, let us go together. Stay focused.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

At the top, this is what East Bank Demerara looks like at Great Diamond. I will only give you two examples. Look here, Hon Member. This is what it is now under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. We have laid a solid foundation from 2020 to 2024 by being prudent stewards of the budgetary allocations made to the Ministry of Housing and Water. This year, our Government has allocated \$137.5 billion to develop housing and water in 2025. Of this, \$112.6 billion is dedicated to the housing sector and will go towards developing new housing areas. We will allocate an additional minimum of 25,000 house lots this year, of which over 15,000 will be accomplished before June of this year. We will establish 20 new housing areas by June of 2025 to accomplish this 15,000 by June. We will construct a minimum of 1,000 houses. With \$23.1 billion, we will ensure that every citizen has access to clean, reliable, and safe water, including the installation of new supply systems in the hinterland communities and the construction of new treatment plants which, when completed, will transform and change the vacuum. We will improve the quality and availability of water to households on the coastline.

The APNU/AFC Coalition Government had five years to make a difference, but their tenure turned out to be one of the most disastrous periods in our history. Under their watch, the housing sector was practically on life support and it was our Government that had to step up and re-energise it. We invested over \$244 billion to breathe new life into the housing and water sector. Housing and water are fundamental rights. Without them, progress is impossible. Every house lot distributed represents the hope for a family. Every gallon of clean water supply is a step towards healthier communities. We are committed to transparency and accountability. Our investments are not just about building houses. They are about creating communities. They are about empowering citizens, and they are about ensuring

that every Guyanese has access and a place to call their home. The allocations to the Ministry of Housing and Water are justified. Essentially, they represent our commitment to correcting past mismanagement and building a future where every citizen can thrive.

5.09 p.m.

I wish to remind the Hon. Member about their record. I alluded to three housing areas only developed of the 7,534 house lots allocated between 2015-2020. Mr. Speaker, 2,000 of those were done in the run-up to elections during their caretaker Government. Hinterland systems were ignored, investments in the housing sector were slashed, the affordable housing programmes were completely abandoned, and Hinterland and rural areas were totally neglected which forced residents to rely on unsafe water source.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, let us rely on an extension so that you can conclude.

Ms. Texiera: I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you may continue. You have five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Croal: In contrast, our Government has restored confidence in the Ministry by delivering with speed and precision. The 2025 Budget investments will create 10,000 jobs in construction, engineering and related sectors. It will stimulate local economies by providing opportunities for small businesses in housing schemes. It will reduce inequality by ensuring that low-income families and the Hinterland communities are prioritised. As I said, we will establish over 20 new housing schemes in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10. Each region will be equipped with proper roads, drainage, electricity and recreational spaces. We will expand the housing programme for low income, moderate, middle and young professionals. We will provide housing subsidies and grants for single mothers, low-income earners and first-time homeowners to ensure that no one is left behind.

In the water sector, we constructed five new water treatment plants in key regions in the coastland to ensure that we are on target to accomplish a minimum of 90% access to treated water, which include 16 small plants and as well as small, powered wells for the Hinterland communities such as Kato, Lethem, Baramita, which will bring safe water to thousands. We will modernise Georgetown's water network to address

decades of underinvestment and inefficiency. We will introduce green housing developments and integrated renewable energy solutions to lower utility cost. We will expand energy solutions to lower... We will expand rainwater harvesting system in remote areas to reduce water insecurity by climate change effect. These projects are designed to provide real benefits to the people of Guyana. These are benefits that were absent under the previous Administration. The Ministry of Housing and Water stands as a beacon of this Administration's commitment to the people. The 2025 Budget is a vote for progress, for equity and for development. I call on this House to join me in approving these allocations and ensuring that ever Guyanese, regardless of income or location, has access to affordable housing and clean water. This Budget represents the vision of a united Guyana where development is inclusive, sustainable and far reaching. Let us reject the failures of the past and embarrass the future of opportunities and prosperities.

I want to extend, in closing, thanks to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility of Finance and Public Service, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his team for their excellent work with the National Budget which reflects a deep understanding of our country's needs, balances fiscal responsibility with sustainable policies that promote development and opportunities. Thank you to the hardworking staff of the Ministry of Housing and Water and through the agencies Guyana Water Incorporation (GWI) and Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA) for their continued commitment and support for the work being done in the Ministry. As we continue to triple and double all the previous work that use to be done with similar number of staff; even Saturdays they are working continuously. I, therefore, am delighted to lend my unreserved support to *Budget 2025* under the theme: *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister Mr. Croal. We will now hear from the Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, special invitees and members of the media, good afternoon to all of you. I think I also want to specially congratulate the two newest Members of Parliament here, Hon. Member Mr. Suresh Singh and Ms. Nandranie Coonjah to the Assembly. Just to let you know that I am a Member of the Opposition and my duty is to oppose; expose; and, when necessary, depose. It is a Budget debate.

Let us start with the facts, *Budget 2025* is here and it is big and bold. Once again, it is a big bold disappointment for the hardworking people of Guyana. Yes, we do acknowledge the Ministry of Finance's staff for their dedication to put together *Budget 2025*, but no amount of hard work can mask the cold hard truth. This Budget is a masterpiece of exclusion designed for the elite, crafted for the well-connected and funded by the sweat of struggling Guyanese families. It is a Budget for the few and not the many. I join with my Colleagues to examine the Budget presentation made by the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, which was delivered on 17th January, 2025, under the caption: *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*.

Budget 2025 stands at \$1.382 trillion, which is 20.6% larger than *Budget 2024*. It regrettably falls severely short of the reasonable expectations of most Guyanese. It was an event that did not engage them. This Budget is supposed to secure prosperity for all, instead it has secured more privileges for the privileged, more riches for the rich and more burdens for the already burdened. While the Government sing their favourite tune of economic growth, the average Guyanese see nothing in their cupboards, nothing in their wallets and nothing in their future. The only people who are truly prospering are the Ministers' F club – friends, family and favourites. Let us be real, prosperity is not measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures in an air-conditioned office but prosperity is when a mother does not have to choose between buying food and paying school fees. Prosperity is when young graduates can find jobs without knowing someone. Prosperity is when hard work, not political connections determine success. The struggle is real. Guyanese are not just struggling; they are suffocating under the weight of a broken economy.

Employment – the Government brags about job creation. The real question is, who are the people getting these jobs?

Inflation – there is a reduction in discretionary expenditures and inflation which was observed in paragraph 3.37. It indicates:

“The 12-month inflation rate at the end of 2024 is estimated to be 2.9 percent driven primarily by food prices, which had risen by 5.6 percent...”

I will repeat that food prices have jumped; yet, the Government claim that things are stable. Who is it stable for? Poverty – nearly half of our population, 43.4%, lives on less than US\$550 per day. That is not building a secure

Guyana but, rather, it is building a survival economy where families live paycheque to paycheque hoping that the next cheque comes in time. When people cannot afford basic necessities the society crumbles. You would recall that in 2020, Guyana's murder rate was the fourth highest in South America and the sixth highest in the Caribbean. In 2023, the homicide rate in Guyana was 19.7 per 100,000, that is the balance in South America. Hence, when there is poverty, there is not only possibility and potential for an increase in serious crimes but there will be more domestic violence and certainly more desperation. In other words, wealth inequality can be a precursor to societal ills.

How does a country that boasts of being the fastest growing economy leave its people starving of opportunities? There is little or no quantitative and qualitative change seen in the lives of the ordinary Guyanese citizens, even the so-called middle class has not enjoyed a liveable wage and income in this land of many resources. This Budget gives no real answers just empty slogans, empty platitudes and recycled promises. Hence, in other words, I should say in the words of the African chant, *a luta continua* – the struggle continues. Should I remind the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, that real meaning must be given to article 40 (1) of the Guyanese Constitution which speaks to the right of every citizen of Guyana to be:

“happy, creative and to live a productive life, free from hunger, ignorance and want.”

Here, we are hungering, struggling and with no clear visions of relief. Instead of addressing these clear issues with urgency, this Government remain focused on optics and not on outcomes. Good planning is essential to secure sustainable economic prosperity. *Budget 2025* demonstrates ineffective governance and poor planning. There is governance and there is good governance. The Guyanese people are interested in good governance and considers the eight principles set out by the United Nations (UN). We on this side of the divide decide with the people of Guyana would want good governance that is transparent, not tricky; accountable, not absent; proactive, not performative; and competent, not crooked. What do we have in our hands?

5.24 p.m.

We have a Government who excel in excuses and underperforms in execution. A Government who believes in a few cash grants here, a few cash grants there, everywhere a cash grant...

[An Hon. Member (Government): (Inaudible)] Maybe good in itself but the Government

is convinced that cash grants can substitute for sustainable economic policies.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to set the record straight on the condition of the health sector under the Coalition. The people of our country will not be deceived by empty platitudes as they live their lives. They already know the difficulties they face in accessing healthcare services that were available before the PPP/C Government squandered the gains. The misleading claims indicated in the Budget Speech are intended to put our people into a false slumber, only to awaken sooner than later to the additional financial burdens with which they will be saddled. Of additional concern are the unfactual and derogatory remarks that prefaced the Minister's other statements on healthcare. I cannot let them remain unchanged. It is therefore necessary for me to contrast the condition of the healthcare system under the Coalition with that of this present Government. The Minister's introductory remarks suggested that the health sector under the Coalition was twiddling its thumbs where the nation's health was concerned. Implicit in his remarks too was the notion that the country has made strides in the health sector under the Administration of the PPP/C. Nothing could be further from the truth as the evidence that I will present reveals.

The vital statistics accompanying this Budget presentation contain a series of metrics on health. At this juncture, I wish to address two of them, because they are central to the provision of inpatient care and very often are factors in the survival of patients. The first metric refers to the number of hospital beds in Guyana and the second refers to the number of nurses serving the people of this country. We use a number of hospital beds in the country to determine the strength of the healthcare delivery. This is a global measure to determine the extent to which a country cares for sick citizens. I want Guyanese to know that the country had an average of 42 beds per 10,000 population during the period 2000 to 2002. I want to point out that there was a further decline from 2004 to 2014. In 2004, the number of hospital beds dramatically declined to 25 per 10,000 Guyanese. That was the reality that the Coalition inherited in 2015 when they took Office. Currently, it stands at 36 beds per 10,000. Now, you are in the driving seat and you have to own what is happening. Hence, after spending nearly \$400 billion on the health sector, this Government could not bring this country to a better place than it was 30 years ago. This is clearly not a Government for the future.

Human resources – the Administration have allowed a good proportion of our health professionals to leave the healthcare

system. We have the evidence right under our noses in the appendix to the Minister's presentation. From 2016 to 2019, there was an average of 35 nurses for 10,000 Guyanese. The Coalition worked to build a reliable healthcare system that recognised the commitment and sacrifice coming from our healthcare workers. The spiteful and reckless conduct of this Government, with their refusal to pay nurses a decent wage and to honour them for their sacrifices and commitments to this country have now left every citizen depending on fewer nurses for care and the remaining nurses seeking second jobs. It is not surprising; yet it is worrisome because the data shows that we now have 23 nurses for every 10,000. These are the facts that the Government hides from the Guyanese people in public so that they cannot recognise and understand the risks involved in their medical care.

Without enough nurses, no amount of cash grants will bring you to the care that you and your family need. Those Guyanese who heard what the Minister had to say on the measures to be taken if a nursing professional needed to seek a second job, even the unschooled would know that if the nurses were adequately remunerated, in the first place, there would not be any need to look for a second job or to seek out greener pastures. There is one other point that I wish the people of Guyana to know, which is the healthcare system is in a state of crisis. In recent times, people who have sustained injuries that may not have been life-threatening would have succumbed to their injuries. I want to state it is a consequence of the decline in the availability of healthcare assets and providers that there is this experience and occurrence. However, given the track record of this Government, one is left to wonder about the correlation.

Universal access to healthcare – it is not a secret that primary healthcare must be the pillar of the nation's health strategy and should take centre stage if universal health coverage is to be achieved. The national public health system has an obligation to deliver public health services to the citizens of Guyana, regardless of whether they reside on the coastland or hinterland. According to Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger in his book:

“Public health is a public good: Risk and response in a small state.”

The Author went on to note that everyone should receive the health services needed without incurring financial distress. In other words, universal access cannot mean turning up at a public tertiary institution for a service which is expected to be rendered, only to be told, “look some money or a voucher,

please go to a popular private institution to access the screening, assessment and analysis that the person needs.”

Facilities – in paragraph 4.108, reference is made to a plethora of health facilities, such as:

“speciality Paediatric and Maternity Hospital at Ogle, the new hospital in New Amsterdam, and six regional hospitals, as well as and health centres...”

...works which continue to be ongoing but not yet completed. We, on this side of the divide, pay strict attention to the training complexes which are to be built in Suddie and New Amsterdam. In addition to the two dormitories for health sciences training to the tune of \$852 million, we stress that there must be value for money. We also wish to sound the alarm that the health facilities and living quarters which are to be upgraded and retrofitted be built under the standard building code and with the correct specifications to avoid any undue calamity or catastrophe to the hard-working health professionals of our country.

Equipment – paragraph 4.110 speaks to expand the equipment pool, thus accommodating laparoscopic surgery, laparoscopic kidney transplant, bariatric and minimal invasive surgeries. We will continue to sound the battle cry that there must be adequate and skilled biometric technicians for the maintenance of such equipment. Mention is also made of equipment at the telemedicine sites in Regions 1, 4, 5, 8 and 9. With the allocation of \$4.3 billion to purchase medical equipment in the health field, it is expected that there be quality assurance and better diagnosis, leading to better treatment and monitoring of the patients. There seems to be no intentional move to procure mammogram machines and have equipment available to carry out tests for prosthetic-specific antigens, so that patients can have access to the best care. As you know, breast cancer is a top-ranking cancer among females, whereas prostate cancer ranks first among males in Guyana.

As we are on equipment, I should be optimistic because of the services rendered at the Diamond Reginal Hospital but patients have fallen off wheelchairs. Observation revealed that there were no rubbers on the wheels of that important equipment. How is that possible in an oil-rich economy? Where are the porters? At that institution, I think it was on Sunday, there were no porters and people want jobs. According to the Primary Health Care Performance Initiative, 2022:

“Strong primary health care is dependent on affordable, timely, and dependable access to safe, effective, and high-quality medicines and supplies.”

The Government is proudly allocating \$28.1 billion for drugs and medical supplies. Yet, the Report of the Auditor General tells a damning story. Billions were paid upfront to contractors, yet nearly \$1 billion worth of drugs and supplies remain undelivered. Let me put it bluntly, sick people cannot swallow press releases and hospitals cannot treat patients with missing medicines. This is not just inefficiency; it is reckless mismanagement. The Hon. Minister must immediately implement an electronic logistic management information system (eLMIS) to track the stocks, the usage of the drugs and the losses. There must be no more expired drugs, no more empty shelves and no more excuses. If this Government had the political will, they would have done this already.

Chronic diseases – screening for chronic disease can allow for a gain in lead time by early diagnosis, as there are the early identification of risk factors before the health practitioner and one can distinguish the clinical semiology, the signs and symptoms. We are talking about chronic diseases and non-communicable diseases. We are talking about diseases such as ischemic heart disease; diabetes; and, of course, the silent killer; hypertension. In Guyana, they are thriving. Why? This is because prevention is an afterthought. The HEARTS Protocol expansion is a step in the right direction but what about the hinterland regions? What about communities where doctors are scarce and screenings are nonexistent? The Government's approach to healthcare is like patching potholes while ignoring the crumbling road beneath. We need nationwide screenings, early intervention programmes and community-based health workers. Let us stop treating symptoms and start preventing diseases.

Mental health – mental health is more than just a photo op. Mental health is the orphan of our health system. There is no health without mental health. Yet, it is underfunded, ignored and dismissed. The conversion of the New Amsterdam Hospital into a mental health facility sounds impressive until one realises there is no comprehensive plan, no feasibility study and no real investment in long-term mental healthcare. The Government is obsessed with buildings over brains. A few extra hospital beds will not fix the mental health crisis. We need trained professionals, community-based mental health services and nationwide suicide prevention programmes. If the Government is serious, let us see the data, the indicators and the measurable targets. Otherwise, this is an election-year gimmick.

Communicable diseases – are we prepared or just hoping? Of course, the Minister spoke about the different diseases and communicable diseases which we want to eliminate. Of course, that is commendable. We want to get rid of lymphatic filariasis; leprosy or Hansen's disease; malaria; hepatitis C; the vertical transmission of HIV; and, of course, some vaccine-preventable diseases. Guyana is facing a dengue crisis, with 10,000 cases and 11 deaths, I think, as up to September. Yet, we are still scrambling in 2024. Where is the vector control strategy? Where are the mosquito nets for at-risk communities? Where are the aggressive fogging machines, especially in Regions 1, 2, 4 and 6? Climate change is fuelling disease outbreaks. Yet, this Government is always playing catch-up. Hope is not a public health strategy. This Government must act now and not after another outbreak sweeps through our communities.

Maternal child health and adolescent health are a national embarrassment. There are too many Guyanese mothers who died in childbirth and too many newborns who did not make it past their first breath. Recently, we saw two tragic maternal deaths, one at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and one at New Amsterdam Hospital. Families are mourning and the Government officials are silent. Within 48 hours, a mother complained of the negligence and malpractice to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. Valiant efforts must be made to monitor both mother and baby to enjoy safe delivery and optimal health in light of the decline in nursing staff and adequate supervision.

5.39 p.m.

We already know the delays that can form barriers to proper maternal healthcare I am imploring the Minister of Health and the team to do something about this frequent occurrence, which brings discomfort and death to our citizens of Guyana who access maternal health services throughout the 10 administrative Regions, especially in Region 6 the East Berbice- Corentyne.

The measure of support for newborn babies with a one-off grant of \$100,000 is noted, though there is a lack of context. By the way, my Colleagues, you have to be careful with your ideas because I sent a question to the Clerk of the National Assembly asking our Minister, with all these maternal deaths and the cost of living, could we have a grant for mothers? There it goes – there it goes. You must be very careful of giving out your ideas. I see what the Opposition leader said when he spoke about having to gauge when to give your ideas out. **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** It never

reached the paper. The measure of support for newborn babies with a one-off grant of \$100,000 is noted, though there is a lack of context. What should have been said is because of the first 1,000 days in a child's life when there can be a threat of malnutrition – be it over malnutrition or under-malnutrition, malnutrition has different stages. It could be mild, moderate and severe malnutrition. I just want to set that record straight. – the nutritional component of the child can be enhanced with this grant, which can assist in the growth and development of the child's physical, cognitive and social development. The question remains, the rise in costs of living, one wonders if this sum is adequate. Where are the emergency response protocols? Where is the accountability for medical negligence?

Let me speak a bit again on the shortage of critical staff for the health sector of Guyana. According to the Report of the Auditor General, when considering the performance of the Maternal Unit at the Georgetown Public Hospital Cooperation, it was found that out of the proposed staff strength of 280, there was a shortage of 103 staff members. In addition, there has also been a shortage of 49 qualified Midwives, 18 Staff Midwives short, 14 Patient Care Advocates short, 10 Ward Managers short and 11 Staff Nurses short. In addition, for the delivery room, the nurse-to-patient ratio is 1:3 rather than 1:1. In the Labour Ward, the nurse-to-patient ratio has been 1:8 rather than 1:3. In the Postnatal Unit, the nurse-to-patient ratio has been 1:15 rather than 1:6. Where is the investment in maternal health training and rural obstetric care? A one-time \$100,000 baby grant might buy diapers, but it will not buy a future if the child does not survive the first 1,000 days due to malnutrition and lack of postnatal care. Motherhood should not be a death sentence in Guyana.

A Government without vision cannot lead. A country's budget is more than just numbers; it is a statement of priority. A budget that fails to create real jobs fails the people. A budget that keeps people hungry fails the people. A budget that neglects healthcare fails the people. This Budget is a spectacular failure. Let me share our new vision for Guyana. Our vision is clear, when we take Office, we will make economic growth work for the people, not just the privileged few. Turn jobs into careers, so that people can build a future and not just survive. We will fix the healthcare system because good health should never be a luxury. This is not just politics; it is personal because when the people thrive, Guyana thrive. The people will decide. The people are not fooled; they see the reality; they feel the struggle; and they know that this Government have failed them.

Budget 2025 was supposed to be about *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*; instead, it has delivered insecurity for the working class, prosperity for the privileged few and sustainability for those who are already at the top. The good news is that this is temporary. In the next election, the people will choose a Government who will fight for them. When that day comes, we will deliver not just promises but results. This Budget is being sold as a step forward. The reality is clear, it is an expensive band-aid on a health system in crisis. While the Government touts their spending increases, the average Guyanese citizens are left wondering where the impact is. Where is the accountability? Where is the vision for a modern functional healthcare system that truly serves the people? As I summarise, *Budget 2025* is a high-priced illusion. The Government boast that \$143.2 billion has been poured into the health sector, but let me ask the people of Guyana: does your hospital have enough doctors? Do you wait hours, sometimes days, for basic treatment? Could you afford your prescription medications? This is not just about numbers; it is about the citizens' lives. Under this Administration, the health system is failing the people who need it most.

The People's National Congress (PNC) and APNU vision is for real change and real solutions. Under the APNU/AFC Government, we will build a truly modern healthcare system, not just expensive structures with empty promises. Our plan includes a national health policy focused on real public needs, not political optics; a strong primary healthcare system that prioritises prevention and early intervention; universal access to affordable medications with transparent procurement and distribution – let us say practices; expanded maternal and child health care, ensuring no mother dies needlessly in childbirth; a real mental health strategy with community-based care, not just hospital beds; and preparedness for health emergencies so outbreaks such as dengue do not catch us off guard. These are some of our points. We cannot give you all lest you want to copy them.

As I conclude, let me thank the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service for presenting what I would call a government's exit budget. It is an exit budget. This Budget is a desperate attempt to buy goodwill before an election, but the people of Guyana are not fools, as I said before; they see the waste, the mismanagement and the lack of real progress. To the Guyanese people, my good friends and Comrades, I say this, you deserve better. You deserve a government who puts your health, your future and your well-being first. This Budget does not deliver that future, and that is why we

cannot and will not support it in its current form. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member Dr. Cummings. Now for the Hon. Minister of Health, the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony.

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. First of all, I want to thank Dr. Ashni Singh and his staff for another excellent budget, which guarantees that everyone in Guyana will benefit from this Budget. Whether you are a child or an adult, whether you live in the hinterland or on the coastland, whether you work for a business or you own a business, there is something for everyone in this Budget.

Over the last couple of days, we have been listening to various presentations. As valiantly as my Colleagues have been trying to explain this Budget to the Opposition, it is like trying to explain quantum physics to a goldfish. They just do not get it. The Guyanese across this country are happy and satisfied with *Budget 2025*. They know that their health is in safe hands and their education is assured. They have jobs and job opportunities. They have better roads and better security. They can now own their own homes. These are unprecedented times, when the lives of every Guyanese are being transformed every day. People are proud of their country. Every day, people across various communities are joining hands with this Government to build a *One Guyana*, a prosperous Guyana where the aspirations of our motto: *One People, One Nation, One Destiny* can be fulfilled.

While optimism reigns eternal among our Guyanese brothers and sisters listening to the APNU/AFC Members, one can only deduce that they reside in an alternate universe detached from reality. Over the past few days, their presentations have exposed their shallow understanding of the economy; the Budget measures; and, of course, the aspirations of the Guyanese people. When they fail to advance any cogent arguments, they fall back on the usual tired innuendos and misrepresentation. The Guyanese people have grown weary of their negativity. We are fed up with the rhetoric and we had enough of your empty promises. The public is not deceived. While some of those on the APNU benches faces might be relatively new, they peddle the same old divisive message – nothing novel; nothing constructive.

Looking at the APNU, one cannot help but feel sorry for them. Imagine the AFC divorced the PNC or vice versa. We are still to find out. While they are divorced, they are still cohabiting in this House. The APNU is now an oxymoron. They are a divided Coalition. Imagine you cannot run your

own house and you cannot manage your own Coalition, but you want to come here to lecture us on how to run this country. We would not allow that. Let us examine their tenure while they were in Government. I will just stick with the health sector. There is a famous Micheal Jackson song, titled 'Do you remember?' Many of you might know that song so, I want to say, do you remember the Sussex Street Bond, the scandal there, where apparently a friend, maybe a family, maybe a favourite... [Mr. Ramson: Or maybe a flatterer.] ...or a flatterer who was given a contract to store pharmaceuticals?

5.54 p.m.

When they were storing the pharmaceuticals, they gave the man \$25 million upfront so that he can then go and buy the property. After buying the property, he turned back and rented it to the APNU/AFC for \$12.5 million a month. That was not all. He rented it because they gave him a contract for three years. One would have thought that, having paid so much money for this bond, they would have utilised the bond. When you go to the Report of the Auditor General it states that from July to August, 2016 there was nothing in the bond. Yet, we were paying \$12.5 million per month. It is not only that. When they finally put something in the bond it was on 1st September, 2016. That is when they put something in the bond. We can go to the something because they had contraceptives and other things they were storing in the bond.

We also had a parliamentary visit to that bond. When the Parliamentarians went there, we found that apart from the contraceptives they were also storing an old computed tomography (CT) scan machine. If we add up the cost per month of \$12.5 million for these three years, we could have bought a better CT machine than they had stored in that bond. I know the Comrades on the other side like to ask for us to lay over the document. I am happy to lay over the Report of the Auditor General on what happened at Sussex Street. It is a very big report.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I come back to Michael Jackson. Again, the song says, do you remember? Do you remember the HDM Labs Incorporated drug procurement scandal? This is the report. It is another Report of the Auditor General on what happened during that period. We can go there. In this report you had a selective tender that went out. Six companies were selected. When the people tendered, and they went in, apparently the preferred company was not one that had the right price; so that tender was cancelled. They did a second tender, and

when they did the second tender the preferred company alone put in a tender and was awarded the contract. According to the Report of the Auditor General, for many of the items on that second contract if you did a comparison between what was proposed in the first – before they nullified that bid or that selective tendering – you would see the preferred bidder that got the contract, HDM Labs Incorporated, had many of the items far higher than most of those from the first set of tenders that they nullified. This talks about how they were managing during that period.

It is not only that, Mr. Speaker. According to the Auditor General, drugs and medical supplies, were constantly out of stock. In this Report of the Auditor General for the period 2015 to 2017, when the audits were done, it states that 43% of the supplies were given to the facilities. It was 43%; they did not have enough supplies for the health centres and hospitals across this country. It is not only that, Mr. Speaker. The waiting time for drugs to go to a health centre was, on average, 50 days. When a Combined Requisition and Issue Voucher (CRIV) was placed at the Materials Management Unit (MMU), it took at least 50 days to be able to get the drugs and medical supplies. The Auditor General then did a very interesting thing. They took some random facilities and went to check, for some items, how long they were out of stock. Let us look at the Suddie Public Hospital's Pharmacy. There was a medication there – potassium chloride injection – that the people in Region 2 wanted. Do you know how long they put in this order and how long they took to get it? They waited 742 days for this order. This is not me making this up. It is in the Report of the Auditor General. I will lay it over so that you can get it.

The Leguan Cottage Hospital and the Diamond Diagnostic Centre were out of Metformin tablets for 650 days. They could not get Metformin tablets which were essential to treat diabetic patients. The Bartica Regional Hospital needed Quinine to treat patients with malaria. Quinine was out of the Bartica Regional Hospital for 1,028 days. That is a mining community and it needed quinine. [Mr. Holder: That is a lie.] Here is the Report of the Auditor General. I hear someone saying that is a lie. It is in the report – for 1,028 days they could not get Quinine tablets. The Linden Hospital Complex was out of snake venom for 1,665 days.

Hydrochlorothiazide for the Cotton Tree Health Centre...

[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] It is a diuretic. They were out of this medication for 500 days. [Mr. Holder: (Inaudible) Panadol.] Let me address the Panadol for you, Hon. Mr. Holder. In December, 2024, Dr. Carter received 6,000 Panadol tablets. She did not say that though.

She did not say that – 6,000 tablets. We can go to the CRIV and see that there were 6,000 tablets delivered to the health centre. We can talk, but that is the fact. Bring her; I am happy that she spoke. There were 6,000 tablets, and I have the CRIV to show it.

[**Mr. Holder:** I dare you to say that she lied. (*Inaudible*) *I wan yuh seh sha lie. (Inaudible)*] Lie is not a parliamentary word. I am telling you, and I have the CRIV to show it – 6,000 Panadol delivered to that health centre in 2024. This was in 2024; it is there. You can go and find out. When you come here and you reference Timehri, you must know that you should come with the facts because under this Government the supply of pharmaceuticals is at 90% across the system compared with your 43% and dismal record. This here is the Report of the Auditor General.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

I am happy to lay it over so that they can get a copy. Do you remember the Port Kaituma District Hospital where millions of dollars were spent? When we took over it was still incomplete. Again, I know they like to doubt. Again, the Report of the Auditor General will tell you what it was like and all the things that were incomplete at the hospital. Mr. Speaker, do you remember the head office of the Ministry? Again, this was another project. They were supposed to do that project for 300 and something million dollars. The project ended up costing over \$800 million. When we checked how the money was spent, the man was paid upfront and did not deliver on the project – another Report of the Auditor General. We can see in the report; it is here. I wonder if everyone can remember the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) hospital – another Report of the Auditor General.

Here is the Auditor General's summary of findings: the facility is currently inoperable; works on the electricity supply network for the main building and the backup generator were still in progress; elevators are still to be installed, along with the medical gas installation while interior finishing works were still in progress in one section of the building; exterior works – the triage shed, access bridge and gate were also incomplete. He stated that they did not know how these contracts were awarded. The criteria used and the basis for selecting the contractors to execute these works under the respective lots are unknown. This is how they were procuring. Mr. Speaker, there is a whole litany of things that the Auditor General pointed out.

6.09 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, apart from all of the mishandling, mismanagement and incompetence, the failure to prepare for the COVID-19 and the subsequent disease management was one of the most monumental failures of the APNU/AFC. This was their plan for COVID-19. I have a copy here. Let me read part of this plan to you. In the last section of their plan, it states, 'Periodisation.' Do you remember this plan? Mr. Speaker, I want you to listen carefully to this: 'It is projected that the presence and threat of COVID-19 will remain in Guyana for between 8 weeks to 4 months.' The APNU/AFC in their plan said that COVID-19 in Guyana would be here between eight weeks and four months – wonderful, and this is their plan. The first part of the plan went on to state, 'Guyana has completed the initial phase of discovery and confirmation of COVID-19 – this was after we found the first patient on 11th March – 'and now we are engaged in the second phase which is contact tracing from patient zero as well as others'. Then they would go to the third phase which was likely hospitalisation.

Let us review how they were managing COVID-19. First of all, there was a lack of personal protective equipment (PPEs). This country did not have N95 masks. In fact, they did not have the regular masks. Not only that... [**Ms. Lawrence:** That is not true. (*Inaudible*) N95 masks. You cannot tell me.] I can tell you because I had to get N95 masks for those doctors who were working at the Accident and Emergency (A&E). When you fail, we deliver. I brought in N95 masks and gave it to the doctors working at the Accident and Emergency.

What about testing? The polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test... [**Hon. Members:** (*Inaudible*)] I want you all to hear this. The first PCR test that they did was on 10th March and we got the results shortly thereafter, which means that is how we knew that the first patient had COVID-19. We took until 10th March to be able to do a PCR test. What happened before? [**Ms. Lawrence:** (*Inaudible*)] Nonsense. So, between January and March, you did no tests, you did zero tests. That is why we did not know how many people were sick with COVID-19; that is why we did not know how many people died from COVID-19 between January and March. This is the truth. While you were doing that, when the people test at the laboratory (lab) they had to send the results to you for you to vet it. Then when you vet it, *yuh guh* pass it on to the doctors, meanwhile the patients were suffering. We had few isolation rooms; we did not have hospital beds; we did not have ventilators.

They were proud to announce they had a National Task Force headed by the Prime Minister (PM) and it comprised

of several other Ministers of Government. This Task Force oversaw this grand effort of incompetence. One of the achievements of the Task Force was that they took more than two or three months before they could set up the secretariat for the Task Force. Two to three months...

[Dr. Singh: ...to set up the secretariat.] Yes. One of the other undertakings of this Task Force was they also wanted to name the COVID-19 hospital. When you go through the Minutes of the Task Force, they spent a number of antagonising weeks and months trying to decide the right name for this hospital they were going to build. I have all of the minutes. They started out by saying that the place was a sanatorium. Then they changed and said they should name it the infectious disease hospital. They then invited the President to cut the ribbon and declare the place open. That was done on 30th July. When they cut the ribbon and declared the name of the place, they went back, because they felt the name was not a suitable name, and they renamed it the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. That is how they finally named the place.

When you went in the place, what did it have? It was a shell – not a bed, not a ventilator and not a Panadol was there. There was nothing. You opened the place to welcome visitors, to welcome patients to go there. One can only wonder what were the terms of reference of this Task Force. Was it really preparing to fight a pandemic or were they busy using the COVID-19 measures to thwart democracy in this country? Let us go through that. It is now a fact that APNU/AFC tried to rig the elections on 2nd March. It is also a fact that it took months before we got accurate results of the last elections. During that time, the National COVID-19 Task Force imposed, one, a curfew from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., as if this virus was only operating in the night. That curfew started on 3rd April, 2020. What about the closure of the airports? On 18th March, they went and closed the airport to international travel. Do you know what was the effect of that? That was to ensure they drive all of the international observers away from Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, we will have to get you an extension to continue with this presentation.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that I have a different calculation for the Minister. Could you double check your timing like the last time for me? I have a different recorded time here for him. Could you just double check it for me?

Mr. Speaker: I have him starting at 5.48 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: I have him starting at 5.50 p.m. All right. I have to then ask that he be given five minutes to conclude, Sir.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me just finish off this idea. Right here at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC), when we wanted to do the recount, Minister Benn, one of the Commissioners of the Elections Commission (GECOM), came here to observe the arrangements for the recount. He was thrown out and the police marched him out. You had that famous protest right behind here. But not only that, what was important was that to prevent or to delay the recount they then came and used an insecticide to spray this place to prevent the recount. Do you all remember that? The insecticide do not kill the COVID-19 virus. It does not kill the COVID-19 virus but *yuh* sprayed the place to prevent the recount. There are many more.

Let me quickly address some of the things that the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, spoke about. Let me talk about maternal deaths. In 2017, maternal deaths in this country were 23; in 2018, maternal deaths were 20; in 2019, it was 23; and in 2024, it was down to 14. That is our record. Two of those deaths were of Venezuelan migrants who crossed the border, came to Region 1, and we medevacked and brought them to Georgetown but, unfortunately, they died. Every mother that dies is something that we mourn. It should not happen. We have reduced maternal deaths in this country because of the investments that we have been making.

6.24 p.m.

You came here and you spoke about hospitals beds. In your period, how many hospital beds have you added? Zero. Later this year, in another couple of months, six new hospitals would be opened – 75 beds each, we will be adding. When we finish there, we have the Ogle facility – 252 beds; we have New Amsterdam Hospital – 240 beds; we have West Demerara Regional Hospital – 220 beds; and then all of the hospitals – Moruca, another 50 beds; Lethem, another 50 beds; Kato, another 50 beds. This is our record. This is the record. You came here and you said you will do primary healthcare once again because that was in your Manifesto. What is our record? In the last three years we have built 25 new health centre and health post across this country. You came and said you want to train Community Health Workers (CHWs). When we came here many of the facilities had no

Community Health Workers. Under this Government more than 500 Community Health Workers were trained.

They talk about nurses. Who do you think increased the salary for nurses? The People's Progressive Party/Civic increased the salary for nurses. Right now, we have 3,000 and more persons who would be graduating soon from nursing and assistant nursing programmes and others. This year, we are also going to take in another 3,000 people. I can go on and on, but I want to say to them that we have a track record to stand on. You do not have anything to stand on. That is why we can confidently go back to the electorate, because they are proud of what we have delivered, and they will re-elect us again. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member Dr. Anthony. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension, and I want to invite the Members of the Business Sub-Committee to stay in the Chamber as we continue the meeting of the Business Sub-Committee.

Sitting suspended at 6.34 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.38 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please be seated. I would like to invite the Hon. Member, Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis to make her presentation.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Good evening, everyone. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Speaker before us carried on. For someone who has a lot of years in this political arena, I expected a different presentation. For a seasoned politician, the presentation from last year to this year was really unbecoming of someone with that amount of experience.

The speaker before me, Dr. Frank Anthony, took time to tell the nation that the APNU/AFC Government took 50 days to get drugs through the procurement system to the health centre. Sir, not so long ago, at a community outreach, we heard a medical professional bear her soul out to her Commander-in-Chief. For me, it was not just that she did not have drugs, and she had to take her own money to buy stuff for the children and their parents in her community, it was the facility in which they worked. They spoke about the washroom; they had to fetch water. I listened to that video a few times. It represents today, the state of affairs that our public servants work in. Dr. Frank Anthony spoke at length about the APNU/AFC's deliverables from 2015-2020. What he did not tell us was the period of 23 years in which we saw the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) diminish from 600-and-odd beds to 300-and-something beds. They never got it right but come here to lecture us. I will let

that mental outburst go for now. I do not think Dr. Bhiri Harry will make any sense with the Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, but I urge him, as a colleague, that outburst should be attended to.

I rise today to speak for the voiceless, for the children who cry in silence, for the women who live in fear, and for the elderly who await in despair, hoping for a better life before they die. I rise to add my voice in holding this Government accountable for its atrocious failure to protect the most vulnerable among us. Despite receiving trillions of dollars in budgetary allocation since 2020, the PPP/C Government has failed the people of Guyana, year after year, while enriching themselves. I want to share an experience with you, because we on the other side, we do not have luxury offices, so we go out into the regions. I was in Port Kaituma, and I was talking with some fathers in the afternoon after we had our outreach. When I said that the PPP/C Government has failed the people of Guyana year after year, this is what I mean. It broke my heart in an after-meeting conversation with three fathers, when they explained to me, in Port Kaituma, in Region 1, that they can only afford... **[Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]** Should I continue, Sir? Please put my clock on hold. Thanks. **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** But the Bishop is here. Where is the Prime Minister? The Prime Minister said we would...*[Pause]*

Mr. Speaker: As we wait for the Hon. Member, Mr. Natasha Singh-Lewis to continue... No, can we have Minister Persaud move that we suspend the Standing Orders so that we can continue beyond the 8.00 p.m. hour and conclude our business?

Suspension of Standing Order No. 10

BE IT RESOLVED

"That Standing Order No. 10 be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 8.00 p.m."

[Minister of Human Services and Social Security]

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Ms. Persaud]: Mr. Speaker, I ask respectfully that we suspend the Standing Orders so that we can go beyond 8.00 p.m. to conclude the business of the House this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Member of Parliament (MP) Lewis, your clock was stopped at 7.44 p.m.

Technical difficulties encountered due to power outage.

7.49 p.m.

Member of Parliament, Ms. Singh-Lewis, are you prepared to continue now? The cameras are working. Let me just check the internet first to ensure that we have the live broadcast. Is the internet back on? It is booting up now. Yes, we are on. You will restart at 7.52 p.m. Hon. MP, so eight minutes went by. I will give you the signal when your time is up.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You may start at 8.53 p.m. Sorry, 7.53 p.m.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I was making the point before the blackout and I got a little bit distracted. I was looking in the blackout for the Prime Minister because he said that we will never have a blackout again and that the Opposition Members of Parliament are being untruthful in the National Assembly. As God would have it, in the National Assembly, we got a blackout and were disturbed but he is not here. He is missing in action. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*]

Not for a moment would I ever do that. I was making the point that the PPP/C Government has failed the people of Guyana year after year while enriching themselves. I wanted to share the experience of when I was in Port Kaituma early in 2024. After the consultation, the community meeting, three fathers came up to me and they were discussing what was happening with them personally. It broke my heart when one gentleman said to me, ‘Ms. Lewis, we can only afford one meal per day, and we prefer to give the children dinner so they do not go to bed hungry’. That is our state of poverty in this country. This budget reflects a failure of good governance, and it prioritises political survival over national well-being. It entrenches poverty, stifles growth and risks destabilising our society because our poor and working class are treated less than humans. When I look at this budget, I am thinking this is not a fiscal policy. It is a clear case of class warfare, a systematic betrayal of the poor to enrich the elites.

After listening to Hon. Dr. Singh’s presentation on 17th January, 2025, and reading the measures this Government intends to implement to improve the social services of this country, I was prompted to look at the performance of the sector. I will tell the Guyanese people now how incompetent this Government is as it relates to the implementation of the budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. Last year, I did not focus heavily on the performance of the sector. I gave a broader view of the

budget itself. This year, I felt like I should look more in-depth in the sector. Last year, after my presentation, I was accosted outside on the corridors... [An Hon. Member:

By who?] By Dr. Vindhya Persaud, the Minister of Human Services and Social Security. In exact words she said to me, ‘Are you proud of yourself now?’ in a very degrading manner. I felt threatened and I did not answer, confirming what she said. I want to say to Dr. Vindhya Persaud, in the presence of the same two persons, I will tell you today – I am damn proud of myself.

Let us look at what is happening with the first agency, the Child Care and Protection Agency (CPA) in Guyana. The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security has been handed a golden mandate and a golden budget, in fact, several good budgets in the last four years to safeguard our people. Yet, very often, this House hears reports of thousands of child abuse cases. More specifically, in 2024, 4,032 cases of child abuse were reported, including unspeakable acts of sexual violence against our children. Can you imagine the situation of our children in this country with the largest budget ever? Trillions of dollars and our children on a large scale are being abused. How many of these children receive psychosocial support? Where are the national education campaigns to educate children and their parents about these crimes? We on this side of the House recognise that socio-economic and cultural drivers, such as poverty and unemployment, have direct correlations between abuse rates and economic hardship. In this case, Guyana has been fighting the high cost of living, and the poor people suffer tremendously.

What are the measures put in place to counter hardship in this country? This is one of the reasons why the Opposition brought a motion to this House to discuss the high cost of living so that our children can be nurtured in a better environment, and we would see fewer cases of abuse reported. The lack of focus on strategy to protect and care for our children in the poverty-stricken homes by this PPP/C Government is a betrayal of our children. What can the Guyanese people expect? The motion to debate the high cost of living died a natural death. We did not see it here and so there was no collaboration with the Opposition to put forward strategies on how to combat that high cost of living. The nation’s children were denied the opportunity of having a systematic approach to alleviating poverty in Guyana, but as a nation, we will wait for the handouts and the band-aid solutions because the PPP/C is accustomed to addressing problems with band-aids and not addressing the causes of the real problems. Our children will continue to suffer, even as the Child Care and Protection Agency was created to protect

our children from harm. Under the PPP/C Government's watch, child sexual abuse has become an epidemic that has no strategy to combat same.

One might wonder if I did not read the budget books. Why am I saying this? I did read the budget books to look at the strategies set out but let me share them and show you how incompetent this Ministry operates. They will provide rehabilitative services to children who are abused and their parents. That is a very reactive strategy. They cannot come up with proactive strategies. They will provide emergency care for children who are abused. Again, after the act. Very reactive. What are the measures in place to protect our children? What measures are in place to ensure that the parents of these children are not frustrated because they cannot provide financially for them? The social workers will tell you that the majority of the 4,032 cases reported are children from homes of abject poverty and that their success rate of taking care of the children is woeful. The Ministry has confirmed it themselves. The number of children abused is 4,032 and they were able to return to their families in one year – 88. The number of children assessed in place in alternative care is 217. What has happened to the 3,815 children? Incompetent Minister Vindhya Persaud. Incompetence at its best. I hope when you come here to speak after me, you will tell us what is happening with those children.

The Minister has failed the children, and I will give her an F grade. Let me tell you how the Minister and Child Care and Protection Agency are failing this country. This one is very personal for me. A Muslim teenage girl, sorry I cannot disclose her identity, but a social worker has the facts, a child from Region 3 but goes to school in Georgetown was sexually assaulted by a relative since November, 2024. When the matter came to light because a social worker in her private capacity intervened, it was reported to the CPA in Georgetown. To date, the parents are awaiting a response from the Director of the Child Care and Protection Agency on how the matter will be addressed. It hurts me personally because I would know better than most of you in here that most of the Muslims in this country voted for a Muslim president since they believed they would be better off today, but the system has failed our people. The PPP/C has failed our children.

One may ask, but why not approach the Minister so that she can intervene? It is a serious matter. I have written to the Minister on several issues, as recent as the last few months, but to date, I have not received as much as an acknowledgement. That is the level of incompetence and

arrogance that leads the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. The Minister says, Dr. Vindhya Persaud says do not be dishonest. Dr. Vindhya Persaud, I wrote to you about Mr. Bristol, the senior citizen who was locked away in the House at No. 50 Village, Corentyne. Not a response till now, but I know you have taken action. You are just arrogant for not responding to the Opposition Members of Parliament. I have written to you on the matter of Ms. Leona James in Port Kaituma, who lives behind the airport. Not a response, but I know you know of the matter.

8.04 p.m.

Let me put a wrap on the protection and care of our children by telling you of the feedback that I received from seven out of ten regions in Guyana in relation to the child abuse issue. The staff at the Child Protection Agency said to me, 'Ms. Natasha, this is what happens when you employ your friends and family who have no idea or experience of the work'. The advice is that the Child Protection Agency is understaffed, underfunded and overwhelmed.

I am moving on. Let us take a look at the empowerment of women and girls. We are quite aware of the many cases where women are raped, beaten and murdered. Only today, Bibi Fazi Ali of Annandale, East Coast Demerara was murdered after suffering years of abuse at the hands of her husband. We need to do better after the billions of dollars this Ministry received. It is just disheartening. More needs to be done to protect our women and children from this epidemic of violence in the home. Not so long ago, we passed in this House the Family Violence Bill, and I heard somebody talk about the training of the policemen and how competent they are, but we still need to do a lot more. The Ministry now has to do its work. But what do we see? Incompetence. It is important to empower our women to be self-sustaining with the hope of escaping the horror of abuse. I have heard in pretty much the same language the Minister of Human Services say the same thing. Why is she not doing anything to help us? What are we doing to empower our women in Guyana?

In the essence of time, I will choose only one programme – as I said, I have taken a deeper look into the Ministry's operations – one programme to give the Guyanese people an idea of how incompetent the Ministry of Human Services and Social Protection is, that programme is the Women Innovation Investment Network (WIIN) programme. The Guyana Women's Leadership Institute (GWLI) spent a total of \$185.5 million on this programme. This sum was for the implementation of the Women's Innovation and Investment

Network training programme aimed at empowering women and girls. At a minimum, and I am not exaggerating, this programme was a disaster, it is a continuing disaster. It is a failed project. Let me tell you how because that seems to be a harsh statement, but it is a fact. Let me tell you how and why. From the start of the project, the design was flawed. I did not say that the first people to say that was the Auditor General in their report. However, this year, I have taken all of my research from the Parliament Library, so I do not have to hand over everything, it is right there. From the time I saw Minister Vindhya Persaud in Region 1, Baramita, talking about how Indigenous women will be able to learn a skill to gain employment through a sewing programme, and the duration is two to three days, I knew that was a sham. That was me bringing to bear my training and experience in the education sector, and maybe I was being harsh, but listen to what the Auditor General Report showed us. The Report stated,

“The design and implementation of the Programme could not have empowered underprivileged and single-parent women to gain employment or start a small business to sustain themselves and their families.”

Why was this, after \$185.5 million? Is that not incompetence? The Minister will have to come here, and I hope to God that she tells us what went wrong. This is because we were not involved in designing... Sorry, Mr. Speaker, this flaw was because,

“Since key stakeholders were not involved in designing the programme and participants were not checked up on to receive feedback for critical decision-making.”

The bigger issue of consultation and partnering with people to make the policies and strategies better for Guyana is an inherent issue in the PPP/C. They have not consulted with the Opposition on this budget, yet they go on in their ministries and their programme and will not consult with the key stakeholders to get value for money. We are seeing it evident here. Therefore, training received by vulnerable women through the Institute may not be beneficial in allowing them to gain meaningful employment. From the get-go, the WIIN programme was a failure and continues to be a failure for the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. The Minister has failed the people, and by extension, the PPP/C Government is a failed leadership for the Guyanese people. Let me give you context. The report stated,

“Staff strengths were not determined, no provision was made for monitoring and evaluation of personnel on the Institute’s organisation structure, and key positions were not filled.”

It is clear the Ministry is not interested in conducting evaluations and assessments to determine the needs of the Institute.

“These were necessary for the effective design and implementation of the WIIN programme.”

A simple task to employ people to do the job the Ministry could not do. They failed the people of this country. They failed the vulnerable women of this country.

“During the period...”

And that is a two-year period.

“...14,663 persons had applied to the programme, and 2,571 of them were identified as the most vulnerable...”

That group was the unemployed single parent.

“...However, only 410 of these women took part in the programme.”

They actually participated in the programme. From 14,663 applications, then reducing that to qualifying 2,571, only to have 410 women take part in this programme. If we calculate the value per training, we have lost \$185.5 million for nothing.

“As a result, 84% of the most vulnerable women are at risk of being left behind.”

I did not say that, the Auditor General Report states that, and it is there for everyone to see. Where is the Minister of Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh? Dr. Singh, did you know that? As a result, 84% of the most vulnerable women are at risk of being left behind. When all of you over there come here to talk about how you represent the women, and you are doing women's training and all of that, look at what Minister Vindhya Persaud is doing at her Ministry – 84% of the most vulnerable women are left behind. The Auditor General Report states that. The PPP/C Government has failed in its commitment to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5), which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The Guyana Women's Leadership, under the stewardship of Dr. Persaud, did not effectively implement the WIIN programme. That was evident as there were gaps in the monitoring and

evaluation process relating to the graduates. Perhaps, Dr. Vindhya Persaud should tell us whether,

“Follow-ups with graduates to understand their progress and the challenges they faced in advancing economically were not conducted.”

This is because the Auditor General Report of 2023 said the Ministry did none of that. Further, the Report stated,

“There was no system in place to raise awareness of possible employment opportunities.”

Could you imagine that, Mr. Speaker? Even the databases used to make informed decisions for the students had duplicate information and, in some cases, incomplete information. The Human Services and Social Security Minister gets an ‘F’ grade on this project. Sadly, the taxpayers' money was squandered – \$185.5 million. It is clear that the Minister has been hopping around this country only for photo opportunities because the programmes are failing tremendously.

Let me turn my attention to the senior citizens. Every month, our senior citizens, those who built this nation, are forced to stand for hours waiting for their pensions which they earn through a lifetime of labour. All of us here would remember how our pensioners were treated badly just the other day. They came out before the sun was up and stood in the rain, and then the hot sun. Not so long ago, they were asked to come out in person to register in Georgetown, where all of us drive around at the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) office, for the \$100,000. That was only one case that said publicly that the PPP/C Government has no respect for our elders, and they do not care. Mr. Suresh Singh, this is merciless. When we talk about our senior citizens, to have them in that condition, the PPP/C is merciless.

My Colleagues spoke extensively on the \$5,000 increase in old-age pension, which compares to nothing in relation to the high cost of living. While in Region 6, at the community meeting, one resident said they were happy that the Government had implemented a system for the pensions to go to the bank, and I was also happy. Minister Vindhya Persaud, thank you very much, that was a really good initiative to implement the banking system for pensioners to receive their pensions. I know the PPP/C too well, they do not care for our senior citizens, and some sixth sense said to me, investigate this. It is too good to be true. Mr. Speaker, guess what I found? I came across a pension fraud audit dated 2023, and this is what Hon. Vindhya Persaud, and the PPP/C are really doing. In 2023, a special audit was

conducted into the receipts and distribution of old-age pensions, the public assistance books and the Tampa evidence holographic labels. We saw the Minister make some statements in the media in relation to that whole story, when it was discovered – and we will come back to what she said. According to the report,

“The Ministry’s application form an approving Officer signature is required for pensioners to transition from coupons to bank payments. However, there were 73% or twenty-nine instances where the approving Officer’s signature was not evident on the application forms for pensioners changing from coupons to Bank.”

Mr. Speaker, I cannot use the ‘C’ word, but this is *runnings*. It was *runnings* that caused the Auditor General to do the report. The *fudgery* gets worse, and the *runnings* get harder. Listen to me, Mr. Speaker, the auditors asked for 40 specific files to investigate the old-age pension fraud, and this one is sweet.

“Four of the forty files that were requested were not submitted for audit scrutiny. However, the Ministry submitted four other files that were not requested.”

What is that, Mr. Speaker? I cannot use the ‘C’ word, but it is *fudgery*. It is hard-*runnings*. I am restrained by your good office, and I will not use the ‘C’ word. I do not know what it is, if it is not corruption and fraud. What is it, Sir? High level of *fudgery* and hard-*runnings* going on at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. The elderly will not get respect from this Government. When you think they are doing something good, look deep into it. It is always about them. The same report states that they have breached some of the stores regulations, and for being somebody who spent several years in public service, I know when you breach the stores regulation what that is all about. It states that,

“The Permanent Secretary shall ensure that Master and Sectional Inventories...are kept and are properly maintained... However, a Master Inventory nor a Sectional Inventory was not presented for audit. As a result, it could not be determined whether all assets [of the Ministry] were properly accounted for by this Ministry.”

8.19 p.m.

What is that? This is the Ministry, and this is the history of the PPP/C that one Minister... The Audit Report mentions the Permanent Secretary (PS) being accountable as the budget agency responsible... This Ministry changed four Permanent

Secretaries in one term. That is history in the PPP/C Government. This never happened before. Where a Ministry has a main store and a sub-store, we all know that all purchases shall be accounted for from the main store. The Auditor General went on to give advice on how the Stores should be run.

“However, audit checks reveal that the records at the Ministry’s main store do not include ...”

It states that the main store should have the inventory and then send it out to the sub-store – we all know.

“...the Ministry’s main store does not include items sent to the Hugo Chavez Centre for Rehabilitation and Reintegration, the Palms Geriatric Home, the Sophia Training Centre and the Mahaica Children Home for which there are the four sub-stores of the Ministry.

That is *fudgery* and hard *runnings* because the items do not meet these places, they end up at somebody’s shop.

Mr. Speaker: You are imputing a lot. Please, you are imputing quite a bit.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I am sorry, Sir. “As a result, the Ministry is in breach of section 45 of the Stores Regulations”. How can all of this happen under one Minister’s watch, in one term in office? In this regard, Sir, there was an audit examination. We are going further you know. We are moving from the Stores now.

Mr. Speaker: Before you move on, you will need an extension.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation, hopefully without blackout.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Permit me to share one more instance of hard *runnings* and *fudgery* in this Ministry. Let us look at another instance, Sir.

“The sum of \$56.500M was allotted to purchase furniture and equipment under the three capital programmes of the Ministry. As at December, 2023...the sum was expended. An examination of the Payment Vouchers and other related documents presented for audit revealed that the Ministry

received the furniture and equipment valuing \$42.974M.”

Not \$55.9 million.

“The difference of \$12.940M could not be verified, since Payment Vouchers and other supporting documentation were not presented for audit examination.

That is hard *runnings* at the Ministry. The Minister needs to come up here and tell us where the furniture and the equipment are because the audit report states that they were not in the Stores and could not be verified. This hard *runnings* has got to stop. We have to know where the taxpayers’ money is going. It is clear this Minister has failed the people of Guyana. No wonder the staff called for her resignation not so long ago. Again, I will award her an ‘F’ grade. The Hon. Ms. Parag spoke about the APNU/AFC’s Manifesto this morning. Let me remind her about her PPP/C’s Manifesto of failed promises just before I close. The PPP/C’s Manifesto states:

“Expand child care programmes and centres countrywide and enhance the capacity of child care and protection agency.”

Hon. Minister, based on your track record of the centre at Mahaica and that failed project where the contractor ran off with the mobilisation – almost a quarter of the money – and did not complete the programme, I think that is a failed promise. You could not do one childcare centre in four years. How would you do nine in 10 months? This is a failed promise from the PPP/C. The Manifesto states:

“Mainstream women’s participation in governance.”

We are still waiting for that. Perhaps, the Minister can tell us about that failed promise. The PPP/C states in its manifesto that it will:

“Provide enhanced benefits for public assistance recipients.”

This is a failed promise. Instead, in Region 10 they knocked off almost 50% of the recipients of public assistance from the programme. They failed the people of Region 10. Bishop Edghill, Minister Vindhya Persaud is failing the people of Region 10.

“Improve conditions for persons with special needs...”

This is a failed promise but let me remind Minister Vindhya Persaud of the letter I wrote her. Ms. Leona James from Port

Kaituma, behind the airport, is begging for the disability grant. I went to that relative's house because Leona James does not have a house of her own. I took photographs. It was on social media. I wrote the Minister and almost begged for this Indigenous woman to receive her disability grant. Perhaps, after this Leona James will get her disability grant. I know, recently, another Member of the Opposition wrote the Minister and the staff called this disabled woman and was really abusive. I want to bring one more matter to bear before I close.

Hon. Member, Ms. Browne, you are a young professional. You may have a future with the PPP/C. I would like to advise you that when you come to this House, come with facts. I want to refer to a statement you made in your budget speech. You said that the Hon. Mr. Cox does not go out into his constituency. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarah Browne, follow my social media and you will see that when I was in Region 1, the Hon. Ronald Cox went with me to Matarkai. He was with me in Port Kaituma. He was with me all around for a whole week in Mabaruma. The untruths will not take you anywhere. As a young professional, it would be in your best interest to be truthful when you come to this House. In a minute, I just want to tell...

Mr. Speaker: I have actually given you three minutes on the original and two minutes on this one.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. I will not be able to endorse this budget based on all that I have said – the failure and the incompetence of this Ministry. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Now for the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security, the Hon. Dr. Persaud.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]: Mr. Speaker, I stand here to thank my Colleague, Minister Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for his astute leadership and, also, to thank his diligent members of staff for presenting to us successive budgets that speak to the needs of the Guyanese people, navigating in a climate where we have seen global crisis and geopolitical tension. Like those budgets, this budget helps us as a country to navigate that, cushioning the impact of the global crises that exist in the world around us. I would like to thank all the staff members of the Ministry of Finance and also the members of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security for the work they have done towards *Budget 2025*.

To embrace one's legacy requires a level of maturity. As I sat and listened to the debates, I realised the Members of the Opposition shied away from embracing their own legacy. I will wholeheartedly embrace the legacy of the PPP/Civic. Every time there was mention of 28 years, we heard that we should not go back to the past. I have decided today to indulge them and just deal with their five years. That is enough for me to tell you many things. In 1992, it was an indisputable fact that we had a debt of \$2 billion. It simply meant, unlike now in 2025 when a baby is born with \$100,000 on his head, back then, he was born with a debt of US\$3,000. Mr. Speaker, you are well aware of that. That is your legacy. I just need to compare five with just about four. I say just about four because the epic heist when it came to democracy that was done in full view of the country and the world, was when an election was ... We all know. I was standing there in the Ashmins Building when the whole world saw what they did. In any country, people will judge a government, as is their right, by the budget. It is a barometer of how they intend to deliver its manifesto's promises. That is exactly the people's right because it speaks of government's vision, competence, capacity and capability. I can easily say, and my Colleagues have said it *ad nauseam*, that the Manifesto of the last Government was not delivered whatsoever. Do you want to talk about an 'F' grade? That is a big fat 'F' grade.

I have become inured to the annual vitriol spewed against me every year by the Hon. Member who spoke before me. Maybe, that is why that day I said – I hope you are proud of the way you delivered your statement. I can say that because, when one spews vitriol, it also seeks to deflect intellectual bankruptcy, which has been so evident from that side of the House. We have a budget that speaks to the development of a country, while at the same time focusing on the people in all the regions of this country. We have really, in this budget incentivised hard work. In this budget, we have given the majority of it to the social services, notably health and education. We are not in the habit of coming like a magician with a hat and pulling out outlandish promises. They got more bizarre as I listened to them today, promising what they will do when they come again. I do not know where and going where. Actually, I do. It is right over there. When it gets outlandish and bizarre, look back at what you did not do in your five years in Office. I will tell you what you did not do. For the 100 days that you all speak of, the 100 days that you promised the people, there were many promises and every one of them was broken. Could the people of this country trust you? No. Should they trust you? No. Will they

ever trust you? No. When you want to have a heist of a whole country, what would you not do?

If we look at when the APNU/AFC Government was in Office, it was a dismal record of broken promises. Let me start with the senior citizens. I sat here and listened to the fact that this budget does not have anything for our senior citizens, and we do not care about our senior citizens. Let me tell you, the budget is \$58.5 billion of which \$37 billion directly goes to our old age pensioners. Now, in addition to the \$37 billion, all the other forms of assistance to senior citizens amount to \$42 billion. If you add the public assistance benefits, over 80% of this \$58.5 billion will be going directly to the most vulnerable populations in our country.

8.34 p.m.

That means we care. I am not going to stand here with the temerity to tell any senior citizen that this is all we will ever do, and this is the 'be all and end all'. This Government has consistently been escalating pensions. But not only that. Look at how our pensioners access their service. It is an indisputable fact that in 100 hundred days, the APNU Government promised to double the budget. At that time, the total would have been \$26,000, if they had done so when they came into office. When they left office, it was \$20,500. Compare that with the PPP/C, which promised to double the pension, and, in 2025, pensioners will get \$41,000. Promise delivered. The usual tendency is to *beat out* of the dome after you have spewed venom and vitriol, but I am accustomed to that too. That would never let me lose my voice, because I have always, before becoming a Minister, stood up for the people of this country.

I want to speak on access. When I came into this Ministry, it was confusion and chaos. Let me tell you. All of this love for the people who are vulnerable, do you know how much they increased the public assistance? It was by \$600 in 2017 and by \$800 in 2018. That is your legacy and that is your record. Embrace it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you, very clearly, as I stand here, when persons come here and peddle misinformation and want to be strangers to the truth, the truth must be told. I have no apology for anyone. Whenever there is fraud and dishonesty, I call it out and I call in the police. So, anything you know, I probably made that report. When the books were found to be fraudulent, I called the police. I have never shied away from improving and fixing issues and that is what I did, starting from top to bottom of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. Today, pensioners

have the opportunity to have their pensions deposited directly into their banks. That is significant. Pensioners can access their pension through Mobile Money Guyana (MMG). That is significant. Over 4,000 pensioners are making use of this. Pensioners can also now cash their vouchers every day of the month because we have introduced alternate venues. There are over 1,500 of those alternate venues across this country. That is what you call care because no longer do you see those pensioners lining up to encash their old age pension as they used to.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to say to you that pensioners are also receiving their pension *via* a very caring system, started at this Ministry, called the shut-in delivery system. Over 3,500 old-age pensioners have received their pensions and any cash grants to their homes. I want to say this because our officers go out into all of those areas and deliver that service, and I want to thank them very much. I also want to speak about direct delivery. Our direct delivery system in this country includes 148 communities to which we have added 76 more communities in remote, rural and hinterland areas. What have you done? Nothing. Actually, you have done something. Your tenure was considered the tax reign of this country. You taxed men, beasts, wheelchairs and pensioners. I was having a conversation not so long ago. You taxed plants too. If one planted more than three or four plants, one had to pay tax. Do you remember the story of the Region 5 farmer?

When you come here and you speak in this House, do not erase what you think we have forgotten because we have not, and no one out there has forgotten the taxation that you levied on them to such an extent they could not...Do you know what? I am not going to tell you what they thought. This was in 2016, and this is what the people said. I am quoting from news outlets, Mr. Speaker, and I can share it with you. This is what they said. You had just gone into office. I think the budget is ridiculous and Mr. Jordan needs to leave and all the rest of them who cannot do something for the country and the people of this country, get out of office and give somebody else a chance. Time up. Mr. Speaker, further in the 2016... [**Mr. McCoy:** So soon?]. Yes, so soon. On the 2016 Budget, another person further went on to say, I think is a rich people budget because the poorer class of people cannot afford it. When you have to pay water bill and light bill and for food and school things for your children, everything is vatted. They meant the tax.

One of the first things this Government did was remove all of the taxes they put on people, and the new taxes. You did not spare pensioners from that. You loved the senior citizens.

Did you spare them? Do you know what else you did? You removed the subsidies on electricity and water. In the 2025 Budget, we have \$882 million directed towards the electricity subsidy and we have \$298 million directed towards the water subsidy. For electricity, it is \$30,000 per annum, and let me tell you, it is a vast difference from what you did. [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*.] Let me deal with that. Thank you, Hon. Member. Let me make a point on that, Hon. Member. This was exactly the argument they used, that all of the people were not benefitting. Do you know what was the measure they introduced? Let me tell you – free driver's licence renewal. How many pensioners are driving so that it benefits them? That is what I am telling you – intellectual bankruptcy. You said that 40,000 people benefitting was not enough and that was not good. You renewed driver's licence for free. Why? Was it with the thinking that every pensioner out there was driving?

Mr. Speaker, do you know what the people said in 2016? I am not too happy about the budget, especially the tax on water and electricity. Those are two main commodities that are used by the poor and every person. I would have liked to see the government a little bit cleaner and more like live up to their word of being accountable and transparent – uh oh – I like to see the pay of policemen, teachers and nurses. How can people subsist on that?' Mr. Speaker, I told you that I was comparing five years plus the months that they held out as an illegitimate...Anyway, you know what I am talking about – five plus. We have not even started our fifth year properly and we have done much more than you have over this time. In 2018, they neglected the inflation that soared to 5.4% that year. Do you know how much money the pensioners got? They got \$1,000. Mr. Speaker, I told you, quite clearly, that this budget is continuing to give and to give.

We have also noticed that the numbers in the vulnerable population have increased, which means more and more vulnerable persons are benefitting. What started with over 50,000 pensioners has evolved to over 76,000 pensioners that we speak of right now. It is not only about the pension. All of the benefits accrue because under this Government, pensioners have received free testing and also subsidies towards their tested spectacles and over 70,000 pensioners benefitted last year. This year, the Government's introduction of the voucher for health checkups speaks to our Government's concern about the welfare, well-being and health of the pensioners. In addition to all of this, \$5 billion was spent on cash grants for our pensioners. When people come here and they want to misrepresent, distort, thwart and just fill a presentation with nothing of substance and all of

these other things, it speaks volumes about them. Is it really care for the people of this country?

I want to further say that recorded legacy is a powerful thing. Your legacy, the Members on that side of the House – APNU, the People's National Congress (PNC) and the Alliance For Change (AFC)... [Mr. Ramkissoon: Whoever they are.] Yes, all of the above. All of them. What do they say? You can change and change but you cannot change your spots and stripes. Well, we saw that. Legacy and recorded legacy are a very powerful thing. We speak of not caring for the pensioners. Where is your legacy of the programmes that you started for any pensioner out there? I can tell you of some. We have the Century Club that has been started for all those senior citizens who are over 100 years old, and there are just under 100 of them. It is a beautiful thing to be able to celebrate their lives. We have also started a community programme for senior citizens in their communities, starting with the village of Victoria, where I had the pleasure of going in the pouring rain. This will allow our seniors to engage and also be trained in things like digital literacy so that they can benefit from something introduced under this PPP/C Government – complete online applications for pension. You see, it is not only going in to apply; you can do this from the comfort of your home.

The Members on the other side of the House want to know about public assistance. Public assistance is open to anyone in this country. The number of persons receiving public assistance has more than doubled from where we started to where we are right now. There has been a 133% increase in what we are doing for people with public assistance. For those persons who fall in the category of permanent disabilities, we have made access better. With a single application, they are on the permanent disability register and qualify immediately for pensions. So, this is unbroken support this Government is giving to the people living with disabilities. What did you do? You did nothing. In addition to all of that, we have also started a supportive and assistive aids programme to ensure that people living with disabilities benefit from wheelchairs, walkers, white canes – and all of these things are free – and hearing aids. Do you know when I came into government and saw? People could not get a single wheelchair. In fact, the Ministry of Health is crafting prostheses at a subsidised cost. So, when people want prostheses, they will be able to get them heavily subsidised and at a reasonable cost. Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, it was difficult. I travelled the length and breadth of this country, and that is what I saw. You may have left something, but when you left, two ministers came after you.

It really says a lot when people want to come here and be strangers to the truth.

The eyecare programme at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security continues to deliver free tested spectacles to pensioners, vulnerable populations and persons with disabilities. I want to say that persons living with disabilities, for the first time...I have spoken to them, and I have met with those persons who make up the Council of Disabilities. Coming out of those consultations and meetings, a series of things happened. This Government expended \$74 million to construct the learning lab, which is part of a complex in the Mahaica community. Every year, that learning lab extends free skills training to persons living with disabilities in all of the regions.

8.49 p.m.

We have exceeded our target every year. We continue to ensure that those persons are not only trained, but they have the opportunity for employment and entrepreneurship. It was under this Government that a revolving fund was set up and that revolving fund is open to all persons with disabilities. There is no interest to be paid, and we continue to see persons benefitting. Over 45 persons benefitted from that fund last year, and we will continue to work with them this year. What are those persons trained in? They are trained in anything from garment construction to agriculture, to social media marketing, using Job Access With Speech (JAWS) for those who are blind. I suggest that one visits the learning lab before you come here and spew misinformation.

It was under this PPP/C Government that over 5,000 persons benefitted from wheelchairs. If we look at the Mahaica complex, what is happening there? The Members spoke about the residential facility for children. When that contractor could not finish the work, we terminated that contractor, as is the normal practice. We applied liquidated damages, as is the normal practice. That complex will have the learning lab, which is a training facility and has been doing a lot of good work, a children's residential facility, and brand-new residential facilities for people living with disabilities. They were in Government for five years. Did they do any of that? No. As we speak right now, \$35,000 is continuing to be distributed as part of the Government's one-off cash grant for persons living with disabilities. That is happening. It follows on the heels of a \$100,000 cash grant that was given to children. From that exercise, for the first time in the country, we were able to develop a register of children living with disabilities. That register will now be utilised to see how we can help them in a very targeted way.

Whether it is treatment they need, whether it is healthcare – whatever they need – we will be working with them.

This side does not have intellectual bankruptcy. We are investing over \$500 million to ensure people with disabilities have equal opportunities because we can speak of disparity. We have set out, in a very strategic direction, to ensure that persons living with disabilities benefit equally to any other population in this country. We have been training persons through the same Women Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) programme that was diminished. Go out there and tell the women whose lives have been transformed that WIIN has done nothing for them.

I want to use, more or less, an independent barometer of the work that Guyana has done when it comes to gender equality and improving the lives of women. You heard from the Ministry of Housing and Water that 46% of those who received house lots were women; you heard that from the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme, over 70% were women; and you could hear from the WIIN programme that every year we are training thousands of women. To date, we have trained over 13,000 women. We have another 11,000 to train this year and this is a hybrid model training. This is a very new programme. When we train those women, it is not just training.

They have the opportunity to be trained in business, literacy, and entrepreneurship. We have seen, in the earlier years, that 48% of those persons would have either enjoyed employment or entrepreneurship. When people try to diminish a programme, they do not look at the real people behind those programmes – the persons who work at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and every day go out to deliver those programmes – No. You do not care – and the persons who benefit at the end of the day. Wherever I go across this country, I am met by women who say, here is my business card, I have started my business. Do you know what? I am going to invite all of you to the upcoming WE LIFT exhibition that started with 75 women-owned businesses. In this year, we are targeting 350 women-owned businesses. We have harnessed Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and developed an app, a WIIN app, which has been populated by over a thousand women-owned businesses. That is what WIIN has done.

I want to say, very categorically, that we have spared no effort in reducing the gender divide and gender disparity by training thousands of persons through the Gender Affairs Bureau (GAB), ensuring that the gender focal point programme continues, and by looking at gender responsive

budgeting and gender mainstreaming. This is all work that was being done by the Ministry, but I want to tell you of an independent source. I speak of the Global Gender Gap Index, which, in one year, saw Guyana move from a ranking of 53 to 35. We have to be doing something right, and that is not me telling you. This is from the World Economic Forum (WEF).

I also want to recognise the work that is being done by the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) as well, and they are tackling gender stereotypes. I do not need to come here and belittle anyone or diminish anyone. I can just speak of the work that has been done – solid, tangible, impactful, consistent and continuous like the PPP stands for: progress, prosperity, and people. It is this we need in this House, not to sit here and descend into the gutter, as we do, and to belittle the work that has been done. Walk around this country. Take the blinkers off. Look at what is happening with construction. Look at what is happening around the country. Look in your neighbourhoods. Mr. Speaker, through you, the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, posted a lovely thing – they walk on my road that I built, and they say we did not do anything.

If we look at the opportunities women are having available to them, an average woman – any woman in this country – will benefit from the \$100,000 one-off cash grant. She will get the \$55,000 'Because We Care' cash grant. If her child has a disability, she will get \$35,000. She may benefit from public assistance. Her child may benefit from the National School Feeding Programme. She will also be able to access free technical vocational training, free training through WIIN, BIT, and anything else that she wants. She is benefitting from what we restored – no value-added tax (VAT) on electricity, water, health care and school supplies. If you conservatively put that all together, you are looking at around \$800,000 a year being put into the pockets of women by the People's Progressive Party/Civic. We do not believe in handouts only. We believe in investing in people, and all the programmes I speak of speak to those investments we have been making in people every year. We are seeing young women just taking those opportunities, whether they are in Region 1 or they are in Region 10, or somewhere in the middle between Region 5 and Region 6. I did go to Baramita. I went to launch the WIIN programme, and after that sewing programme, they were able to make hammocks. Can you make a hammock? Well, they were able to do it after the training programme, through the WIIN programme. Baramita, Region 1, was the place where WIIN was launched.

Let me turn my attention to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). I think it is a tragedy when any woman or man loses their life to violence. I believe that with all my heart. This is work that must be ongoing. The Member spoke of 4,000 reported cases of child abuse. That is because we have a reporting system. In 2017, they had 3,000 cases. In 2018, they had more than 3,000 cases. What did you do? Nothing. In coming into this Government, we have developed a comprehensive Guyana model. This was supported through the Spotlight Initiative. Here are the things we did. That is why people can report. We have a 24-hour toll-free hotline – 914. We have the Survivors Advocates Programme, and a survivor advocate in every region. We also have the Stop Abuse, Stay Empowered (SAFE) voucher, and the Survival Kit. We also have expanded our shelters across the region. We have developed the Gender-Based Violence Policy Framework. We have developed the Guyana model to counter gender-based violence, which is recognised across this region as the best model from the Spotlight Initiative Programme. So much so that my counterparts from across this region have been asking me how we do it. They would like to know what we are doing. I am very cautious when I mention statistics related to domestic violence, because nobody should lose their life – no one...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, not to lose you, we would like to get you to continue.

Dr. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, could I ask Minister Singh for the hour he has been promising everyone? Anyway, back to gender-based violence. The Family Violence Act was passed under this Government. The Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act was passed under this Government. All the policies I speak of – reintegration and reunification – are going to be done this year. It speaks to children who are in abusive situations and the thinking is that we do not want these children to be institutionalised forever. We want to ensure that they are with families, so our foster care programme has expanded.

We have also added day/night care early childhood facilities to the landscape— first of its kind – because it is complemented by early childhood development, speaking to a population of zero to three years old. That is new. That is innovative. That will morph into where I want to see women take the opportunity since we are going to subsidise them, to set up their home-based care programmes. That is solid work.

The other thing is the collaboration between the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and the Ministry of

Legal Affairs to develop a model – a novel model that my counterparts came to Guyana to see. They looked at it, and they marvelled at what we would have done – the Hope and Justice Centres, one in Lusignan, and the other in Vergenoegen, and, for the first time, a mobile service hub in Region 1. What did they do? Zilch.

When we think of the social ills that we have and the social issues, we cannot ignore trafficking in persons (TIP). We have managed to maintain the Tier 1 status for eight unbroken years, seeing more convictions, and more restitution paid to victims. That is because of the kind of work that we have been doing. We have been working with the Guyana Police Force (GPF). The Cops Squad initiative has seen over 50% of the Guyana Police Force trained to respond to cases of gender-based violence and child abuse. However, we did not stop there. Legal access and legal support – the Government heavily subsidises Legal Aid, as it does ChildLinK and Blossom. You were saying that there is no collaboration with anyone. For the first time, we have child advocacy centres in every region. I know you looked at me. This is because we have continued to work to put all those things in place.

The legal access to which I speak is called the Legal Pro Bono Initiative, and that was started a couple of years ago under this Government. It has been providing legal support to thousands of women at no cost. That is a collaboration between the Guyana Bar Association and the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. Let me tell you a little bit more. The manifesto promises of APNU/AFC in 2015: work closely with local, national, and international bodies to increase women's entrepreneurial activities. You did not do it, but we did it through WIIN. Advocate for lower interest rates at financial institutions for female-headed households and first-time owners. You did not do it, but the PPP/C did it.

9.04 p.m.

I can continue just like that to tell you about more of the broken promises, more of their manifesto promises that were not delivered and that were not at all even touched in their time. Promote gender-friendly banking services, especially in the area of loans to women. The PPP/C did it. Implement a child-tax credit programme for employers. *Budget 2025* does it. This is our legacy. Do you see why I want to embrace it and why you run from yours?

If the Members on that side of the House choose not to support this budget – and I am hearing that – these are the kinds of things that they are saying no to. Go out there and

tell women and go out there and tell the children, which you claim to love, that you are not going to support this budget and starve them of the resources that they will get. Increase government-funded childcare centres to support women: it is now at \$50,000 under the Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA), and we are giving \$100,000 to all women who start their childcare centres. This is the PPP/C. Amend labour laws to incorporate flexy time, which permits women to work from home and promotes part-time employment. You scoff at the 10-day worker programme, but most of the persons employed there – honest work – are women. This was done by the PPP/C, not you, but you promised. Immediately implement a special victims' unit at all police stations: This is where you talked about handling crimes against women. Police stations have them. Minister Benn spoke about them, and Cop Squad was done – PPP/C.

Encourage women to enter non-traditional areas of employment, including auto mechanics, electrical repairs and carpentry: we have done it through BIT. Women are building boats, women are driving heavy-duty machinery, and under the WIIN Programme, the UK City and Guilds will produce women who will be adept in electrical installation, masonry, carpentry and much more. We are doing it. We walk our talk. What do you do? Nothing. There was another manifesto promise. I think I need MP Singh to read this in his big voice. I am going to try. Establish, with assistance from national and international agencies, scholarships for disadvantaged women to pursue tertiary education: free University of Guyana (UG) in 2025. Empower and identify female police officers to support victims of violence: Cop Squad. None of these things are your programmes. I can go on and on. I hope I am still up for that hour that Minister Singh is so generously giving away.

I want to say that the 2025 Budget promises things that we are already doing and will continue to do – inclusivity, equity and empowerment. We have an opportunity to foster a society where citizens feel that their circumstances are being looked at, their needs are being met, their aspirations and ambitions are being encouraged and nurtured, and they are motivated to do more and be more, as we continue on a rapid trajectory of development and growth in this country. I must say that we are not just investing in numbers, we are investing in lives, in futures, in people and in the very fabric of our nation. I thank, again, my colleague, Minister Singh, and I support *Budget 2025*. That is our legacy. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very... tonight to say that the APNU/AFC Coalition's claim for consistency in lighting has been vindicated tonight. [**An Hon. Member:** Blackout.] Blackout. Our Prime Minister, it is your portfolio.

I rise to share my thoughts on *Budget 2025*. We hear, as we do every year, that it is the biggest budget ever, but certainly, no one can think it is the best. I would not hold back. I will not bite my tongue when it comes to this ridiculous budget. The biggest budget, on the most pressing issue of the day, is virtually silent. The people of the region are angry and frustrated. They ask themselves if this is the best the PPP/C can offer. How many times can we bemoan the cost-of-living crisis? This is because the PPP/C finds it in their hearts not to listen.

In my region, the price of basic items like bread is nearly twice the price of it in Georgetown. This is not news. The Government knows that the hinterland areas are faced with the brunt of inflation because of their location. If we put some sort of voucher on the things that can take the goods, like trucks and carts, to the region, it will certainly bring the prices down. Why has the Government not seen it fit to provide vouchers for trucks or canters for the delivery of food, to bring the prices of these goods down? By targeting vehicles transporting food and providing them with access to low-cost fuel through vouchers, it can ensure, at least, that citizens' basic needs are met. The most vulnerable in our society are the ones who suffer dearly when food prices rise.

Low-income Guyanese do not have the luxury of excess resources to cushion the shock of high prices. They are only just getting by. We have seen this Government ignore the cost-of-living crisis, throwing scraps at problems with \$5 million here and \$5 million there. At least \$20 million could be set aside to alleviate the high cost of living. Spending needs to be focused on low-income Guyanese. Even further, those in our hinterland communities must be given priority. I repeat, they must be given priority. On the other hand, when the Government does not provide direct cash grants ... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible.*)] Not the one that you gave. It is a chaotic and demeaning situation. I think many would agree that the PPP/C cannot even do that – share out a little money here and share out a little money there. Long lines have plagued the cash grant distributions in our region and even in Georgetown. Elderly people stand in long lines in the rain and in the sun to receive this grant, only to be told that their names are not on that list. In addition to that, teachers also lined up and were told they had to go to some other location to receive their cheques.

I was happy when I heard that pensioners will be given their \$100,000 grants but some of us sitting in this National Assembly have not received ours as yet. Pensioners could have been given their moneys at the same time when they were receiving their vouchers. Public Servant also could have been given their money in addition to their salaries. This would have removed the necessity for long lines, lines that follow them to the bank. The Government is proud to say that 90,000 people have received their cheques but through these measures, 150,000 could not have been paid. We made these proposals, but the Government stubbornly adheres to....Mr. Speaker, let me be frank with you. This is common sense. If this Government cannot even give away a little money ...You could recall. Mr. Speaker, about two years ago, when we talked about the budget and this population, we proposed to this Government that every family receive at least \$1 million. That was two years ago, not even last year, but this year, they came up with a little cash grant.

When it comes to more complex issues, developing regional agriculture, this same Minister of Agriculture just chucked off a truckload of plants at the playfield at Mahdia and the people had a mad scramble. It was nothing that was systematic or nothing that was properly planned. It took some officers in the region to just rush out and share some plants. That is the plan that the Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, can think about for agriculture in Region 8. I think what could have been done was provide these farmers with a little fertiliser so that they could grow crops and have some ease in the food crisis.

I want to raise another issue that is close to my heart. We must take education more seriously. This Government has been spending more and more, with worse and worse results. How is it that Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Mathematics pass rates has fallen from 50% under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) to 31%, as we speak? Let me tell you why. This Government has failed to put some more resources in the hands of competent teachers who can deliver the work. What they have done is just pull a few comrades here and there and promise them some allowance here and some allowance there. That is not what teachers need in Region 8. You need to increase their salaries substantially. Pay the teachers proper salaries and give them consistent training. This Government seems to be focusing only on building schools. I welcome schools. You build schools, but you do not put competent people there to work.

Guyana, for the *Hansard* record, can say how teachers are paid. Since 2024, some questions have been asked of the Hon. Minister of Education, and I think we are still awaiting the receipt of some answers. We still are awaiting the photocopies of the last set of answers that should have been given to this National Assembly.

9.19 p.m.

On page 105 of the 2025 Budget Speech, paragraph 5.3, under selected economic indicators, we saw from 2020-2024, under the PPP/C students' how matriculation has declined. This is how the PPP/C show maladministration of the PPP rule. One only has to remember 2024 where there were three memorandums sent to teachers by the Ministry of Education to schools. Why? They wanted to have a parade on the road, a street carnival. This is their emphasis rather than allowing the learners to be properly taught. Education must not merely be used for those on the Coast but those in my region must also benefit. I am not against the construction of schools again and, I underscore, I am not against the construction of schools; but it must not be at the expense of our learners. Let us pay the teachers proper salaries. Education must be equal across the board for both people on the Coast and in the Hinterlands.

I want to close on the issue of the development of new industries and jobs. We have the rainforest here and I think we can invest some more money. The sum of approximately \$50 million can be placed at the University of Guyana (UG) to encourage research into medicinal plants and other things that help our rainforest. By investing in research development, and by carrying out surveys and assessments, we can open new opportunities to grow our economy. I believe in the University of Guyana. We believe in the University of Guyana. We also believe that \$10 billion more can be put for research. I want to increase that from \$50 million to \$10 billion.

We need a Budget that addresses cost of living and not just ignore it. We need a Budget that focuses on both education and infrastructure. This is not a good Budget. Thankfully, this will be the last of the PPP/C's Budget. As the peoples' representative of Region 8, coupled with the fact that I am not in receipt of my \$100,000 grant, I can in no way support this Budget unless that comes through. Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member Mr. Sinclair. I like you, plea for my \$100,000 and I registered right here. Hon. Members, let us welcome the Hon. Member, Minister in the Ministry of Public Works, Mr. Deodat Indar.

Minister in the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Thank you, very much. As they say the night is old, but I just want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to give my contributions on this Budget of 2025 that is put forward by the PPP/C's Government. I sat for four days from Friday to now and I have heard almost everything about what this Budget can do and from the Opposition side what it did not do. From Friday to the end of today... **[Mr. Mahipaul: (Inaudible)]** Just couple more hours to midnight Mr. Mahipaul; Mathematics is not hard.

Starting from the Opposition's side was Ms. Fernandes who said something that really offended me. It really offended me. Young people, I believe if you are a Parliamentarian, you must do research and you must be able to bring facts to an argument. This is an honourable House and persons debating should have some facts. I say that her presentation offended me for one single point, when the Hon. Member said about the small jobs and persons working in the hotels as cleaners and so on. I know my colleague, Ms. Oneidge Walrond, answered it at length, but I wanted to put a personal side to it. I came from 47 New Road, Vreed-en-Hoop. I was born and raised there. My mother was a single parent. My father left when I was two years old. She was a Tactical Service Unit (TSU) rank. Apart from that job, she did cleaning work. She was a housekeeper. She went and pressed peoples' clothes with dignity, cleaned their place and cooked to take care of me and my other siblings.

Today, I stand in this honourable House as a Member of the President's Cabinet and as a member of the PPP/C's side of the House to defend, to defend and to defend people who work hard for an honest living. It is a front to all Guyanese who go and toil with their hands to make an honest living for persons who are supposed to be young and supposed to be respectful to disrespect their hard work. That is not service to Guyanese; that is disrespect to Guyanese and I took umbrage to it. I feel obligated to say that because my mother, rest her soul in peace, worked her bones to bring us up, honestly. I wanted to respond to that.

As I am on that, I want to say that the Hon. Member after her was Mr. Duncan. The hon. Member spoke about a whole host of things including cash grant. The Hon. Member said that the cash grant cannot be delivered. In this Budget, \$60 billion will go to 600,000 people; every single Guyanese will get their money and they will get that money from the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. It is not the APNU; not the hecklers over there, who spent out Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCCA) money to travel and all sort of things – not those people. It is the PPP/C who will

give and make sure that they put provisions in the Budget to give all Guyanese. It seems that my comments, in this very old aspect of the night, have caused some shivers over there. They are quarrelling a lot, please. The Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, talked about job losses and Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) being closed down. I know that the Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh in his closing will deal with that. I want to say, when you are speaking about jobs in Guyana, it is the generation of jobs that come from economic growth and expansion. This did not happen under the APNU. What happened under the APNU is a different story. It is marked by people being fired day in-day out, day in-day out. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, spoke about agriculture and all sort of things about Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). Mr. Ramjattan spoke about GuySuCo and firing...Rightsizing and all these things about GuySuCo. They were the ones who put GuySuCo out of work.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share a story with you and all of the people who will listen and who will see this commentary. I walk every part of this country as humanly possible. I walk with these two feet street by street and do work. I came across a woman in Zeelugt North two years ago. Her husband was sitting on the step. I sat there with two of my colleagues in the blazing sun. We were walking house to house. I saw the woman and I was talking to her but she was not paying me no mind; but she was cleaning white belly shrimps. I decided to walk out of the house and come out of the yard. Then, my colleague said, Minister, the woman is picking shrimps because that is her job. I said you are joking; I walked back in. I go and asked the lady, is this what you do for a living? She said, yes. I said, what is your name? She said, Ms. Kemraj. I said, how much of that you do per day? She had this butter bowl and she picked the shrimps and said she is paid \$100 to pick a butter bowl. I said, how much of that can you do for a day? She said, 14. That is \$1,400 she is working to pick shrimps. I said, is that your husband? She said, yes. I said, what does your husband do for work? She said, he does not work. I said, he does not work. She said, no; he was fired by GuySuCo. When people come to this House and talk about closing, downsizing and rightsizing, those are the real stories. That is not that lady's story; that story is cascaded across the country. Everywhere you go, you find stories such as that of how they have destroyed people's lives. You can heckle as much as you want, but the fact of the matter is that you destroyed people's lives.

The other matter that I want to raise is the philosophy of Wales. [*Heckling*] oh, sure man, the Wales area. When you went into Wales, a couple of years ago it was a ghost town.

Mr. Mahipaul trod over there. The sugar estate was mangled iron with nothing happening there. There were bush and rats taking over the fields – nothing happened there. The PPP/C Government came into power and put a power plant over there that all of you are cursing every day. Now, when you go there to try to buy land, try to get waterfront, try to build anything you go there the land prices have gone up. Do you know why? It is because of the philosophy of the people that we bring investment into the areas where all of you abandoned. You have abandoned them and you have left them to rot. It hurts when people speak about it. [Mr.

Duncan: Blackout.] Now, as you are heckling blackout, let me get to that. That is the ultimate political football, that is the political football. This morning, we were relegated and regaled by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. He is not here. He is never here because when he speaks he leaves.

When they took Office in 2015, a couple of months in, one full year in 2016; when you check the records of what we collected from GPL, when we went to GPL's revenue at the time was \$33 billion. The Government owed GPL \$13 billion of the \$33 billion per annum, one-third of the money they cannot pay GPL. They have left GPL with broken knees. They have done nothing.

9.34 p.m.

They have done nothing – not one single feed-out they have built. One engine they put in; it worked for six months and it broke the crankshaft. They come in here and they accuse us by saying, "Oh, the gas-to-energy is not good, the power ship is not good." Do you know what? We have built back the generation capacity to 269 megawatts of power. We picked it up with 99 megawatts. They left it to nothing – next to nothing. They cannot hear the truth. Once you see them behaving like that, Mr. Speaker, it is hurting them because that is the fact.

From 2016 to 2020, fuel prices were next to nothing. A barrel of oil went to \$28 – a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) was more expensive than a barrel of oil under their tenure. For the whole five years, they were in there, the average price they paid for a barrel of fuel was \$53. Guyana Power and Light Incorporated was making reserves. Do you know what they did with the reserves? Nothing. What did they do? They did not even reduce the price to people. They put value-added tax (VAT) on it and taxed the people more. They cannot handle it. We came into Government; fuel prices went to \$104 for a barrel of oil. For every \$100 GPL brings in, \$0.91¢ goes into fuel. You have to run an entire company by \$0.09¢cents. How do you do that?

You cannot do it. What have we done? Now, this is what we are doing to fix the sector. They do not like it because we are doing the right thing. We are monetising gas. We do not wait for the Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, to tell us that we need to monetise gas. We are building a 300-megawatt plant. We are building another 250-megawatt plant that is already out to tender. We do not wait for anybody to come and give us advice that he/she needs.

Are you telling me that we need to monetise gas now? Since we were in the Opposition, we made sure that we put in the manifesto the monetisation of gas. We have contracted a company to build a natural gas plant to feed the generation and you are coming here now, at this late hour, to tell us about the monetisation of gas? Come on, man. I find that the hero syndrome is coming back into the House. The hero syndrome is the Fireman who lights the place on fire, takes the hose, tries to out it and calls himself a hero in the process. I find that happening everywhere in the Opposition. They did all of the worthlessness when they were in Government and now they come here with fancy plans – “Oh, we are going to fix this, we are going to fix that and we are going to come back Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo).”

Imagine, they are so bankrupt for ideas. Their government was marred... The APNU/AFC, and not forgetting that bunch, the AFC too; are marred by *bankruptcy* for ideas. They do not have any. That is why a man could come now and say he wants to start back GuySuCo. He has no new idea. That is like a dog trying to eat back his vomit. Listen, their Administration – some of them cannot sit and take it – was marred by bullying, *regressiveness* and by stagnation. You stifled growth. You taxed everything under the sun. Incompetence was the height of it under their management. It is not how much money you have; it is how you use the little that you have. They were collecting \$90 billion more in taxes and did nothing with it. Do you know what \$90 billion could do? The sum of \$33 billion is building 121 kilometres of roads in the hinterland. The sum of \$90 billion could have built 333 kilometres. Do you know what they did? Zero. They sat there and thought that they are some geniuses with all the answers in the corner. They think that we do not understand what they are about. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Minister, let me appeal to the House to give you an opportunity for me to hear you because it is becoming very ructious. You must be touching on a lot of nerves.

Mr. Indar: For four days, I heard insipid and cantankerous presentations by those on the other side. For four days, I have heard them. These are people who tried to steal our country in front of the world and they are telling you about democracy. They are telling you about honesty and truth. Those are the folks over there. These – you call miscreants and *ca-va-ca-mites*. Those are what characterise the Opposition and they cannot handle it. They cannot. They are bare-faced and brazen. They come and they spread all sorts of mistruths. They think this country has people with goldfish memory, whereby the time they flick up and flick down their memories are gone but, no, Guyanese people remember things. We have memories such as elephants. We remember things and we remember all those things that all of you did. We will remind the population about everything that you did to them – every single thing that you did to them.

This is my personal experience and I had no time with politics. I remember, in 2015, I was in the private sector when they won the Elections in 2015 and I went outside, watched the sky and the place got dark – dark. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that darkness stalked this land for five years. It was blighted. I can tell you, it was so blighted that the fish did not even bite. Ask the artisanal fishers, the fish stopped biting hooks – that is how blighted the place was under their Government. What do you come here to tell us about? They cannot handle it. *[Heckling]* Hold on, I am coming for all of you just now.

I saw a *TikTok* video going around with the Opposition. It started with my good friend, the Opposition Chief Whip saying, “did you see anything good in the Budget?” – “No. I did not see anything good.” They are like children with a toy plane. It was so childish. They are saying that they did not see nothing good in this Budget. You have a threshold moving now to \$130,000 tax-free – 100,000 Guyanese of all walks of life will benefit from that and you do not see anything good. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson this morning talked about him not seeing anything good either. The problem with him and the rest of them is that they are always looking to London and going to Tokyo. That is the problem with them – they do not see right. They have people like them who are the older folks over there leading that crew. The boat is going in a direction but the captain is sailing. All of them – the entire Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what lost me many years ago? I will tell you what lost me. It was when an entire government – the collective wisdom of an entire government – looked children in their eyes and said, “I am not giving you the

money to buy your haversack. I am not giving you the money to buy the shoes, neither the crayon nor the Crayola." The collective wisdom of an entire government. Imagine the value system. What will they do to us? The People's Progressive Party/ Civic put back the cash grant. It is now \$50,000 plus \$5,000 – \$55,000 – for every child. Do you know what? We will be remembered for it. Do not believe parents forget all of you because that money comes in good. As I said, I do not sit like the rest of them – like armchair generals – and hear reports. I am on the ground and people are telling me what they did to them.

I heard somebody whispering something about the cost of living and liveable wage. My good friend, Hon. Member Mr. Figueira talked about liveable wage. What is a liveable wage? I want to ask him. Is it a million dollars? Is it a liveable wage for somebody like Hon. Mr. Duncan sporting all the time, all over the place? Is that what a liveable wage is? A liveable wage – you need to tell us what a liveable wage is because all the time we have been putting money in the hands of people. We put money in people's hands – you took it away. We put it in. Let us discuss the cost of living here. I am on the floor now. You had your chance and you messed it up. The cost of living is not a factor that is only internally influenced and that is what they do not understand or they choose not to understand.

The United States of America just had elections. They had a big election and one of the biggest things to the central theme of the election was the cost of living. It is not like Guyana alone has it – every person and every country who are connected in this global trade suffer from it. We have done what matters. We have changed the freight rate to make sure that it is pre-pandemic levels so that when a man brings in a good – if it is a bottle of water or whatever – it is taxed lower, so that it does not transfer into the hands of the consumer. That is what these people do not understand. What we can do internally, we do.

The agricultural sector puts all sorts of incentives in the hands of farmers to bring down their cost of production so that when it goes into the markets, those such as the Hon. Opposition Leader and my friend, Hon. Mr. Mahipaul, who went to Parika Market the other day just to save face, would not meet anybody name Lila. I was the man who went and... When there was the fire at Parika, I was there – in the fire – with the people, helping them rebuild their market and making sure that all who had space got back their space. Do not come here and feed the honourable House Nancy stories. Do not come and feed any Nancy story here. We deal with

people, we know the people and we walk on the ground with them.

Cost of living – if you look at how ships operate, most of the places that they come from are in the far east in places such as Singapore, Taiwan, on the southern side of China and all of the ports there. They come through the Suez Canal. The Suez Canal had problems. Apart from the war in Ukraine and Russia, the Suez Canal had problems. The Panama Canal had droughts. For all the years that we have been in government, there has always been something internationally that disrupted global trade. Guyana is not an island separated from the rest of the world – we are connected. The ships went down the bottom of Africa, came up and went to the Netherlands, adding nine and a half days to the trip – 6,500 kilometres to the trip. It costs more. When the goods land in any country that it is going to, it will go up. That is what these people do. They do not understand and they do not even check to research. Mr. Speaker... [Mr. McCoy: They do not know.] Eh? They do not know. When the Suez Canal was blocked and they had all of them fighting down there, it affected 12% of global trade. Do you know what that means? Do you know what 12% of global trade? [Mr. McCoy: Sherod Canal] Sherod Canal.

I want to come to the gas-to-energy project because I believe that the Opposition, accused you of not doing anything and when you do it or when you do not do it, they accuse you of non-action too. That is what they do. An hour ago, a number of feed-outs went out in the country but yet, they do not want to vote for the Budget for the \$88 billion to fix the problem. They do not want to vote for it to fix the problem, but they are cursing you about the blackout. They are cursing you about the blackout but the very thing that you want the money to fix – they do not want to vote for it. That is to show... I cannot use the word 'hypocrisy', but the one-sidedness of them. They do not want to vote for the money, but hey, you have to fix the problem.

I do not know if the Opposition think you just attaches two wires and get the problem fixed. It does not work like that. You have to invest heavily and that is what we are doing. We are investing in transmissions, new substations and new plants to fix the problem. That is what they have never done. They could not comprehend the large, massive project of a gas-to-energy project. They do not understand it so they curse it. I have to respond to this because I was part of it.

9.49 p.m.

I heard my brother from Region 2, the Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, came to the microphone and spoke of how they will

reform the oil and gas sector, put this and that on the Petroleum Commission. Please, check the records of this very Parliament, a Petroleum Commission Bill came from the APNU/AFC when the Hon. Member, Mr. Trotman, was Minister then. The document was a 28-page document and it was the worst piece of legislation they ever put together on the face of the earth. It concentrated all of the power in the Minister of Natural Resources making him a super-minister. It was such a bad piece of legislation that they sent it in the Special Select Committee. It was left there and died a natural death. Now, you come here as if the Petroleum Commission is a new thing. It was done, tried and tested by you and you could not get it done. The Hon. Member brought up the matter as if it is some fresh idea but they must check their own records to see what is in there. I recall at the time, I was President of the Chamber of Commerce, I went all over the country and told everybody how bad the piece of legislation was that they put in the Parliament. That is how bad it was.

Another thing I want to talk about is what Hon. Member Mr. Patterson said. The Hon. Member spoke about bringing some London Ring sort of road, introduce light rail and he is going to introduce some township that connects this one to the other. Do you know what bothers me about this? The Hon. Member was the Minister of Public Infrastructure and never once said those things. **[Bishop Edghill:** No.] Bishop Edghill, never once has he said these things in public or in private. He has never said anything. Bishop Edghill, the Hon. Member, came and spoke at length about public works. Do you know what? These days, the Opposition's whole strategy is to promise more and deliver less or over-promise and under-deliver – that is what they are doing. They come and they promised about light rails when we have been doing our options on light rail in our Ministry for a while now. We do not need the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, to come and do that. If Mr. Patterson wants to build a road, we have built all of the roads already. There is nothing left for him to build. We built all the stellings. We have built all the bridges – the Kurupukari bridge is the only one left and we are already dealing with that. We have built all of the airports and we are extending the current one. There is nothing for him to build. There is nothing for them to build. All of the schools we have built and we are building more. The hospitals, Dr. Frank Anthony was here, were built. What are you going to promise the people when we have already built them? All of the drainage and irrigation structures Agriculture has been building. There is nothing for them to promise. Do you know what they are going to do? They would do, oh, you give \$100,000; we are going to give \$400,000. That will be their promise and they cannot deliver

it to people because they have a notorious track record of not delivering anything that they promised people. It is like a lying boyfriend. Hon. Member Dr. Singh, it is like having a lying boyfriend who makes promises all the time and cannot deliver anything. They are akin to a lying boyfriend or girlfriend.

I want to say that when a Member, Mr. Patterson, comes... I take umbrage to what he said, because it is as if the Hon. Member is telling us that we are not doing any work. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something, I checked the records, Minister Dr. Singhs put 4,000 roads were completed in his Speech. When we added the ones that are currently being done to the ones that are done by the force account unit, it accounts for 8,208 roads – 8,208 roads – everywhere. Since the dawn of this Republic, we have never built that many. When you said that you are going to New Amsterdam to build roads, all are built. When you go to Bartica, if you go to Bidrabu, Dog Point, the access road to the airport everything is built. If you are to go to Mahdia, it would be the same thing. Even in Georgetown, the Mayor and City Council (MCC) they control, they did not build any road. They did not put even a black cent into building roads. The Ministry of Public Works has to do them. The Ministry of Public Works put over \$15 billion for the last four years into building all the roads in the city and all the connections for them to come up here and make promises when they have nothing to promise. We have done all the work and the country saw that. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** People will cut the

same piece and put it all over.] Well, hear this, if there was none that was not done, this year, \$53 billion in the Budget for miscellaneous and urban roads will get it done. By the time you go to campaign, you will be walking on roads that Minister Indar or Minister Bishop Edghill built. Ms. Annette Ferguson was in the South Ruimveldt walking on the road... **[Ms. Ferguson:** I have all right to walk anywhere and drive anywhere.] ...that the force account built. When the same Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo went in the community and asked...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will need an extension. Let me caution the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson. The Hon. Member is now being, I do not know, unusual, unusually disruptive by putting on her microphone and shouting in it. The next time, I will put her out. Not for tonight, but when it matters on Friday.

Ms. Ferguson: I am sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Do not apologise. Go ahead, Hon. Member Minister.

Ms. Teixeria: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given a five-minute extension to conclude his statement. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Minister Indar, you may proceed.

Mr. Indar: Thank you, very much. Mr. Speaker, when they do that, my train of thought gets cut but, never mind, I have more material to deal with them. I heard from one of the Members over there who claims to be a finance expert, gave jumbie Mathematics and jumbie finance in her speech... I will show you. Our country's in-depthness is about \$5.993 billion. For some, it might seem like a lot but, that is not even a project in another country. It is not even one single project in a country. For everybody who is conservative harpers who say, oh, we have \$5.93 billion in debt, well, it is a fraction of what we call our GDP.

In 2020, it was 47% and, at the end of 2024, as reported by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, it was 24.3%, which is the lowest in the entire world. Do you know what gets me? The Opposition have belly. Colloquially, as one would talk, *they got belly* to come to this Parliament and find a fault about the debt to GDP ratio, which is the lowest in the world and still find something bad about it. *They got belly*. It is either *they got belly* or they are playing stupid. Is 'stupid' a bad word? Is 'stupid' one of the words I cannot use? **[Mr. Mahipaul:** You cannot describe us as that.] I say that the argument is stupid.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that in this Budget, I have not gone through the sectors that I labour in with the Prime Minister neither with Bishop Edghill in public works. I have not even touched that because I will spend all day going through those. I want to say that the Budget, at a glance, speaks about some measures. These measures are there to stimulate certain parts of the economy and to deal with certain strata of society that need help, which we saw, we promised. We are now delivering those. Do you see anything? They said they do not see anything good in the part-time jobs. I know a lot of these people and when I go on the road, I see these women working hard to get their money so they can add to the income of their household and the Opposition said they do not see nothing good about that. They are ridiculing thousands of people for the hard-earned money that people worked for. They see nothing good about that by increasing the old-age pension, they do not see... I work at Freedom House from time to time on a Thursday and the number of folks who come in there to talk about

issues about the pension and how they would like extra money to deal with things. The Government, our Government, my Government have doubled it and they are saying they see nothing good about that.

Public assistance – everywhere I go around the country, there is somebody who always has some issue that puts him in the category to be qualified for public assistance. Look, we are now paying \$22,000 for that, which benefits over 40,000 people of all creeds of life and they are saying that they cannot see anything good about that. If you cannot see anything good about things such as that which help people who struggled to build this country with their hands and their feet, then something is wrong with you. There is something wrong with them if they cannot see anything good about that.

Mr. Speaker, I am telling you, it questions the value system. Now, all of the arguments that I heard from the Opposition over the past four days, one would think might be the symptoms of influenza but if ever, by God or some work of a miracle, they find themselves in Government, it will become a plague. It will no longer be influenza; it will become a plague. Their value system is just wrong. They do not connect to people. They do not connect to poor people. They cannot empathise with people. They cannot put their shoes on people's feet to understand their problems. That is why they could say that they do not see anything good in this Budget. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** How will we put our shoes in people's foot?] Your foot in people's shoes. You cannot empathise with people; you can sympathise and say I am sorry for you and so on. Do you know something? You do not understand what people are going through and that is the problem with them. It questions the value system and it makes them unworthy to govern a nation such as ours.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say one last thing before I go. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** Your time is up.] Listen, I am on the floor. When you were on the floor, I allowed you to speak. I want to say one last thing before I leave this podium and it is the collective of everything that we have put together as measures and all of the provisions in every ministry. Everything spent is surrounding people. Our business is people. It is to serve people. Everything – whether it is education, infrastructure, health or whatever circles around it – is the people. That is what this Budget is delivering. It is delivering for people from every walk of life and in every area of their lives. That is what this Budget is.

I want to thank the Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, who laboured and laboured; the staff who laboured and laboured to put this

Budget forward on behalf of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government so that we may be able to continue the transformative work that we have been doing since 2020. God bless you. God bless all of you. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Minister Indar. Now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon.

Mr. Ramkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most distinct and distinguished honour is now conferred onto me to make my contributions to Budget Debate 2025 under the theme: *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*, presented by the Hon. Dr. Ashi Kumar Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibilities of Finance and the Public Service. Guyana is, indeed, very proud of all the offices within the Government, departments and ministries for the services they have rendered for the preparations of this \$1.382 billion Budget.

Mr. Speaker, before I make my substantive contributions to this debate, I wish to first thank you, Sir, for the warm welcome you have extended to me and the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarah Browne, when we returned to this National Assembly. The entire Guyanese population knows and the world knows that in all the cases that the Opposition brought before the courts of this country they have lost. There is no case that they brought against our Government or our Party and won. Guyanese must know that these very people sitting in the Opposition benches went to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to determine whether 33 is greater than 32. People who are proud of their past will never be ashamed of it. The Opposition want the people of this country to believe that the history of governance began only in 1992 or from 1992.

10.04 p.m.

The Opposition, the PNC, pauperised this country and ruled this country from 1964 to 1992. From 2011 to 2015 they had the majority in this National Assembly and stymied all the developmental projects that the Government had at that time. Again, from 2015 to 2020 they ruled the country. We know how to count good over here. That makes it a total of 38 years. Every year, every minute, every second, and every hour that the People's Progressive Party/Civic spent in Government, we are proud of it. We can stand any time, any forum, anywhere in the world to defend our track record. We do not hide from it. From the Opposition, when they speak, they only want this country and the world to believe that governance started from 2015, or from 1992 rather. We do not run from our track record.

As of 2025, our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh reported, is somewhere around US\$24.5 billion and our national debt is around US\$7.6 billion. As the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, said just now, this will give us 24.5% of GDP to the debt ratio, which is indeed the lowest in the world. When we reflect back to what we inherited in 1992, we inherited a GDP of US\$374 million and a debt of US\$2.1 billion. That gives us the debt ratio at 900%. You come to this honourable House, Members of the Opposition, and try to lecture us about inflation. Go back to the records of the 1990s, the 1980s, the 1960s and the 1970s. The highest recorded inflation rate in this country is in 1991; by all conservative estimates it was around 85% – and you, the Hon. Members of the Opposition, come to tell us about the economy and managing of economy. The Hon. Mr. Christopher Jones asked us yesterday to present evidence of the rigging of elections. I am saying it is a matter and a question of fact – we have the evidence here. I can lay it over.

[The Hon. Member displayed documents.]

In 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985, they rigged the elections. The referendum of 1978 they rigged. Here is a report from Telegram 1032 From the Embassy in Guyana to the Department of State, dated the 12th July, 1973, Subject: Guyana Election – Forecast. It reads here, there are two concerns.

“Second, and more important, there is problem of rigging. It is taken for granted that ruling People's National Congress (PNC) will engage in various irregular practices such as ballot box switching and manipulation of postal and overseas voting.”

This, here, is the evidence. This is the Human Rights Watch reports; we can lay them over. The former President of the United States of America, Mr. Jimmy Carter, noted in his book, *Beyond the White House*, that the most personal danger he felt after leaving the White House was in Guyana in 1992. When the PNC realised, the Opposition realised, that they were losing the elections they unleashed mobs in Georgetown. It was Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte from the PNC, the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the PNC, who said, ‘slow fire, more fire’. That was the Opposition's slogan. They did not leave it as a slogan.

In 2020, they attempted to rig the elections. Hear their excuse; listen to the excuse, but *y'all deh* in Government. There is something called inchoate crimes. If you attempt to create a crime, it is a crime. A crime is a crime. They attempted to rig the elections in the most transparent manner,

using bed sheets and spreadsheets; bed sheets and spreadsheets they used. It must be noted that almost 100 countries across the world condemned them for their actions. They chased, harassed, and intimidated the elections observers. The Carter Center, all elections observers were chased out of this country. That is the record and that is what we must remind the Guyanese people about.

The Hon. Mr. Christopher Jones asked about evidence. Now, if he has any evidence that they won the 2020 General and Regional Elections, it will be the Statements of Poll (SoPs). Where are the SoPs of 2020? We want to see them. Former President Abraham Lincoln once said:

“Commitment is what transforms a promise into reality...”

And commitment defines character. We had widespread consultation in this country, and we drafted our Manifesto. We went to the electorate in 2020, and on the basis of that Manifesto, which reflects our commitment, the people of this country elected us. We are proud, after so many years, from 2020 to 2025, we are in Government. We are proud of all our records – everything we planned, everything we committed we have achieved them; we have served the people. We can watch the people of this country with a straight eye and say that we ‘tell you we will do this’, and we are here, and we did it. This is what defines the PPP/C and it is the opposite that defines the Members on the Opposition. Each of our budgets is aimed at fulfilling these promises. Effective 1st October, 2020, we promised and reversed all those draconian taxes and fees that they unleashed and imposed on the backs of the Guyanese people. We promised that and we delivered it. We promised the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarships and we delivered them. We promised the house lots and we delivered them. We promised free university education – Guyana education, tuition-free – and we delivered it.

The stories of the people bring the message because it is the people who have to elect the government. There is a retrenched sugar worker of Wales, who lives in Vriesland. Listen to his story. He said, when the estates were closed, it was misery all over; people *dem bin ah* run helter-skelter; there were no jobs; we had to stop our children out of *de* schools; we had to take them out of *de* schools. They took away the cash grant. That is a fact. The cash grant was taken away. We had to go to the courts. They said we had to go to the courts to get the severance. That reflects the issues, the challenges, the difficulties that almost 28,000 Guyanese encountered in this country. That person is now employed as

a Carpenter under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration and is earning over \$15,000 per day. His wife is employed as a National Pathway Worker (NPW) and she is now on the Nursing Assistant programme, that will increase her creditworthiness and her ability to earn more money. That is the story of the people of this country.

There was a single mother in the community I came from – Zeeburg. She went to the seawall, and dried shrimp. She dried shrimp for 15 years, and eight of her children have graduated from different universities across this world. I will tell you that one of those children is now serving as a Parliamentary Secretary in this Government. The Hon. Member Mr. Sherod Duncan boasted about his record at the University of Guyana. I am saying that I did a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from the University of Guyana. I can lay my certificate anywhere in this world. I can post it, and I can show the world that I had no failed grades. My Grade Point Average (GPA) was 3.66. I came from a poor family. I want any one of the Hon. Members to present their certificates before the Guyanese public to prove their credentials. [Ms. Ferguson: (Inaudible)] I want you to do that as well, Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson. In 2015, they erected massive billboards across the length and breadth of this country, promising jobs to the youths. Here it is.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

They promised jobs for the youths and the people of this country. When confronted about the plans for jobs, Brigadier (Ret’d) Granger said, go and sell plantain chips and cook-up-riice. That represents the ideology, that represents the vision that they have for the people of this country. This is 2025 and the elections are around the corner. Do you know what will be popular now? The Opposition will come with a bunch of fake promises. They are on a rampage right now, presenting fake promises to the people of this country. Here are their fake promises. They are on it again. They said they would give a \$50,000 stipend to every student that studies at different universities and technical institutes. They were the very ones who removed the cash grants from the children of this country. They are promising a tax-free threshold of \$400,000 and all sorts of promises *y’all* going back to again.

The Opposition claims that successive budgets presented by this Administration contain nothing transformational; it has nothing transformational. If their definition of transformational is this, D’Urbain Park, then I pity them. I pity them because this is their record. This is what they are proud of. This is their legacy, and Guyanese must see and remember their legacy. They are telling the people of this

country that we did nothing or that we are doing nothing. The Demerara Harbour Bridge will be toll-free. Will the people of Guyana not benefit from that? The six state-of-the-art hospitals that will be built across the length and breadth of Guyana, will that not transform the health sector? If that does not, then I do not know what will. They speak about inflation. Ask them about their strategy – if they have any or if they had any.

They have promised again – listen to the promise – cheap cooking gas. Ask them how they will deliver that to the Guyanese people. The gas-to-energy project is the mechanism, is the way in which you can produce cheap cooking gas. [Bishop Edghill: *Yuh gat* to bring the gas ashore.] *Yuh gat* to bring *de* gas to *de* shore; that is right. In order for you to do that, you have to have a project in mind. You are cursing the same project and now you are going for that project; you are campaigning on that project. The gas-to-energy project will slash, Hon. Ms. Ferguson. It will slash the cost of cooking gas and electricity by half. It will slash it by half and put in the hands of Guyanese people US\$138 million annually.

The Opposition also argues that the Mandela Avenue to Eccles four-lane highway, the Heroes Highway, the Eccles to Great Diamond interlink road, the Great Diamond extension four-lane road, the Mahaica to Georgetown road, the Crane to Schoonord road and all the thousands of roads that we have built or rehabilitated will bring no relief, no benefit to the people of this country. What an irrelevant, visionless Opposition we have.

Mr. Speaker: This is a good time to take a motion for an extension for you.

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to ask for the Hon. Member to be given five minutes to conclude his statement.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Ramkissoon: Thank you very much, Sir. The Leader of the Opposition said only one positive thing he heard in the Budget, and that is the production of soya bean and corn. Naturally, we can only hear what we listen to and we can only know what we learn. If the Leader of the Opposition was not listening, it is not our fault. If he *don't* learn, then he will not know. Therefore, he knows nothing about the Budget. [Bishop Edghill: He *don't* know that he *don't* know.] He *don't* know that he *don't* know. That is the tragedy of our country. The People's Progressive Party/Civic has undertaken the expansion of agriculture. This did not

happen by magic. Let us address the one thing that he heard. It did not happen by magic because in 2024, \$97.6 billion was allocated to the sector, and in this Budget \$104 billion is allocated.

10.19 p.m.

We reversed all of the Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) charges, pesticide taxes, you name it – fertilizers and everything we did. We had what is the public-private partnership (PPP) in the sector – 12,000 acres of soybean were planted; 25,000 acres for this year. This is how we work. It does not happen by magic. This is how we work – we have very strong work ethics. When they were confronted on the agriculture sector, Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger said that is private business. So, if it was private business, then it could not have happened this way. One of the Parliamentarians from the APNU/AFC, I think it was the Hon. Mr. Christopher Jones, referred to the sugar workers as bloodsuckers. Sugar workers, like everyone else, toiled to build this nation and we are proud of that.

Let me tell you something, Sir, they are accustomed to the principle of *neemakaram*. When they were in Government, you look back at the sugar levy from 1974 and look at all of the successive budgets, the source of their funding came from the sugar levy. To the Hon. Members on the opposite side of this House, this PPP/C Government will continue to support the sugar workers and the industry to make it viable, because we cannot be ungrateful to the people who built this nation. No Guyanese who built this nation can any sensible government be ungrateful to them. The Opposition is coming, walking, and skirting themselves around as if they care for the people of this country. They accuse us of drafting budgets for friends and families and favourites. The sum of \$11 billion allocated for the 11,286 Pathway Workers – yes, Sir, we accept the acquisition – they are our friends, families and favourites, and we have no apologies for that.

The budgetary sum of \$13.4 billion, which seeks to abolish tuition from the University of Guyana in which 11,000 students will benefit, those students are our friends, favourites and our families. Every Guyanese, 18 years and over, who will receive that \$100,000 cash grant, they are our friends, they are our families, and they are our favourites, and we are proud of that. Could I remind the Opposition, when they were in Government, the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, you were a recipient of the scholarship too that was assigned only to government ministers, their friends and cronies. Today, 29,000 people, after five years, Guyanese, will benefit from the GOAL scholarship

programme; and we are proud to say that those 29,000 people represent our friends, families and favourites.

The political entity called the PNC, the APNU, or whatever you call them, are at it again. They are coming to make fake promises. Sir, elections are around the corner. No going to the Seven Ponds, lighting candles, invoking ‘Kabaka’, and praying prostrate before him will make you win any elections. You have to go to the people; you have to seek a mandate from the people; you have to work for the people; and you have to respect their mandate. That is how you can go in government. We over here have been doing that from day one. We have been at the people; every time we go to the people, and we will continue to go to the people. You cannot go to the people because you know why. You did nothing for them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramkissoo. Hon. Prime Minister.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That this National Assembly stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. on Thursday, 30th January, 2025.”]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we adjourn the National Assembly to 10:00 a.m. tomorrow.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we adjourn to 10:00 a.m. tomorrow. Have a safe journey home.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.24 p.m.