

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer my support for the 2017 National Budget under the theme, BUILDING A DIVERSIFIED, GREEN ECONOMY: DELIVERING THE GOOD LIFE TO ALL GUYANESE. I would like to thank the Hon. Winston Jordan, Minister of Finance and his hardworking team for delivering the third Budget of the Coalition Government in just 18 months.

It is an early Budget, which gives us the chance to hit the ground running at the start of 2017; and against the backdrop of a global growth slowdown, IT IS CREATIVE ... which will serve Guyana well, since it is critically important for us to pursue policies that will boost economic growth and improve the lives of ordinary Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that this Budget of \$250B caters for everyone – evenly distributing responsibility and benefits while remaining focused in the pursuit of a GREEN ECONOMY. Mr. Speaker, with my 30 minutes speaking time I will proceed to highlight a few of

the interventions that will create major and positive changes in our lives.

Beginning with our Public Servants: I ask, when last were they blessed with a 10% increase to their earnings – other than when they received the \$50,000 across the board increase last year under this Government? Mr. Speaker, public servants benefitted from an increase to their minimum basic salary from \$50,000 to \$55,000. Added to that the tax threshold went up to \$60,000 - and these are ordinary Guyanese benefitting.

Mr. Speaker, fulfilling the Coalition's promise of a reduction of VAT to 14% is nothing less than an act of compassion! Mr. Speaker, this alone will have a significant effect across the whole country, bringing great relief to the ordinary people of this country, who had to fetch the burden of VAT since its inception. And to the residents of the hinterland regions, this is like the fairy godfather waving his wand.

It is of note that while many of the essential items like onion and garlic, soap powder and laundry soap are zero-rated, one still has to pay VAT for the transportation of

these items, hence, with the VAT decreasing to 14%, residents of Paramakatoi, Kato and Kamana in Region #8, Kamarang and Paruima in Region #7, Kokerite and Kariako in Region #1 and Aishalton and Achawib in Region #9, and all other Indigenous communities, will be paying less for much needed basic items including shoes and clothing.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to see the increase of the Old-age pension to \$19,000. This is not a livable sum of money, nor is it intended to be. But our senior citizens look forward to this monthly assistance, and I am sure with some of the proceeds in the not too distant future, from our oil and gas sector, that every senior citizen and every special needs child or person will receive a livable monthly allowance. The increase in public assistance is also welcomed.

Mr. Speaker, Guyana is pursuing a GREEN ECONOMY. There are huge billboards at intersections of the city that everyone can see and read whether they are walking or driving. It is a major part of President David Granger's vision for the development Guyana.

Our economy is going to transition towards renewable, clean and cheaper source of energy. To this effect, \$264M is budgeted for the first ever large scale solar farm in the hinterland town of Mabaruma where 3000 residents will benefit from an additional 17 hours of electricity. The hinterland town of Lethem, Mahdia and Bartica will also benefit from 800 kilowatts, 400 kilowatts and 1.5 megawatts respectively.

Mr. Speaker, in pursuit of a green economy, renewable energy along with smart energy efficient interventions in 2017 will see an annual cost savings to the tune of \$193M and avoid carbon dioxide emissions of 1,674 tonnes per year.

Mr. Speaker, in the hinterland, the residents of Lethem in Region #9 will also benefit from the refurbishing of the Moco Moco Hydropower Development Project which will feed power into the Lethem Power Company grid thus bringing more reliable electricity support to the growing town.

IT training in the hinterland: Mr. Speaker, with the establishment of the Ministry of Telecommunications and

the passing of legislation to liberalize the telecommunications sector, this Government is demonstrating how serious we are about development in this modern world. We recognize that we have to be tech-smart to keep abreast with the rest of the world; hence, Smart Guyana will touch every major sector of our economy and, indeed, every facet of our daily lives as Minister Jordan stated in his budget speech.

Mr. Speaker, this is revolutionary for the hinterland... **the internet will absolutely transform the lives and livelihoods of our Indigenous and hinterland brothers and sisters.**

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Minister of Finance to know that I am extremely happy about this - and added to the 150 individuals targeted for training in graphic design, programming, office tools, etc, I will be offering, free of charge, graphic design and office tools tutoring to some hinterland villages as my time permits, in preparation for the Government's certification course.

The pictures that come to mind are exciting; just bring to mind indigenous and hinterland young men and women in their villages' computer hubs, designing posters,

banners, magazines, newspapers and typing manuscripts for businesses overseas; and with a click the beautifully created finished product is off to Germany, London or in the Caribbean. Picture them building their own websites to market their products; designing their own labels. Mr. Speaker, many, including myself, spoke about this several years ago and I am excited that at last this is becoming a reality and I am especially pleased that it is happening under this Government. Needless to say, jobs will be created as never before for hinterland peoples.

Mr. Speaker, indigenous and hinterland residents in four more locations will also be kept up to date with the activities of the National Assembly and be able to enjoy their favourite programmes by the establishment of four more radio stations to the tune of \$150M. Mr. Speaker, the APNU+AFC Government will do what it takes to bridge the information gap between the hinterland and the Coast.

Just to remind my honourable colleagues on the opposite side of the House, Mr. Speaker, this year, 2016, two radio stations were established – Radio Lethem and Radio

Mabaruma – in the two newly established hinterland towns. This is simply remarkable – when suddenly after only 18 months in office this Government is delivering the dreams of our hinterland brothers and sisters. And adding to dreams, Mr. Speaker, Santa Rosa now has streets light!

Mr. Speaker, with the expansion of the tourism sector, Guyanese in the service sector and those developing market-ready products, will be challenged to step up to sustained quality and innovation. More jobs will be created and this goes for the hinterland as well, where eco and community tourism will be one of the main earners of revenue in the hinterland.

Mr. Speaker, roads are always of great concern to residents of the hinterland as well as those who do business with/in the hinterland and it is music to the ears to hear that \$2.3B is earmarked for capital projects in the hinterland with interventions for the Port Kaituma road from the airstrip to Fitzburg Housing Scheme in Region #1, Issano Road and Karrau to Buckhall Roads in Region #7; Karasabai to Monkey Mountain in Region #8; and

Aishalton Junction to Shea in Region #9. Very important is a further \$262.5M which will be allocated for maintenance to the existing road network. This is necessary because of the inclement rainy weather which continuously wreaks havoc to most hinterland roads.

In 2016, I am pleased to inform this honourable House that if you travel along the Linden/Lethem road, its condition has never been better. Mr. Speaker, Guyanese are already beginning to experience the GOOD LIFE.

Mr. Speaker, this Budget has many good and reasonable plans and strategies that will touch Guyanese in a positive way but my colleagues on this side of the House will speak about them.

Now for the MoIPA

Education: In 2017, Mr. Speaker, the Hinterland Scholarship programme will be expanded to provide for 530 students, moving up from the present 510 students. This will allow for more to progress to tertiary institutions thus affording more Indigenous and hinterland residents the opportunity to vie for public sector and private sector jobs.

Mr. Speaker, 78 students wrote CXC and secured a pass rate of 83.3% while 9 students wrote CAPE and secured a pass rate of 90%.

Mr. Speaker, our hinterland students presently housed at the Lilandaal Dormitory, are learning to sing, play chess and scrabble. Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Sukhai should be pleased about this. The intention is to keep the children gainfully occupied and it is also hoped that chess will help them to do better in Math and scrabble will be able to help with English language. They are being trained by the renowned Circle of Love singer, Mr. Parks and the aim is to establish a successful hinterland students' choir. Chess is being taught by an experienced chess coach.

Mr. Speaker, this year, 2016, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs tendered the consultancy for the design of a dormitory to house hinterland students from 18 years and above, attending GTI, the University of Guyana and Carnegie. In 2017, the new dormitory will be built to house these students.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs supported 2 hinterland women's group in 2016 – the

Marigold women's group in Santa Rosa, Region #1 and the Kanapang women's group in Region # 8. The chickens are alive and well and I am proud to say that the Marigold group will have eggs for the New Year.

Mr. Speaker, a Study of Indigenous Women and Children is also being done by the MoIPA in collaboration with UNICEF. This is the first time such a study is ever being done and it will serve to inform and guide organisations/agencies on suitable programme designs for our indigenous women and children.

For the first time ever, too, indigenous designers were highlighted at the Guyana Fashion Week, an international event held at the Pegasus Hotel. Three indigenous designers from Region #9 made their successful debut.

Mr. Speaker, at long last, this Budget provides for consultancy services and design, bill of quantities for the construction of a new hostel. Our Indigenous patients and their families deserve to be comfortable in a nice-looking building during their stay for treatment.

Mr. Speaker, MoIPA continues to serve our Indigenous patients by way of financial contributions towards,

surgeries, CT scans, MRIs and assistants towards funerals.

Mr. Speaker, this Government continues to support youth empowerment in a big way. To continue the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service programme in skills training, agriculture, eco-tourism and hospitality and entrepreneurship, the generous sum of \$991M was allocated in the 2017 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, the sun-dried organic tomato project I spoke about in the 2016 Budget is being implemented. The residents of Paramakatoi, Region #8 will soon be supplying the facility with fresh, organic tomatoes and the solar dryer being built in the community will extract the water from the tomatoes. Youths, women and men from Paramakatoi and the surrounding villages will be trained by staff of the IAST, in food processing in the laboratory and be certified. Mr. Speaker, this is a sustainable business that will benefit the entire North Pakaraimas, and is in sync with the 2030 sustainable goals.

Mr. Speaker, our indigenous and hinterland brothers and sisters can look forward to a better standard of life with Budget 2017. Our only challenge will be the implementation of projects and programmes which depend heavily on the whims and fancies of public servants.

Training is necessary for our public servants, Mr. Speaker, because they are key to the success of any Government's mandate.

Mr. Speaker, I support this Budget and I congratulate Minister Jordan and his team.

Thank you.