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## Opposition warned against boycotting scrutiny of \$44.7B supplementary budget

Aug 08, 2022 News

By Davina Bagot

**Kaieteur News** – The Opposition is being warned against boycotting Parliament today where a \$44.7B supplementary budget by the government is to be considered.



AFC Chairperson, Catherine Hughes

Transparency advocate Dr. Yog Mahadeo said that the political decision by the group that represents close to half of the voters in Guyana must be not be taken lightly as a whopping \$44.7 billion will be withdrawn for spending by the government, without being scrutinised by those whose job is to do just that. Mahadeo in an invited comment on the matter told *Kaieteur News* that the proposed boycott of Parliament plays right into the hands of the ruling party. He explained, "Lack of scrutiny and oversight at the National Assembly is an obvious outcome as the cycle of corruption and cronyism continues."

Mahadeo continued that the proposed boycott is a political decision that will not do any good, but rather give the PPP/C free rein to allocate funds as they desire.

"Guyana needs nationalistic thinking – decisions that can create a better future for all Guyanese, not just for a party or its loyalists. I think that the Coalition can do better in developing political strategies."

Addressing the root cause of the boycott, Mahadeo said he believes the attempt to remove the mace was "illogical, improper and ineffective". Additionally, the founding member of civil society organization, Article 13 reasoned, "We must remember that Guyana's winner-takes-all politics renders a minority party ineffective since a majority party will do whatever it wants. The Coalition was in power just three short years ago and squandered its opportunity to make fundamental changes to our political system. The current ruling party, while in opposition, bandied around all verbiage in proposing change. But now in power, nothing substantive will happen because they enjoy their dominance."

Leader of the Opposition Mr. Aubrey Norton last Tuesday told a rally that the government will be left to speak to itself, as his side of the House will not be present today to scrutinize the \$44.7 billion being sought in supplementary funding. Norton was keen to note that the decision was arrived at following what was described as the "unconstitutional suspension" of eight Opposition Members of Parliament (MPs). The MPs were suspended over the unauthorised removal of the mace last



Opposition Chief Whip, Christopher Jones has confirmed that their side of the House will not be present at tomorrow's Sitting of the National Assembly

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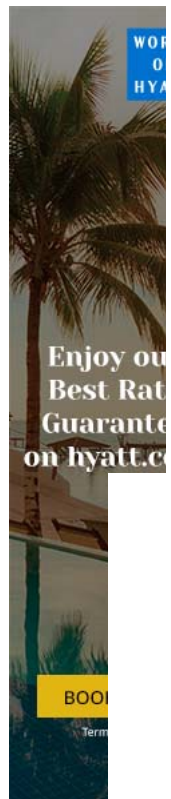
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Aug 13, 2022

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Opposition Leader, Aubrey Norton

The A Partnership for National Unity +Alliance For Change APNU+AFC MPs: Sherod Duncan, Christopher Jones, Ganesh Mahipaul and Natasha Singh-Lewis will be required to be absent from four consecutive sittings, while Annette Ferguson, Maureen A. Philadelphia, Tabitha Halley and Vinceroy Jordan would be suspended for six consecutive sittings. It was revealed that the MPs will each lose four to six days pay each month and they would not be allowed within the precincts of the Parliament Building or Chamber, use of the library or participation in committee meetings.

On Saturday, the Opposition Chief Whip, Christopher Jones in an exclusive interview with this publication confirmed that the APNU faction will not be present at the scheduled Sitting. In this regard, he was asked how he feels about missing an opportunity to examine the \$44.7 billion in additional funds being requested, six months after a \$552.9 billion Budget was passed.

To this, he explained, that the Speaker of the National Assembly has not been allowing the Opposition to function as it should, and he believes that questions would be casually dismissed as per normal, by the PPP MPs. "We have been scrutinising these financial papers forever and we have been asking questions in the National Assembly and the answers that we get are less than any answer, so even in being there, you ask them a million questions and they don't answer," The MP pointed out, adding, "We raised these matters with the Speaker for him to somewhat instruct them to answer but as the Standing Order puts it, a Minister can answer in the way he or she chooses."

Jones said that due to this provision, ministers are allowed to share "absolutely no details" which is the usual course. This means, he said, "The PPP has made a mockery of the Parliamentary settings that would allow for scrutiny, transparency and accountability. We had lines of questions before that were dismissed by the Agriculture Minister for example, who was questioned by Khemraj Ramjattan. The Minister responded by saying the same way in which you used to give gun licence."

Confident that its presence in the National Assembly will reap no benefit in understanding the need for the additional funds, the Opposition said it will be dissecting the financial papers on social media to share its views over the next few days. In addition, the Chief Whip indicated that an Opposition press conference will be hosted on Tuesday where the parties would make its position known on the supplementary budget.

He was keen to note that, "some of the provisions that they are asking for, there is the Standing Orders that state the only time you can come with a supplementary document is when the matters that you are requesting the money would have had to be unforeseen. In one of them, they got \$4 billion for electricity arrears."

In light of this, Jones enquired, "How is it that a Ministry doesn't know that at the end of every month, they got to pay electricity and every year in the Budget, there is an allocation for electricity charges. So how is it that they coming for electricity charges and arrears, so therefore where is the money that we allocated year after year for the Ministry of Finance to pay GPL?"

Particularly interesting the Opposition MP said was that none of the supplemental funding will go towards addressing the cost of living crisis burdening every Guyanese. He argued that nothing was being done to subsidize the cost of electricity or reduce the cost of basic food items, all while public servants continue to be ignored an increase of salary.

#### AFC to join APNU

Similarly, the AFC Chairperson, Catherine Hughes said that the party's MPs will not be attending the sitting on Monday, as it will be standing in solidarity with the eight MPs suspended since they were not given a hearing. According to her, "We are standing in solidarity with them just because due



Dr. Yog Mahadeo

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She explained, "The reality is that Parliament really has not operated to the level that it is intended to operate." Hughes sought to put in perspective that the Parliamentary Session will be closing off by Wednesday, however the Opposition continues to be sidelined by the government's side with the assistance of the Speaker in throwing out Motions that seek to address national issues, such as the high cost of living and full liability coverage for example. As such, she told *Kaieteur News* that none of the Opposition recommendations have been considered to date, as government simply uses its majority to pull the strings. Hughes assured that the AFC will also be scrutinizing the money in the public domain to highlight its thoughts on the additional funding. More importantly, the Chairperson reasoned, "What is most offensive also is the lack of information. You are asking for billions of dollars and your explanations are so broad for development. There is absolutely no breakdown of what the project is."

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4:00am	04:00	
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