

**SPEECH BY MR SEAH KIAN PENG
SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT OF SINGAPORE
AT THE END OF THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY DEBATES
SINGAPORE PARLIAMENT HOUSE
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Honourable Members

It has been a long but intense debate - nine days - for Budget 2024, a budget that moves our country upwards and forward.

2 Sitting in this chair, I listened intently and quietly to all of you and in some cases, we went for a 6-hour session before going for a break. For me, spending over \$130 billion is a serious business, and I thank honourable members for their time, energy, and ideas.

3 For me, this debate scored a few firsts:

(1) Personally, this is the first budget and Committee of Supply (COS) in which I am Speaker. Accordingly, it is the first time in 18 years that I did not have to make a Budget speech nor file cuts for Budget debate. And for the record I average about 10 cuts each budget.

(2) In all, some 61 Members [from both front and back bench] spoke this year compared to 58 Members last year. Some more statistics - there were 598 cuts filed compared to 661 cuts last year.

(3) In fact, this is the first time in last six years that there was a decline in number for cuts over the previous year* - in part, this is due to the fact that we have fewer members in the house.

(4) There is one other first which we all do not want - for the very first time, our Total Fertility Rate, unfortunately, has gone below one. Singaporeans are very special to us, and our budget reflects that from birth to old age, we are spending more than ever on each one. Being a father myself to two adult children now, I can only hope that more young Singaporeans will have the privilege of experiencing the joy of being parents themselves.

(5) But the next first is something which is a good first: this is the first time in three years where members from both sides of the aisle have explicitly expressed their support of the budget. And this support came from no less than the leaders of both Opposition parties. We want to build a Singapore for all, and we want to build it for all Singaporeans.

4 Whether speeches are long or short, whether it is 15 cuts or five cuts, all I can say is that: More is not necessarily better. In fact, I also heard members from both sides of the house echoing the same in that more handouts are not necessarily good. Likewise, more Parliamentary questions, more committees are not necessarily better.

5 Indeed, from my perspective, crispier and sharper speeches are much preferred and the order for the day. When speeches go on for too long, some of us may start to wonder if they were written by ChatGPT!

6 I am glad that there was no need for me to cut anyone off -although there were a few members who breached their time allocations but in the spirit of give and take, I cut them some slack but please don't take this as a given. And for those members who attempted to slip in a mini speech during clarification time, please refrain from doing so as I will be more strict from now on.

7 It leaves me now to thank all Members for your cooperation and support in helping me ensure we had a smooth Budget debate. My appreciation also goes to the Leader of the House, Minister Indranee Rajah and her Deputy Leader, SMS Zaqy Mohamad.

8 My final round of thanks goes to my two Deputy Speakers Ms Jessica Tan and Mr Chris De Souza, my Clerks and all support staff for ensuring that proceedings went well each day throughout the entire two-week period. It takes meticulous care, experience, and a whole team to ensure Budget and Committee of Supply 2024 went smoothly. And the Parliament of Singapore has over the years received the support from an invaluable and experienced team.

9 Let me conclude: Like I said, more is not necessarily better so my speech is also short. DPM Lawrence Wong has described the world we are in now as “messier, more dangerous and more unpredictable.” As a small country, we cannot do much to remake the world into a neater, more predictable one. Nor should we want to because complexity and multilinearity is a part of the human condition.

10 To thrive in this new world, Singapore cannot aim to be a mere “safe space” - we must, as our forefathers have always done, take risks, accept failure and rise again and say “Majulah!”.

11 And in this, Singapore is a beautiful home and safe harbour, where we will help each other along when we are down, and we provide over \$130 billion and more a year, to those among us who need it most.

12 Only in this way, can we move Forward Singapore. Thank You.