

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Finally...I get to speak! It is my once a year occasion. Some of you think that the biggest challenge being up here is how one manages to stay awake, or how we answer the calls of nature. Well, that would remain a trade secret. What I find most challenging is having the desire to participate but not being able to do so in the way that all of you do. What you all have is a unique precious privilege to make a significant impact on the well-being of our people. And I want to start by commending all of you for actively doing just that in the past few weeks.

2 I'd like to thank my Deputy Speakers Charles Chong and Lim Biow Chuan for sharing the responsibilities of this chair. Thanks also to my Clerks and parliament colleagues who quietly help to keep the process running smoothly during this Budget and COS. I'd like to especially recognise our simultaneous interpreters who sit from 10.00 am till 8.00 pm each day. And on this topic of language, some of you have spoken of the importance. Mr Yee Chia Hsing did raise some questions. A "set-top box" in Mandarin

is "机顶盒" and analogue TV is "类比电视". Of course, we remember Senior Minister of State Chee Hong Tat who raised the bar by speaking in Tamil not once, but twice. So, the arms race has begun. இது ஒரு பலமொழி நாடாளுமன்றம் (This is a multi-lingual Parliament). என்னாலும் தமிழில் பேச முடியும் (I can also speak in Tamil)! And of course, thank you so very much to all our Civil Servants and to our Leader and Whip.

3 As I mentioned earlier, as Speaker I don't speak, so I have no choice but to listen. And there has been a lot of listening in these past few day! As Leader mentioned, 530 cuts, 51 hours and 50 minutes allocated, these are the second highest and highest respectively in the recent five years.

4 Rather than repeat what the Government has said, from this vantage point, allow me to try and see the wood for the trees.

5 Firstly, what is our purpose?

6 I discern four core reasons from everything that you are saying. It's really about how we look after and make things better for Singaporeans as individuals, for Singapore, the community and society. And also, there is a time dimension of meeting today's

needs while catering for future ones. All four are clearly important. They are same-same but also different, isn't it? There are trade-offs and choices that need to be made, even when we focus on the very reasons for our existence.

7 Secondly, what is the Budget and COS process for?

8 It is to discuss how we intend to realise our ideals, aspirations via our plans and details. The need to be pragmatic is as important as the ideals we hold dear. Mr Murali Pillai shared with us Joe Biden's quote, "Don't tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I'd tell you what you value." Closer to home, in 1971, S Rajaratnam shared, "What you have done may not get as much publicity as utterances of professional oppositionists, but long after these have gone, what you have done will strengthen the democracy of deeds and not words."

9 I know that in today's world, we sometimes like the smart sound bites, the eloquent emotive rhetoric. It helps. It is important. But substance and details matter too especially in the real VUCA world, as Seah Kian Peng shared, Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous. Difficult unpopular choices need sometimes to be made.

10 We all grapple with these dilemmas in our daily lives, as individuals, in our families, at school, at work, as leaders. It is no different at a national level.

11 Remember this, it is not about fear but how we thrive in this environment, and embrace and seize the opportunities before us.

12 Thirdly, are we clear and united in where we are going?

13 At times, things seem to be rather ambiguous, such as whether two-thirds plus one-third is greater than 1! Or disagreement, for example, having a division for the Budget Statement.

14 But when we look past the differences that are often amplified, do we not see that we have more points of convergence and agreement than not?

15 These differences of opinions are important and the debate helps us refine and clarify. Argue, fight by all means, but within limits and in a responsible manner but I am thankful that despite it all, we do have a unity of thought and conviction as to where we should go and how we should position ourselves as a nation. So

long as we do not hold ourselves back and be mired as others do, we can boldly move forward into the brave new world.

16 Others have noticed this. I recently listened to a BBC interview where a commentator was amazed that a government was able to plan for a tax increase in four years' time. He noted that we were able to take "medium to long term decisions in a way which governments in the UK and America are not able to do because they are always worried about the next election."

17 While we should always be circumspect about comments and observations, these comments are worth pondering over. I believe that we are only able to think long term when in our society, there is a sense of "we" and not just "me", and where there is a belief in tomorrow and not just a focus on today.

18 Lastly, how do we realise our vision?

19 We are laying the foundations for our future. We need to build a vibrant and innovative economy. We intend to build a smart, green, liveable city. We want to foster a caring and cohesive society. And we have to ensure a fiscally sustainable and secure future. For all of us.

20 Perhaps the question to ask is, who makes this happen?

21 We do. It is us, the people. What will make us great as a nation and to realise our vision will be when we are a people who will go the extra mile. We go the extra mile for each other because it is not just about me. When we are able to look beyond self.

22 This is about the heart and soul of our nation. Deep down inside us, we know that these are fundamentally important, but unlike everything else in the Budget, these cannot be mandated by law.

23 But they can be nurtured. And it is for us, as Singaporeans, to respond.

24 I recently met a father of a chronically ill child at a Club Rainbow event. He shared that as a result of his child's illness, he has learnt to be more patient, to be more loving and caring. And he might have been quite different if circumstances turned out differently. He said, "In some ways, it's a blessing."

25 When I speak to volunteers at the hospices, caring for those who do not have long to live, I realise that many of them learn to live their lives today differently.

26 You see, change happens when we reach out and care for others.

27 How else do we nurture this sense of looking beyond self? St Francis says that it is in giving that we receive. Many faiths share the same idea.

28 SG Cares is about how we nurture an environment where we reach out and care for others. And in the process, how we can perhaps begin to change. And how we begin to become a better people, and a better society.

29 Our future is tremendously exciting.

30 When we as Singaporeans take the step forward to care for others, when SG Cares, we begin to build bonds that bind, and these bonds enable us to go the extra mile for one another. Whatever the future throws at us, we know we will fight for our

survival and figure a way out. Because there is something larger than us that we are fighting for.

31 These are the same qualities that will allow us to say the first line of our pledge with conviction, “We, the citizens of Singapore”.

32 These are the qualities that will enable us to “pledge ourselves as one united people, so as to achieve happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation.” Thank you.
