Mr Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to add my voice to show appreciation to the effort of Hon Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin — A.S.K. Bagbin. Mr Speaker, often times when we have run into turbulence, we turn to A.S.K. Bagbin — On this occasion, we are celebrating Hon A.S.K. Bagbin at 60 years. Mr Speaker, I chalked 60 years in February this year but the man had been pretending all this while that he is older than me. Mr Speaker, today the cat is out of the bag. Sometimes, he tells me that when he went to class one he was nine years old and so, he is older than me. At least, his official age is known and he may have a different chronological age or a different biological age but we do not want to interrogate that.

Today, we are celebrating Hon Bagbin at 60 years and a quarter century in Parliament. That is a monumental achievement given the turbulence in Ghana’s politics. Mr Speaker, I believe it is worthy that as a House we would find space to acknowledge and celebrate our own. In the lead up to the primaries of the NDC, a programme that had been on the drawing board for a while and which we had not been able to execute was kicked into action and we found ourselves in the Upper West Region. Mr Speaker, let me explain that, that programme had been on the board for a very long time and we had not found enough space to execute it and when we found space to do that, we went to the Upper West Region.

We went into the space and the backyard of Hon Yieleh Chireh, Hon Bagbin as well as one other constituency. Mr Speaker, when we went there, I had the occasion to speak eloquently about the achievement of Hon Bagbin. Mr Speaker, my own party was contesting him but I said to them that it should not just be that we would want to conquer this mountain. It should be that, yes, this is a person with a monumental experience and competence and so, if we would want to replace him from my own party then let us have a person who is more capable in order to replace him. Mr Speaker, I appealed to his own party that whereas they are saying that he had stayed for too long, if they want to replace him then these are the credentials of the man. So, they should bring a person who would be able to rise taller than the achievements that the man had chalked, then we would make a lot of sense. But we should not just say that he had stayed for too long and so let him bow out and then we would replace a tertiary student with a primary one student. Mr Speaker, that would certainly not make sense. One person then asked that we are talking about experience and so, if we had all gone there, we would have got experience as I was speaking about. Mr Speaker, I told him if a group of people enter class one at the same time, one person would be made the class prefect, and when they get to the final class, they might have one senior prefect among the lot. So, all fingers are not the same. We must recognise that.

Mr Speaker, the Hon Bagbin has risen through the ranks. He entered Parliament as a backbencher and became a Chairman of a Committee; then rose to become the Hon Minority Leader;
subsequently, the Hon Majority Leader; a Minister of State in more than one Ministry and today, the Hon Second Deputy Speaker. Mr Speaker, we must recognise competence and ability. He has risen through the ranks. He did not enter Parliament by anybody's patronage. He pulled himself up by his own bootstraps. In Parliament, he has discharged and indeed acquitted himself creditably before all of us. He fulfils his representational role effectively and efficiently. When it comes to legislation, he is one to be noticed and in exercising his oversight functions, again, he punches the raider.

Mr Speaker, because his own contributions are well informed, in the informational responsibility of an Hon Member, he performs with excellence. Parliament is charged with the responsibility of holding the purse. As the purse holder of the country, when it comes to the scrutiny of the Budget, he applies eagle’s eyes. Parliament ratifies agreements, treaties and conventions and the Hon Bagbin is one person to be noticed and to be flowering the discourse in the House with his own experience. Mr Speaker, he is a man of considerable experience and a great degree of institutional memory. He has learnt the rules of the House; the rules of Procedure, as a Minority Leader, as a Majority Leader and as a Member of this House. The man has informed the debates and indeed enriched the debates and discourse of this House in his own way.

Mr Speaker, in all this, the Hon A. S. K. Bagbin is a man that you would notice as a man who moderates his language and I would recommend his attitude to Hon Members of Parliament, especially the new ones among us. People would want to be recognised and in their haste to be recognised, they employ very acidic language as if that would give them recognition. I would appeal to them to learn from the Hon A. S. K. Bagbin. One does not need to be insulting to be recognised within and without; that is inside and outside the House. Mr Speaker, sometimes, some language might be hard, but they might not be insulting. They might be on point; that might be acceptable, like the use of “optical illusion” and others which certain people wanted to challenge.

Mr Speaker, however, I believe we must recognise quality material when we see one. Let us also say that the experience of the Hon A. S. K. Bagbin did not happen by accident. He has stayed in the House for quite a long time. He has not wasted his talent; he has employed his talent in the Business of the House. He has learnt the rules; in the pieces of legislation that we have worked out our way through, he ensures that he participates in law making, oversight and in exercising the power of purse function of Parliament as I have already said, and he does his own research to enrich the discourse of the House. Mr Speaker, so, all in all, I believe it is worthy to celebrate the Hon Alban Bagbin.

Mr Speaker, it is sad to relate that, of all of them who started in the year 1993, he is the only remnant of that stock in this House. My own political party boycotted the 1992 Parliamentary Elections. We came on board in the year 1997. It is sad to relate that from my side, I am the only remnant of that stock. It does not help to grow this House. It is all because of the intrigues within our own political parties, which is why we should do serious introspection about the operations of our own constitutions; that is the constitutions of the various political parties. I do not know
of any political party in any of the entrenched democracies, where at the end of every four years, the sluice gates are opened to all comers and people then go and dust and wash their suites and send their kente clothes to the laundry and come to contest sitting Members of Parliament.

It does not have to happen in that way. One would speak to these matters and people would want to think he would want to preserve himself. We should confront the reality. It is sad to relate, as we speak today, that from the Minority bench, as the Hon Minority Chief Whip just said, in the current situation, almost half of the Minority benches are first timers. It does not help in growing Parliament in anyway. From the Majority benchers, there are about 169 Hon Members and 87 are first timers. How do we grow Parliament that way? Mr Speaker, four years back, out of the 122 Hon Members, about 70 were first timers. That is from my stock. It would not help to grow Parliament in any way.

Mr Speaker, of the three arms of Government; Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary, Parliament is the weakest, and we keep weakening it because of the practices in the various political parties. That is why we should interrogate the constitutions of our various political parties to do what is right. It is like the Members of Parliament are afraid to confront the reality. This is because we must face it. Those of the first timers who are in Parliament today kept banging on the door of those sitting Members of Parliament. They wanted to enter. Now, they are here and people have already started banging at their doors. [Laughter.] Now, they cannot also react. What is the way forward for us?

I believe we should break that cycle. If we are not able to do that, we would never be able to grow our Parliament and eternally, it would remain very weak. Mr Speaker, it is one of the reasons four years ago, when twelve Parliaments on the continent came to be assessed, Ghana’s Parliament placed last but one. Our Parliament placed last but one in respect of the functionality of Parliaments in Africa. Are we happy about that?

Mr Speaker, I believe the time has come for us to confront the reality. We are talking about an Hon Member of Parliament who is 25 years old in the House. Elsewhere, we would be referring to the private members laws that through him, Parliament would have crafted. There is none in the name of the Hon Alban Bagbin because of our own constitutional strictures, and nobody would want to talk about that. Mr Speaker, the Hon Ala Adjetey was the first to address that matter, that we should open the window to allow for the crafting, and indeed, the sponsorship of Private Member’s Bill in this House. Unfortunately, he did not last and those who followed after him were all timorous souls and did not pursue that path.

Today, we have Hon Prof. Aaron Mike Oquaye, who has, at least, given an indication that he wants us to revisit that matter, because what constitutional provision that we all allude to exists in the constitutions of all Commonwealth countries? All of them have had a way about that constitutional provision and yet, in Ghana, we use it to bog ourselves down. Mr Speaker, thank you very much, because come to think of it, that constitutional provision relates to matters that are financial. The chapter on finances, it relates to that alone, and that is why it is good if we
explore the possibility of going round it. As I said, unfortunately, our Speakers have not given that interpretation to it, except Hon Peter Ala Adjetey who made the attempt. Mr Speaker, all established Parliaments allow for matters that are before the courts to be commented on in the House.

Our Speakers sit in the Chair and forbid us. I do not know where this is coming from. The provision provides that if in the opinion of the person presiding, the contribution an Hon Member is making would not prejudice the matter before the court, it should be allowed, but for us, ab initio, we cannot raise it because it is before the court. I cannot understand. We are inflicting a mortal wound on Parliament and we are forbidding Parliament from performing its functions. Mr Speaker, on the occasion of celebrating one of our own, who is the only person to have crossed that rubicon of attaining 25 years, a quarter of a century in the House, we should use that occasion to do serious introspection about how we are contributing to grow our Parliament or imperiling the growth of Parliament by our own omissions and commissions.

The Hon Minority Chief Whip alluded to what the Hon Peter Ala Adjetey wanted to institutionalise, that is, recognising the competences of various Hon Members in the House and rewarding them. I believe the time has come for us to commend same to the current Speaker for us to revive that. At least, that provides some motivation to Hon Members in the House, and by our review exercise that we want to conduct, we want to even create some space to Committee Chairpersons, recognising their own efforts as we move along, because it is a herculean assignment, in order to motivate them to work to grow our Parliament. The axiom is that a Parliament is as strong as its committees make it. If we do not make our committees strong, our Parliaments remain very weak.

So, Mr Speaker, this weekend, we would like to conclude the work on the review exercise and I hope when we come to approving the new Standing Orders, Hon Members would acclaim the efforts of the previous Leaders and what work they have done. Let us approve of it to help grow our Parliament. Mr Speaker, not to dilute what the Statement stands for, let me conclude that I am happy for Hon Bagbin, for the 25 years he has chalked, that he should let us know his true date of birth. He says it is 60 years, but in other areas, it is more than 60 years — I am not the father, I am not the mother, but this is just an aside. I believe we should celebrate the man. He is worthy of celebration. He invited me to the programme. Unfortunately, I lost my aunt, so I could not attend, but I sent word to him that I was with him in spirit. So, Mr Speaker, I was not too comfortable when other contributors were making their own Statements and the man was wide eyed looking at them, as if he was beckoning them to say something good about him. He is not here, and I think we can speak well of him that he has discharged his functions and responsibilities as a Member of Parliament dutifully and faithfully, and the nation at large should recognise him.
Mr Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity — and respectfully, let me say to my Hon Colleagues, that when a Colleague makes a good presentation, the reception should be — and not —