



**2023/24 SESSION**  
of the  
**BERMUDA SENATE**

**OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT**

**15 NOVEMBER 2023**

*Sitting number 2 of the 2023/2024 Session*  
(pages 1–34)

**Sen. The Hon. Joan E. Dillas-Wright, MBE, JP**  
**President**

**Disclaimer:** The electronic version of the *Official Hansard Report* is for informational purposes only. The printed version remains the official record.

**BERMUDA SENATE  
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT  
15 NOVEMBER 2023  
10:00 AM**

*Sitting Number 2 of the 2023/2024 Session*

*[Sen. the Hon. Joan E. Dillas-Wright, President, presiding]*

**The President:** Good morning, Senators.  
The Senate is in session.  
Shall we pray?

### PRAYERS

*[Prayers read by Sen. the Hon. Joan E. Dillas-Wright, President]*

**The President:** Please be seated.

*[Pause]*

### CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

**The President:** Senator Wight, you have the floor.

**Sen. John Wight:** Good morning, Madam President.

**The President:** Good morning.

**Sen. John Wight:** I move that consideration of the Minutes of the meeting of Friday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2023, be deferred.

**The President:** Is there any objection to that motion?  
No objection.  
The Minutes are deferred.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Wight.

### MESSAGES

**The Assistant Clerk:** No messages, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Ms. Beale.

### REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

**The President:** There are none.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

### APOLOGIES

**The President:** Senators, we have been advised that apologies have been received from Vice President Kiernan Bell and Sen. Rev. Dr. Dill.

### NOTICES OF MOTIONS

**The President:** There are none.

### PETITIONS

**The President:** There are none.

### STATEMENTS

**The President:** We have one Statement, and that is in the name of the Honourable Owen Darrell, the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Minister Darrell, you have the floor.

### HERITAGE MONTH THEME 2024

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, today I am pleased to stand before you to announce the exciting theme for Bermuda's [Heritage Month](#) and the Bermuda Day Parade in 2024. This year we are celebrating the theme of *Culture Equals Energy*. It is a theme that encapsulates the vibrancy, diversity and boundless spirit of our unique Island culture.

Madam President, Bermuda Day holds a special place in our hearts, reminding us of our heritage and the traditions that have been passed down through generations. This year's theme, *Culture Equals Energy*, is a testament to the dynamic nature of our culture. Our culture is not static; it is constantly evolving, blending our roots with new traditions and infusing cultural elements into our everyday lives. We are Bermudians, and our culture is an ever-expanding tapestry, reflecting the diversity and the energy that define us.

Madam President, the Bermudian ability to generate this endless cultural energy is why at a sport event part of the excitement is in the spectators' fashions, the intricacy of the camp setup. It is why when our athletes compete in sports internationally, the whole Island stops and becomes heated experts at the rules, no matter how new to us. We are fiercely proud of our

team whether that be at Cup Match, football or, as everyone knows my favourite, County Games, and show the same level of enthusiasm when we see tremendous displays of artistry like the performance at Troika's *Sarafina!* or follow the rumble of the drums as the community did over the weekend when Gombey Warriors celebrated their 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Madam President, when thinking about Bermuda Day, what comes to mind are the majorettes twirling their batons with grace and style, crowds moving to the rhythm of our beloved Gombey drums, the infectious energy of the participants and the undeniable pride we feel for our Island. There is something magical about our culture, something that urges you to leap to your feet and celebrate, dance and bring energy. And that is what we are doing this coming Heritage Month!

Madam President, as we look forward to the Bermuda Day Parade and the Heritage Month celebrations, I would like to remind the public that in 2024, Bermuda Day falls on the traditional date of Friday, May 24. I also would like to remind the public about the importance of community support in making this parade a success.

Last year we saw the tangible benefits of the newly established Bermuda Day Fund, a fund that supports groups and individuals by offsetting the costs of costumes, truck rentals and other expenses incurred when participating in the Bermuda Day Parade. This year we must continue to support this cause, as it allows more people to get involved and contribute to the energy of our celebrations. Anyone wishing to support these participants can visit the Bermuda Community Foundation website at [www.givebermuda.org/BermudaDayFund](http://www.givebermuda.org/BermudaDayFund). Madam President, I would like to urge individuals and businesses alike to donate to the Bermuda Day Fund. Whether you give a little or a lot, every contribution makes a difference in preserving our traditions and strengthening our cultural ties.

Madam President, no [matter how] heated the community banter grows over the best girl, the nicest dive off peak or the cleanest shank dank, there is a common dream we all share that imagines a Bermuda of possibilities, a land of endless opportunities to be better. It is through these moments of unity that our culture shines brightest. This is what the Bermuda Day and Heritage Month celebrations were established for. We saw this in May 2023 as participants and spectators alike danced in the rain together.

So, Madam President, as we prepare for Heritage Month and the Bermuda Day Parade in 2024 under the theme *Culture Equals Energy*, let us embrace our culture, celebrate our traditions and support one another. Let us make this a Heritage Month to remember, a month of unity, pride and boundless energy.

Madam President, on Bermuda Day 2024, let us raise our airhorns, dance, cheer and bring the energy that defines our Bermudian spirit. Let us show the world that our culture is not just a reflection of our past

but a beacon for our future. Let us make the 2024 Heritage Month and Bermuda Day Parade a celebration of *Culture Equals Energy* that will resonate in our hearts and minds for years to come.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Minister Darrell. Moving on with our agenda.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**The President:** There are none.

## FIRST READING OF PUBLIC BILLS

**The President:** There are none.

## FIRST READING OF PRIVATE BILLS

**The President:** There are none.

## QUESTION PERIOD

**The President:** Senators, we will entertain any questions on the Statement that has just been read by Minister Darrell on the Heritage Month Theme 2024.

Senator Tucker, [OBA Senate] Leader, you have the floor.

### QUESTION 1: HERITAGE MONTH THEME 2024

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Thank you, Madam President. And good morning again to you and to my Senate colleagues and listening audience.

Thank you to the Minister for bringing the Statement. The May 24 holiday and Heritage Month is definitely one of my most favourite times of the year. It is certainly a time when people from all walks of life are able to just celebrate who we are and just have a really good time and be good to each other.

So, my question for the Minister, one question . . . I have two questions actually. One question is as it relates to the community support that the Minister mentioned that he would like to have. And he stressed the importance of the community support, which I absolutely agree with. The question is, I would like to know what added support would the Minister like to see. Given that the Bermuda Day holiday is the favourite of so many, and there are so many who make a contribution to celebrating Bermuda Day, I would like to know what the Minister would like to see in addition to what is already being done.

And if I may ask the second question?

**The President:** Please do.

### QUESTION 2: HERITAGE MONTH THEME 2024

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** The second question again comes from part of the Statement, the last paragraph on page 3 when [the Minister] invites donations to the Bermuda [Day] Fund. So, I would like to know, as people and businesses make contributions to the fund, what is the vision? Why should people contribute further? What does the Minister have for the future that people and companies can make their contributions or their donations to and see that grow and develop and progress further?

So, thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Tucker.

Would any other Senator care to ask questions?

Senator De Couto, you have the floor.

#### QUESTION 1: HERITAGE MONTH THEME 2024

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** Thank you, Madam President, and good morning to you and everyone here.

**The President:** Good morning.

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** And thank you to the Minister for outlining that . . . I know we are all looking forward to the celebrations next year.

I am sure the Minister is well aware that next year is a big year for those in Bermuda, like myself, of Portuguese descent with the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the *Golden Rule* from Madeira. So, my question to the Minister is, Can he give us a heads-up or a preview of any celebrations or events that the Government might be doing during Heritage Week to mark that occasion?

Thank you very much, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator De Couto.

Would any other Senator care to speak?  
No.

Then it is over to you, Minister.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Thank you, Madam President.

So, the first question was regarding added support. And the Senate Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance has asked, *What added support are we in the Department of Culture looking for?* And the answer to that would be that added support can come in multiple ways. And you have heard me talk about support when we are in the sporting arena. It can either be through donations to the Bermuda Day Fund or supporting the parade by simply getting a group together and entering participants into the Bermuda Day Parade.

Groups do not have to be a big float bed. They could be just a walking group in your company shirts. We have been trying in previous years to get the National Sports Governing Body to get more exposure. You would have seen last year that we had a visiting

sporting team that came down, and they simply just walked in the parade with their sporting gear. And sometimes it is the simple things to show the community a presence as to what they are doing.

Ultimately, the ultimate goal is to increase participation. You know, Bermuda Day is a holiday where, whether you have 20 participants or 80 participants, the parade always takes the same amount of time. So, it is a matter of whether we speed up the parade or whether we slow it down. But the ultimate goal is to get as many participants as possible.

Adding on to that, this particular year you would have noted that we put this fund together rather late in the game. A lot of companies that we reached out to said, *Hey, look. You know, we have already done our financial outlooks, and it is kind of late to come to us looking to support the community.* So, you would note the timing of the Statement. It is purposely put this early so that groups who start ordering equipment and start putting together their training schedule as soon as the new year comes can get an early jump as to what type of financial support may be available.

So basically, because we started late this year, we had to split the donations that came in. And although we were able to give out some considerable support, I am thinking and the department is thinking that by putting this Statement out and making this appeal and announcing the theme so early, everyone can kind of put themselves in position to support even better. Of course, if companies want to be involved further, we would love to help them facilitate how to get in and how to be involved.

To Senator De Couto's point about the anniversary of the Portuguese in Bermuda, he will recall that for the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Government did give the Island a national holiday to celebrate the Portuguese. Now, I cannot speak as to whether we will get a holiday this year. I do know that a request has been sent to the Government. And right now, our full Heritage Month calendar has not been developed, and we will update Senator De Couto closer. We know that the Portuguese heritage and culture are very special to many Bermudians.

I would go on record and say that one of the best submissions in the Bermuda Day Parade for years has been the Portuguese Association, and whether it be Vasco or Casa Dos Acores (did I say that right?), either one of them always comes together and puts an immaculate submission into the parade. I do know that there are discussions ongoing with Government with the different Portuguese organisations to see how we can recognise this monumental anniversary for those of Portuguese descent. I remember last time, five years ago, I believe they . . . I think it was the President or the Vice President of the Azores came to Bermuda. So, we are looking to do stuff definitely around the anniversary, which I think is around November.

But once we have the full schedule of the Heritage Month calendar, we will update all. But we do

know that there is a very special Portuguese fiesta during May, and with this anniversary the Department of Culture will do all that we can to mark this celebration.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you.

Senator Tucker, OBA Leader.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Thank you, Madam President, and thank you to the Minister for responding to my questions.

I would just like to ask if he could respond specifically to the second question, which is about the donations and the vision that he and his team have for using those donations for future Heritage Month initiatives.

And if I may, I do have another question. My last question.

### QUESTION 3: HERITAGE MONTH THEME 2024

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Yes. So, my last question is in connection to the Minister mentioning about the pace of the parade. And I will say that this has been a common complaint over the years about the lags in the participants and the gaps in between. So, I wondered if there has been discussion at this wonderful early stage about improving that. I think that if we can get some improvement on that, then that could be one thing that might encourage more people to come out and actually watch it. So, if he can also speak to that.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Tucker.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** I will answer the first one. I will try not to make my answers into a debate, but the first answer to this question is that the money actually does not come to the Government. It goes to the Bermuda [Day] Fund. And that fund was set up so that all of the proceeds of that fund go directly to the community groups that are participating in this parade. And they send in an application. The applications are reviewed. Based on how much money is in the fund, it is then distributed to these groups. And they can use it for all sorts of support that they need to get ready. And I am not going to go through the list of the types of things they use it for; we have been through that before. And the vision is to increase participation.

Senator Tucker alluded to a complaint—I think that was the word she used. I would say this. Depending on whom you talk to, there are some individuals who enjoy sitting off and using the time in between the participants, you know, to get something to eat or just relax. It is a public holiday. It is our biggest holiday of the year, so many people enjoy sitting out on the streets of Hamilton from sunup to sundown. So that is why it is mixed in with the runners and the junior race and the bike race, and then you get the parade . . . So, if we

sped up this parade and finished it at 2:00 pm, I can guarantee you that we would get complaints there as well.

So, I encourage Senator Tucker to bring the energy to her camp this year. If she wants increased participation, I will encourage her to get a couple of friends and come on out and enjoy the festivities. Because this is a great, great celebration of heritage. And with the topic this year being *Culture Equals Energy*, I am sure she, as well as her colleagues and all of Bermuda, will enjoy the Bermuda Day Parade this year.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Madam President, may I make a point of information?

[Laughter]

### POINT OF INFORMATION

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** I just want to put a point of information there. I have attended and have been on Front Street for decades watching the parade. So therefore, I think that I can speak from an informed position about the pace of the parade. And not only [is] my camp complaining, but others have complained as well. Nothing to do with the other things that the Minister spoke about. Just the pace of the parade and the participants.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Tucker.

With that said, I think there are no other questions, and the Minister has responded. So, we will move on.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

**The President:** The Order of the Day is the consideration of the Throne Speech with which Her Excellency the Governor was pleased to open the present session of Parliament.

And, Senator, the Honourable O. J. Darrell, Government Leader in Senate, I turn it over to you.

### DEBATE ON THE 2023 THRONE SPEECH AND REPLY

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, I am grateful of the opportunity today to open the submissions on our general debate today on the Throne Speech, which was delivered on Friday, November 3 of this year. Madam President, I think that the Government has done a good job of promoting the highlights of the Throne Speech. You would

have seen that different Ministers have had press conferences almost daily. They have been on talk shows. There have been social media graphics highlighting the work that this Government is doing and plans to continue doing along the theme of *Serving the People*. I would like to repeat that theme one more time, Madam President: *Serving the People*.

And if you would look at the cover of the Speech from the Throne that was delivered this year, you would see that theme prominently displayed. You have a picture of a Minister opening a housing development which will increase housing for the people, Madam President. You will see another picture of a group of firefighters. I do not have to tell you, Madam President, or anyone how grateful we are for the service that they do [on behalf of] the people.

There is another photo of workers of the pilot boat. And we may think that the pilot boat only brings in cruise ships every single week. But that pilot boat is also a rescue vessel. And when you live on an island surrounded by water, the rescue vehicle is important to serving the people.

Then there is a fourth photo there of another Minister, Madam President, of the Minister with members of a female sporting association. And if you look at the front page of the daily today, you can see the enthusiasm and joy on the faces of those young women who have their facility back open. Again, Madam President, that is a visual example of the Progressive Labour Party serving the people.

Madam President, I cannot get into my submission today without giving my speech a topic. And we will get to that in one second. But if I take these two booklets, one put out by the Government, the Progressive Labour Party Government, and then the other booklet, which is rather thin, put out by the One Bermuda Alliance Opposition, you will see that one has striking images of people of which the Government serves, while the other one is void of any single photograph. I mean, Madam President, if we go back to last year . . . at least the Opposition got their colours right on their book this year. But other than that, there is not one image on the front, the back or in it of people. Just a title talking about, *Let's get it done. Together! We will get into this later*, but I am still trying to figure out what is "it" that they are trying to get done? More on that in a bit, Madam President.

I will give a topic or a title of my submission this morning, Madam President. We will call it *A Lesson in Civics. A Lesson in Civics*, Madam President. Now, Madam President, most will know, some may not know that I am a qualified educator with a background in social sciences. So, I will start today, Madam President, by giving a simple civics lesson. See, this journey started in 1998 at the University of Tampa. And one of my first classes was entitled Foundations of Education. Let us refer to it as Education 101, kind of one of those classes where you go in and you decide, *Is this what I want to do? Or is this not what I want to do?*

There was a teacher who was straight out of New York City. She had that New York accent. Her name was Ms. Silverman. And one of the first things any educator will learn, Madam President, is that a good lesson starts with a set of objectives. We were introduced to the acronym TSWBAT. So, when I started in the classroom at CedarBridge Academy for my first three years and then moved on to the Berkeley Institute for the next 12 years, students would enter my classroom and ask, *What do those letters stand for, TSWBAT?* [It stands for:] The students will be able to. And what that did was outline what the teacher intended to teach the students; but more importantly, what the students should know by the time they exited said classroom.

Today, Madam President, for this presentation I would like to replace the "S" which stands for "students" with "S" for "Senators." So, Madam President, we will go with: The Senators will be able to. This is for the theme of my civics lesson today. So, the Senators will be able to, by the time we leave this Chamber, understand the key concept of what it means to be in Opposition. Because I do not think, Madam President, some Senators understand what that means.

The second objective, the Senators will be able to review a historical case study of a what a quality Opposition looks like. And then the third objective before we leave this Chamber today, Madam President, will be Senators will be able to demonstrate an understanding of how all of this is relevant to us today. Follow me here.

Let's start with something small to make sure everyone understands the key concept of what an Opposition really is, or what it is supposed to be. Any good lesson, even when we do Bills and we start debating Bills, starts with definitions, Madam President. So let us start defining a couple of key terms. In politics, the term "opposition" simply means to be opposed. Now, we in the Progressive Labour Party, Madam President, are under no illusions here. We knew that no matter what went into this speech, which is entitled *Serving the People*, that the One Bermuda Alliance would do the lazy thing, the easy thing, and just simply oppose everything that we put in this book without any critical thought, without any analysis. And many times, Madam President, we see that they oppose to things without any trace of any facts.

Madam President, I would like to offer the definition from a social science educator's point of view. And I used to tell my students when I used to teach about politics and law, I would say, *The Opposition has a key role to play. And that is that they are supposed to offer genuine alternatives to what the Government is putting forward.* I will say that again: They are supposed to offer genuine alternatives to what the Government is saying. However, Madam President, sadly, I do not know why I continue to be disappointed. But as I listened to the Reply to the Throne [Speech] given Friday gone, the problem became abundantly clear. In 24 minutes and 50 seconds, the Leader of the Opposition,

who sits in another place, offered no alternatives, Madam President.

Madam President, I would go as far as to say that the speech said absolutely nothing. In this eagerly anticipated first Reply, the One Bermuda Alliance Leader could only muster up a mere 24 minutes and 50 seconds of fluff. Mind you, Madam President, I would say this, I say it with a smile on my face: That 24 minutes and 50 seconds was considerably longer than one of the Senators who sits in this place could muster up when he got up with 30 seconds of nothingness a couple of weeks ago. (But I digress, Madam President.)

Our objective in this simple civics lesson is straightforward, and it is to examine a historical case study of what a quality Opposition could possibly look like. This is our second objective. We are going to do a little case study. We will go back in history a little bit. Yesterday, Madam President, was November 14. It was seven years ago on November 14, 2016, that there was a Reply to the Throne [Speech] delivered by a different Opposition Leader. I will say the date again: November 14, 2016. Check it out.

This speech was delivered by someone in similar circumstances, we would think, as the current Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance. (Or is he interim Leader? I am not really sure.) This was a new, fresh, young party leader who was eagerly anticipated to lead his party and our country to a better future. That particular Reply to the Throne [Speech] in 2016, Madam President, laid out a clear vision for 2025. The title was *Our Plan for a Better Bermuda*. Check it out, November 14, 2016. In that speech, we heard a narrative of Two Bermudas, Madam President, a narrative of inequality and inequity that was fostered by the then Government, One Bermuda Alliance, and how the Progressive Labour Party would offer a better alternative. Imagine that, Madam President—an Opposition Leader giving a plan for a better alternative. It seems like a simple concept.

Now, Madam President, let us contrast that speech with what we got on Friday in the 2023 Reply [to] the Throne [Speech]. The Leader (again who sits in another place) of the One Bermuda Alliance began his speech with a litany of could-be's. It is my submission today, Madam President, that those could-be's that the Opposition Leader continuously referred to are in fact reality of the work that this Government is doing to serve the people.

Madam President, I know we have heard it before. But let me take this opportunity now to remind Senators and the listening public what the Progressive Labour Party is doing to serve the people. Let us start with small businesses, economy and workers, one of those could-be's that was thrown out by the Opposition Leader.

The Progressive Labour Party Government has implemented a minimum wage for the first time in Bermuda's history, [and] reduced taxes for 86 per cent of workers and businesses. Small businesses received

tax cuts up to 43 per cent, Madam President. The Throne Speech announced that a new economic empowerment zone will be created in South East Hamilton with amendments to the Economic Development Act. During this legislative year, following extensive consultation with the public and industry stakeholders, the Government will also introduce the Corporate Income Tax Bill, in line with our commitment to adhere to the Global Minimum Tax Agreement.

Let us go on to another point of could-be's that was raised by someone on Friday, new jobs and new opportunities. Google's Nuvem subsea cable which will lead to more jobs and investment in our economy. The subsea cable initiative is part of the Government's recovery plan. The Bermuda Business Development Agency (also known as the BDA, started under another Government) will evolve to become an investment promotion agency. This new agency will focus on attracting foreign direct investment to our shores, in line with the economic development strategy, which will support economic growth and job creation, Madam President.

Let us talk about enhancing social benefits and protections. This Government expanded the child day care allowance to support more families, Madam President. We increased seniors' pensions in line with the rate of inflation five times since 2017. Just as a comparing-and-contrasting activity, the previous Government only raised it once in five years.

Let us talk about education, another could-be that was mentioned on Friday. Let me tell you what this Government is doing. Signature schools have opened at CedarBridge Academy and the Berkeley Institute, including the first trades school in a generation. Bermuda College is now accessible to all Bermudians regardless of their financial circumstances. And the Throne Speech announced a signature programme in education services, hospitality and tourism at Sandys Middle School. These are not could-be's, Madam President. These are things that are actually happening right before our eyes in order to service the people.

Another could-be—I could not believe this one—was talking about accessible home ownership and affordable housing. Did the Opposition Leader not know about the mortgage guarantee programme where 49 Bermudians have been approved and are on the path to home ownership? Has he not opened the newspaper, Madam President, where we can see that new affordable housing units have opened in Paget, in Sandys, in St. George's, with a guarantee that there are more on the way? This is all following Government's \$15 million investment pledge of additional funds to increase affordable housing. Shocking that he missed all of this.

Carefully managed budgets and a plan to pay off our national debt and the ability to save money in the good years to provide for the bad—another could-be that was raised on Friday. I got that, too! We will see the first balanced budget in Bermuda's history. This December, Madam President, \$50 million of debt will be

repaid! The first debt repayment in nine years, which will cause our interest costs to fall by \$2.4 million.

The Tax Reform Commission, Madam President, will review our current tax system and provide recommendations to reduce the cost of living and doing business in Bermuda.

So, I have to go back to this comparing and contrasting. Here we have an Opposition Leader who I do not think that he is just imagining things. He has got to be dreaming, Madam President! Dreaming that he and his party could actually genuinely lead.

And continuing along with my contrast, Madam President, that 2016 Reply [to] the Throne [Speech] had fresh ideas, a narrative for change and hope. But the 2023 Reply has the same narratives from what is the current OBA playbook, which must have been inherited from the UBP playbook, and it continues to be recycled and circulated.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Madam President, point of order.

**The President:** Senator Tucker, what is your point of order?

#### POINT OF ORDER

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** My point of order is the Minister's inference that the operations of the PLP [*sic*] are based on the UBP, which we know is no longer even a party. And it is just incorrect. So, I just wanted to make that point, Madam President. If the Minister can be mindful of those types of statements.

Thank you, Madam President.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** That is not a point of order, Madam President. However, since we are going to go there, I will repeat my line again so people could hear it one more time. When you have a party, even in this room, Madam President, where you have former candidates of the United Bermuda Party, I think it is not a far stretch of the imagination that the playbook in my eyes appears to be the same.

But this is where it gets very interesting, Madam President. This speech that the One Bermuda Alliance Leader gave on Friday, said the PLP is filled with stooges and yes-men and leaders who cannot lead. Let us go to my definitions again. A "stooge" is a subordinate used by another to do unpleasant, routine work. And here is the thing: I see some Members of the One Bermuda Alliance shaking their head. They might want to watch where I am going with this. An interesting choice of words, to use the word "stooge," Madam President, given that the title of the Progressive Labour Party's Throne Speech was *Serving the People*. Remember a stooge is used by another to do unpleasant work. Maybe the Opposition thinks that serving the people is unpleasant work. We'll see if we get any head-nods to that one! Come on, let us talk about it, Madam President. Maybe the Opposition thinks that

servicing the people is unpleasant. I certainly do not, Madam President. And the Progressive Labour Party do not think that servant leadership is either unpleasant or routine. And it is rude and disrespectful to those people of which we serve.

Maybe a Senator in this Chamber will remember calling me a yes-man. Yep! Let me take this opportunity to remind individuals in this place, and that Honourable Senator from the One Bermuda Alliance, that contrary to what he may believe, outside of my political work I have a 20-year career in servant leadership, a record of community involvement and a genuine desire to serve the people.

Now, Madam President, every good lesson must come to a quality conclusion. So let me summarise. As we heard on November 3, 2023, the Progressive Labour Party has a very aggressive and full legislative agenda. Serving the people was our mandate when we got elected in 2017. It was our mandate when we got re-elected in 2020. And it continues to be our mandate today.

Sadly, Madam President, my third conclusion point that I have come to over the last couple of weeks is that, sadly for the One Bermuda Alliance, they are in no position to lead this country despite their newly touted Leader, interim Leader, soon-to-be-contested Leader. (Maybe they can tell us whatever they want to call it.) However, Madam President, I am proud to be part of a Government that continues to serve the people.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Minister Darrell.

Would any other Senator care to speak?

It is over to you, Senator Tucker, Opposition Leader in the Senate. You have the floor.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Thank you, Madam President. Like the Minister, I am very grateful to be able to provide some comment on this year's Throne Speech.

[Pause]

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Madam President, we know that the purpose of delivering the speech is so that the Government can let the public know what initiatives they intend to focus on during the legislative year. While some who will speak today will focus on politics and perhaps refute much of what is said as an unfavourable response by the Opposition here today, my sole aim is not to entangle myself in the political theatre, as I have heard it called. But my purpose is to speak frankly to and for those who are living and feeling the effects of life in Bermuda, but who do not have a platform or cannot otherwise speak for themselves.

When the speech was read, I listened intently to learn of the plans that the Government had that would provide relief for some of the most pressing issues that ordinary Bermudians are struggling with. I will

say that I heard some updates that were good, contrary to Minister Darrell's saying that we did not have a whole lot of positive things to say. But those things that I heard that were good, did make me wonder if the Government is fully in touch with the people and the reality of what life is like for the ordinary person and the sense of urgency needed from them so they can have some relief.

So, I will start with comments on positive initiatives that stood out for me, followed by further observations. The independent living initiative. So, extending services to 17-year-olds, I thought that that was really good that life skills preparation will be provided to 17-year-olds. Supporting young people in the care of the Director of Child and Family Services early in an effort to prepare them to take on the responsibility of independent living when no longer in the care of the director after turning 18 is critically important. I was, however, under the impression that prior to the opening of the Transitional Living Facility last year, that DCFS [Department of Child and Family Services] was already providing such a service to young people, as I seem to recall asking questions about the preparation that was given to young people as they aged out.

In any event, Madam President, I look forward to hearing how these new initiatives will either supplement or replace what is already done, or supplement those things that were already done. This training, life skills training, is a vital skill that is crucial to improving the young person's chances for successful independent living when they are legally able to do so.

The CCTV initiative I thought was good. Completion of phase 1 of that project, as I understand it, and I invite my Government colleagues to correct me if I am incorrect. But phase 1 is intended to improve security and safety and provide additional resources to and support for the Bermuda Police Service and their work. Phase 2 of the project focuses on having a more rigid enforcement of traffic laws. But we have no timeline yet as to when this will come into being. [We] look forward to an update from the Government as to when this project will be fully complete, as crime and road use by some of our residents needs full and urgent attention and enforcement. So, there is absolute agreement there.

I was also pleased to see that the uniformed services cadet programme will be re-implemented. At a point, which I will call *back in the day*, it was commonplace that there were army cadets and police cadet programmes which enabled young people to join these services whilst still in high school. The cadets meeting certain academic and physical and other requirements were paid up to as much as \$42,000 and could receive additional support as they pursued degrees. Many people whom I personally know, Madam President, took advantage of the cadet programme and have established careers in uniformed services and within various other law enforcement areas to this day. It was a disappointment that the programme ended, because it enabled young people to develop skills and relationships

and to gain valuable experience that may not have happened if it had not been for that cadet programme.

So, Madam President, now to some added comments on areas that were highlighted in the speech and my further observations, which follows pretty much the order that they appear in the speech rather than order of importance, because they are all important to me.

On page 2 of the speech, it pledges to modernise the form E as it relates to the improvement for obtaining a death certificate. And the speech says that "in appropriate circumstances" (they will) "make provision for a short form death certificate which will allow for urgent estate matters to be settled." While it is good that this efficiency is finally being addressed, as many families have been and continue to be distressed by the inability to obtain death certificates within a reasonable timeframe after their loved ones have passed away, attention, Madam President, was brought to this issue by members of the public going back to 2020. And to date, there are many more who are still waiting for death certificates.

It is unfortunate, despite public outcry even back then, that this issue has unacceptably taken about three years to address. Hopefully, now that it has been mentioned in the Throne Speech, this issue will be shown to be a high priority for the Government and families will finally be able to settle the affairs of their departed loved ones and end the prolonged grief and suffering they have experienced because of the delays and, obviously, Madam President, prevent other families from having to experience it in the future.

I would ask, Madam President, as we serve the people, where is the sense of urgency by the Government when we are talking about serving the people?

Another thing, Madam President, we have so much talent on this Island. As a positive step, the Government is considering using unused buildings to provide our creatives with places to develop their skills. We do not know how many unused buildings will be provided for use, but I do have concern that, given our homeless population, there was no mention of repurposing any of these unused buildings to provide emergency shelter for people who need it, or the establishment of a safe house for domestic violence victims which was shut down in 2014.

On page 3, Madam President, we learned that the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors will now develop a five-year strategic plan to combat domestic abuse. The Centre of Abuse website indicates that approximately 7,000—I will repeat that, 7,000—are affected by domestic abuse annually in Bermuda . . . sorry, 7,000 women (I should add that). No statistics were provided for abuse rates regarding men. Prior to gang violence, domestic abuse killings were the number-one cause of murders in Bermuda. And over the 40 years there have been 35 people murdered. In a country our size, these numbers are staggering, and again

urgent attention is needed to combat incidences of domestic violence against women and men.

While there needs to be a coordinated plan, Madam President, victims cannot afford to wait for the plan to be developed and implemented before steps are taken. People are suffering, and the current suffering is at the hands of the abusers, and they need help and support now. I will just say, Madam President, I just want to add this piece. My comments are not targeted specifically at the Ministry, because I do know that the Ministry is doing some work in this front. However, again, I want to highlight the sense of urgency that is needed for the domestic abuse victims.

I continue to be disappointed that we are yet to have a specialist domestic violence court in Bermuda to handle the intricacies of domestic relationships or a strengthening of legislation that sends clear messages to victims that we will do what it takes to protect you, and to the abusers that the behaviour is unacceptable in this community and will not be tolerated. Amendments to the Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) Act 1997 to increase those protections for victims of domestic abuse are critically and urgently needed. And I am disappointed that it was not added to the list of Bills for consideration in this legislative session.

Madam President, although not directly mentioned in the speech, which is somewhat of an issue for me, I want to say a little bit about seniors. This summer we heard in the media that reports of elder abuse increased by 33 per cent from three years ago and that owing to the increase in the ageing population, the Department of Ageing and Disability Services expects that number to grow. Financial exploitation and physical and psychological abuse are the most reported types of elder abuse. Given this information, Madam President, I will say I was disappointed that this speech did not mention seniors or further amendments needed to protect them.

On page 3 of the speech, it speaks to the introduction of a Homelessness Strategy, which the Government announced that they would actually do two years ago. Our homeless population has swelled to 650 confirmed cases, as we all know. We also know that homelessness is a complex issue and that there are various reasons why people find themselves without shelter. I look forward to hearing more about this with the hope that the Homelessness Strategy will extend to prevention and the establishment of coordinated support between the public services. We need not only help people who are already unsheltered and at a crisis point, but also provide dedicated assistance for people before they reach the crisis point.

I support, Madam President, the idea of ensuring that disabled people who cannot otherwise leave home maybe due to a serious physical limitation are able to work at home with reasonable modifications. However, I do want to point out that there is also benefit for all people, disabled or not, working together in the

same workplace, as it would lend to improving the public's understanding and acceptance of people with differences. And issues of social isolation would be a concern for disabled people who are mobile and can actually get into an office space or in another working environment.

I think, though, Madam President, that more focus needs to be on improving building accessibility and employing other modifications within the community such as transportation services, for instance, to help the physically disabled people move about much better within the community.

I also want to note, Madam President, that there was, disappointingly, no mention of providing support for children with physical and other challenges. In 2019, Atlantis Psychiatry estimated that there were approximately 550 children and 1,200 adults with ADHD in Bermuda. And according to *World Population Review*, the current autism rate is 85.4 per 10,000 children in Bermuda. But initiatives for these growing populations need much more Government focus.

Madam President, turning attention to page 5, the Government advised us of its intention to incentivise employers to retain able-bodied workers beyond age [65] (if I may quote from the speech) to "retain the workforce we have while other efforts are committed to growing the Island's economy, creating more jobs that support an increased working population." Madam President, I just want to point out that I am concerned by the fact that we have been long aware that we have an ageing population and that those numbers continue to swell. But yet little has been done by the Government to prepare for this inevitability and take tangible steps to proactively address the conditions that would negatively impact us, as we are now seeing the fruit of that inactivity. And that is worrying to me.

According to Statista [[www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)], the average life expectancy in Bermuda for 2021 was 82.60 years for females and 85.82 for males. The Pan American Health Organization estimates that life expectancy at birth in 2023 is 81.70 years. We know that people are living longer, but it saddens me that rather than looking forward to retirement, due to out-of-control cost of living in Bermuda and unfunded pension fund that will run out at some point if we do not do something very soon, instead of being able to look forward to enjoying their twilight years doing whatever they want to do, many of our seniors will be forced—not all, but many of our seniors will be forced to continue working just to maintain a basic standard of living.

According to the World Economic Forum, Singapore, one of the most rapidly ageing populations in the world, and Japan, where around 25 per cent of the population is older than 65 and where the life expectancy is about 83 years, are already responding to the demographic shift and are benefiting from it. From innovation retirement incomes and care programmes, Japan's and Singapore's governments are seeing pos-

itive results. Both countries can reap what they call longevity dividends largely because they were thinking ahead by looking long term and starting early. And we have not done so. It was well known that we have an ageing population and that by 2026, a full 43 per cent of our population will be seniors. Many seniors will, as I said, have no choice but to continue working until they are no longer physically able to do so or up until they pass away, sadly. And a key reason for that, again I am stressing, is a failure to plan for the ageing population and an inability to retain our health population numbers.

I am heartened, Madam President, to see that the Government is aiming to improve efficiencies in some of the key departments. Again, the initiatives mentioned in the Throne Speech are long overdue. It is good that they now intend to create a single payment portal to enable people to pay for government services in one place, to establish one-stop shops to reduce the need for the public to make multiple trips to different departments to get their things done. And, Madam President, while I think these changes are good in terms of making an attempt to improve customer service in the Immigration Department, again it is long overdue.

But I do worry, Madam President, about the Government's ability to successfully execute on these improvement initiatives.

There was mention of implementing better use of technology to facilitate some of the improvements and increasing customer satisfaction through further digitisation of immigration processes. But, Madam President, we all recall that the Government spent \$150,000 on a system to digitise work permit applications processes only to learn that it did not fit requirements. So, they had to scrap it and start again. That exercise in itself is just one example of where there was not an efficient use of human resources or money. So I do, Madam President, look forward to seeing how these planned improvements will develop and how they will be implemented.

In conclusion, Madam President, no matter what side of the political divide you are on, there is no denying that living in Bermuda is becoming increasingly difficult. So much so that Bermudians are exercising their right to leave. There is no denying that most of us, if not all of us, know someone who has already left because they felt they cannot afford to live in the very home that they were born in. So, for those of us who have determined that leaving this country is not an option, we look to the Government to guide us through the challenges and influence and create an environment of positive change that will [ensure] that their plans read out to us each year are taking us in a direction that will improve life in Bermuda.

Madam President, I believe that we all want to make changes and bring about the successes that Bermuda and the people so desperately need. However, as much as the Government would like to paint the pic-

ture that things are not as bad as they seem, I will borrow a line from an African proverb that says, *He who feels it, knows it*. Permit me to read a few excerpts from a few people on social media who have been reaching out for help. And people are responding and helping people who cannot otherwise find help in other places.

*I am in need of some assistance for groceries, please. I don't have a lot of work, three-hour shifts like two times a week, which is not much that I can take home.*

*I am a mama of a primary school-aged son. I am in need of help with support of getting him snacks and fruit for school.*

*I am in desperate need of food for my daughter for this week and next week. If anybody is able to provide food or a voucher, it would be greatly appreciated.*

Madam President, I will say that while these examples have been given from social media, I have heard myself where people have asked directly for assistance and have also published things on social media. So, we cannot discount how much and how important those things are that are coming out on social media, although the Government will probably challenge that. But that is okay, because the public knows the value of what I am mentioning. How about the people who are leaving items that they need on the grocery store shelves because they cannot afford them? I have seen them. And I have seen seniors. And others probably in this room have paid for items that people have had to put back that they cannot afford.

I have listened to seniors who have said that they now have to choose between food, medicine and paying their BELCO bill. And I have spoken recently to a young professional couple who has left the Island and eventually want to return home, but they do not see any reason to do so because it is too expensive to live here. And although they make good money, Madam President, they do not see being able to save money, purchase a home and raise their children in an environment that they would like to do, the environment that they have grown up in. They do not envision there being any significant change in the Island anytime soon that would entice them to come home.

That is an area of focus, Madam President, that I believe the Government should really be also looking at, and that is in terms of being able to create that environment where people want to come back. Because countless of them have left. And, Madam President, there are countless stories like these. So, I beg the Government, I beg them not to present a picture to the public that things are not as bad as they seem, because there are countless examples of where they are and it is disingenuous to do so.

So, Madam President, while the Throne Speech is not all bad, it does in my opinion lack specific direction for how we are going to stop Bermuda from sinking. And as important, I believe there is no sense of the urgency [that is] needed to act on pressing matters affecting the Island. And [the Throne Speech] offers

very little hope that the Government can address the problems facing our Island and put us back on a right path of progress. In addition, what has been mentioned already, the exorbitant cost of living, a spiralling debt, unfunded pension funds (or I should say underfunded pension funds) and infrastructure that we all know we are less than proud of, a waning tourism industry and declining population, Madam President, are all serious causes for concern.

I have no doubt that the Government will say that my comments are all about gloom and doom, I have heard it before, and that we ignore all of the good work that we are doing. But, Madam President, to that I will answer my own statement and say that the Opposition has given credit where credit has been due. My personal view is that a good Government will embrace constructive criticism and adjust where necessary for the good of the people rather than spending time rebutting what is said for political expediency, which benefits no one.

Former US Senator and Secretary of Transport Elizabeth Dole said, "The best public policy is made when you are listening to people who are going to be impacted." This quote rings true when one considers the challenges that the Island currently faces. Because people feel that they were not listened to, the Government has seen demonstrations and protests from taxi drivers, fishermen, farmers, some educators and other supporters. There have been protests from ordinary people concerned with the recent ridiculous increase in electricity [costs] and those impacted by the high cost of food prices. So far, I count a staggering four protests in just one year, just this year alone, Madam President! But there could have been more and maybe I just missed the count.

Bermuda is in for more rough and rocky days. And unless the Government takes proactive steps when necessary and responds as quickly as needed, the rough and rocky days will get even rougher and rockier. The impact of slow reaction and in some cases inaction will be felt most by the people who can least afford it financially, mentally or physically. And no responsible Government will let that happen.

The value of the work the Government is doing will be for the public to judge. But I believe that we are an intelligent, proud, caring and resourceful people. And we can turn Bermuda around if we are willing to learn lessons from the past, roll up our sleeves and embrace a future where we can all work together for the benefit of all Bermudians and for the generations to come, as we are our greatest resource. But not enough of us know it or embrace it. As Bermudians, no matter your socioeconomic background, your gender, your race, we are all better together. But to turn the country around, we must function through the principles of integrity, transparency and accountability.

Thank you for listening, Madam President. That ends my comments for today.

## ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

### SENATE VISITOR

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Robin Tucker.

But before I invite another Senator to speak, I would just like to acknowledge the presence in the Gallery of the Minister of Education, Minister Diallo Rabain.

Welcome to you, sir.

*[Throne Speech and Reply debate, continuing]*

**The President:** The floor is open for you, Senator John Wight.

**Sen. John Wight:** Thank you, Madam President. Just give me one moment, and I would appreciate that.

*[Pause]*

**Sen. John Wight:** Madam President, as is often the case in these types of discussions, I do not see things quite as rosy as the governing party and not as dire as the Opposition. While there are many items and issues included in the Speech from the Throne, I am going to prioritise and comment on those items that I think are most important to Bermuda's future both for the 2024/25 year and beyond.

The first issue I am going to discuss is education. The Throne Speech referenced education being the foundation of any society's success. While I agree 100 per cent with this comment, I do not see it aligning with the success in our public school system that we need to see. By this I mean that the performance scores of our public school students compare very unfavourably with peers outside of the public education system and outside of the country. To be fair, this has been an issue in Bermuda for decades under the governance of all political parties. I understand that there are complicated issues and there are multiple factors surrounding this under-performance. But if we as a country are serious about this statement, that education is the foundation of any society's success, then we need to be doing more.

**Sen. Lindsay Simmons:** Point of order, Madam President.

**The President:** Point of order? What is your point of order?

### POINT OF ORDER

**Sen. Lindsay Simmons:** Yes. Senator Wight should have to produce proof to support that statement.

**Sen. John Wight:** I am no expert on education. I listen and read, but do not fully understand what education reform means. This is better left to the experts. But

what I do understand is that we need to be transparent and honest in the community about the current state of education, which needs to improve as evidenced by the grades of our young Bermudians.

On the rare occasion when grades are publicised, it is very obvious to me that our students are regrettably under-performing those in other countries. In a global world, our student grades are concerningly below those whom they will be competing with. For starters, to understand whether education reform is working, we need to report performance scores for each level of public education for educators and parents and the whole Island to see. How otherwise do we know whether the changes are working? I am a true believer that that which gets measured, gets done.

I took note of the consideration in the Throne Speech of an Education Authority. We have in the past had many good private sector people who headed up the boards of education only to resign due to the frustrations of needed changes being resisted. Bermuda needs an Education Authority with strong people who are given the authority and responsibility to do what is necessary to improve the education of our young Bermudians so that these young people can go on to achieve their education goals, provide for their families and become leaders of tomorrow.

Madam President, my next item for discussion following education is the economy and particularly the country's finances. Bermuda's finances are challenged, as we all know, as are virtually [the finances of] every country in the world. We are in no way unique. A country's finances are driven by three main levers: (a) increasing taxes, i.e., cash inflows; (b) decreasing expenses, i.e., cash outflows; and (c) increasing economic activity by having more people live in Bermuda and contribute to the finances of our economy.

I am going to focus my discussion on (a) increasing taxes, i.e., cash inflows. Reference was made in the Throne Speech to the global minimum tax in Bermuda that is expected to become reality January 1, 2025, which has the possibility to increase the amount of taxes that Bermuda collects from those large multinational companies that are domiciled and earning income in Bermuda. If this is the case, then Government will be able to use these new tax receipts to prioritise paying down the large government debt and provide tax relief to individuals at the lower end of the income spectrum in particular so that the cost of living in Bermuda is more manageable for them.

I cannot emphasise enough how important it is for Government to prioritise paying down our large government debt. The daily interest on government's debt is in excess of \$300,000 per day simply on the interest alone. Just imagine if we could reallocate those funds to things like elder care, repairing our roads and providing health insurance to those in our community who do not have it.

The caveat I have regarding the new minimum tax in Bermuda as a jurisdiction is that I give failing

grades for our inability to collect the taxes from payroll tax, land tax and other taxes that should be easy to collect. Government's balance sheet year after year includes an item for uncollectable prior year's taxes, and from memory it is far in excess of \$100 million cumulatively. The design and implementation of the system to administer and collect the new 15 per cent minimum global tax is very complicated. We need to get this done right, and we need to get better, much better at collecting what is owed. Otherwise, this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to benefit Bermuda from increasing taxes from large corporations earning income in Bermuda will not be optimised.

Governments everywhere talk about legislating cost of living increases, but in my view this is largely rhetoric. Governments cannot legislate supply and demand forces. This global minimum tax, if we do it right, will have the potential to improve the fortunes of many Bermudians in the lower income ranges in particular in a way that no other option has.

Finally, Madam President, one area that I have been a strong proponent of for many years is a progressive immigration policy to recognise the ageing population issue that is getting more severe each year. The Premier and Minister of the Economy have both said, which I agree with, that the Island needs thousands of additional residents paying into our tax system to support services such as our Island's hospital, which we know is chronically financially challenged. The Throne Speech offered no details as to how Government is going to achieve this.

Overall, Madam President, the Throne Speech included most of the themes I would have expected it to. The 2024/25 year will indeed offer many risks and opportunities for Bermuda.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator John Wight.

Senator Lindsay Simmons, I recognise you. You have the floor.

**Sen. Lindsay Simmons:** Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, first I would like to say that I was actually a little surprised when the Senate Leader for the Opposition did not mention anything about her party's Reply in her speech.

The Throne Speech outlines the legislative agenda for this year. Our platform speaks to what we plan to do. Madam President, the pension fund has benefits underfunded since the UBP introduced it. It defines benefits versus defined contributions. The fund was set up to keep those White civil servants back then paid. It was never intended for us. However, this Government is tackling this problem where previous Governments have not bothered to touch it.

The OBA had multiple protests per month for 12 months when they were in power.

Madam President, I would like to point out that the Government could have completely repaved all

public and private roads [which] would still have been \$100 million less than what we ended up paying for Morgan's Point.

Madam President, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors has been actively working on solutions for homelessness. During this legislative session, a Homelessness Strategy will be introduced for Bermuda. It is important that this Government make it a priority, so that is why this was in our Throne Speech.

Madam President, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors will allow children who are under the care of the Director of [Child and] Family Services the opportunity at the age of 17 to move to Bermuda's first Independent Living Programme. They will be given the life skills preparations at 17 instead of 18 so they can get the tools needed to live independently and go into society.

Madam President, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors will now develop a five-year strategic plan to combat domestic violence. It will mitigate against its familiar and societal impacts and promote the safety of children and families experiencing this trauma. Madam President, those who feel it, know it. Madam President, this is something that is important to me. And the reason why it is a five-year strategy is nothing that we should take lightly. This is a very, very important matter that is prevalent in Bermuda that we need to address.

Madam President, I also want to highlight that unemployment is down significantly, particularly with youth underemployment. The OBA had said previously that it is only in international business. But there have been job increases in other sectors as well including accommodations, food service, activities sector, professional, scientific and technical activities, the wholesale and retail trade, construction and the quarry.

Madam President, I must say I always enjoy listening to Minister Hayward speak on promises that we make to our Island. Madam President, as Minister Hayward pointed out in another place, and if you allow me, may I please quote?

**The President:** You may, certainly.

**Sen. Lindsay Simmons:** It was not up for debate that our Island's economy "had expanded beyond pre-pandemic levels." He added that 2022 came with 812 new companies in Bermuda's international business sphere, created 230 jobs—230 jobs, Madam President. Minister Hayward and his team are working tirelessly to ensure that Bermudian employment is up and Bermudian unemployment is down.

Madam President, our tourism is up. Figures are up. Air arrivals are up by 25 per cent compared to the first nine months of last year, and cruise arrivals are at 91 per cent of pre-pandemic levels.

Madam President, education reform. Madam President, when I talk about education reform, I am not

talking from a place of not knowing. Madam President, this Government will continue to reform the education system. Two more primary schools are slated to become parish primary schools. They are Elliott Primary School and Harrington Sound Primary School. Sandys Secondary Middle School is slated to be the next signature programme.

Madam President, I am at the Berkeley Institute every day, and I just yesterday had a conversation with a young lady about the signature programme. I wanted to know her feedback. And she said that she was excited to be the first year that had the opportunity to be a part of the signature programme. She has now become an intern at a legal firm, and this young lady said that she would not have had the opportunity if it was not for the signature programme. Madam President, this is not a thought; this is not what I think, but this is a story from a young lady who is on the honour roll and has just been given her invitation last night to come to the Berkeley Institute's prize-giving ceremony.

Madam President, this Government has taken on the task of adding 77 affordable rental units on the market which will be available for Bermudians. We expect 25 to be completed by December of this year. Madam President, since returning to Government, the PLP has reduced taxes to their lowest level in 30 years, so much so that the average worker has saved over \$4,000 in payroll taxes. Madam President, that is \$4,000 that they do not have to pay out now.

Madam President, we placed a price freeze at the pumps so that people of this country are not subjected to the global increase in the cost of fuel. Madam President, we introduced a mortgage guarantee programme which not only cuts [the] down payment requirements in half, but also offers a reduced interest rate of 5 per cent. And as said earlier, 49 people have been approved.

Madam President, the increase to the child day care allowance [will] better assist many Bermudians with the rising cost of child day care. Madam President, if you make under \$133,000 a year, you can apply for this relief.

Madam President, the proposed corporate income tax will be the most fundamental tax reform in Bermuda's history that will provide the strong likelihood of allowing the Government the capacity to significantly reduce the cost of living and cost of doing business in Bermuda.

Madam President, like it was said in another place, the S&P recently maintained our credit rating and in their most recent report said that they did so because of the country's strong framework, prosperous economy and prudent policymaking.

Madam President, this February the Premier will be announcing a balanced budget for the first time in over 20 years—a balanced budget, Madam President. And Madam President, December 18, the Government has now positioned itself to be in the path of reducing our debt by \$50 million—\$50 million. That is a

lot, Madam President. With a projected balanced budget, the Government will continue on those trajectories and continue to make payments toward our debt over time.

Madam President, I applaud the Government for continually putting Bermudians first.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Lindsay Simmons. Would any other Senator care to speak at this time?

Senator Robinson, you have the floor.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Thank you, Madam President. And you might want to get your timeclock out.

**The President:** Yes. I was just going to.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Yes. We have Members who measure the amount of time for which folks speak. I want to make sure that I am on the clock, and I beat my 30 seconds from last session.

So, the main precipice here that we find ourselves in with this Westminster system of politics is that usually both parties tend to agree on the issues that are facing Bermudians and also tend to agree on the principle of how to effect that change and how to assist Bermudians in that regard. But where we segue tends to be execution. And we sat through a (quote-unquote) “civics lesson” that spent more time on the Reply to the Throne [Speech] than the actual Throne Speech. And herein lies the problem with why Bermudians have become disenfranchised with these Throne Speeches from the Progressive Labour Party. We have a similar playbook from them when it comes to releasing policies, when it comes to speaking on what they will do. And it is typically *attack, deflect and distract*. And when they run into issues with certain policies, they just scoot them out of the way.

So when we come to a speech like this from the Throne, where we have an ageing population, we have Bermudians who do not feel as though they can afford to live in their own country, we have Bermudians considering their options or having to move out of their apartments to do house-sharing with other people in the community because they cannot afford rent, these are the issues that permeate when you hit the doorstep. And constantly what we hear is, *Well, why doesn't the Opposition come forward with their plan or their solutions?* Well, we have, Madam President. We have run on numerous platforms in the last elections, and we take those to the people. We do the hard work of presenting our . . . And I also just want to be clear as well, Madam President. This is my second run in the Senate. And I have to say that the decorum from the Government Leader is appalling. I have seen Government Leaders in the Senate before, and I understand that this is a confrontational Westminster system that we have to—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Point of order, Madam President.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** What is your point of order?

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Point of order.

**The President:** What is your point of order?

#### POINT OF ORDER

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** The Senator is supposed to be giving his submission to the Throne Speech. I have given my submission. I am quietly sitting here, and you have not heard me say a word. So, I am not sure what decorum he is talking about, Madam President. But I would ask that you get the Senator to withdraw that comment and get back to the speech of what he is trying to relate to the people as to what the One Bermuda Alliance will actually do as an alternative.

Thank you, Madam President.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** And Madam President, I will retract that if you can admit that you have not heard the heckling, the comments, the laughing, the talking toward Members who have been speaking. I will retract that if that is the ruling.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Thank you, Madam President. I am glad he retracted that.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** I have not. I asked Madam President, if—

**The President:** Yes, Senator Robinson, you can retract it.

But I will advise the Minister that you certainly in your own presentation made your own comments about the Opposition.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Thank you.

**The President:** However, you have retracted it, and we will move on.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Thank you very much.

Yes. So, this is what we have become accustomed to. And it is something that we hear on the doorstep often with the Throne Speech here. It is missing some very key and national issues that many of us were looking forward to hearing about. We know that the SDO [special development order] was approved by the Minister, the Deputy Premier and the other place. And we understand it is a private project. However, it has been marred [by] lots of opposition not from just this party on the One Bermuda Alliance side, but also from residents including the Planning officials.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** That was not what I was saying.

The purpose that I bring this up is because when things get tough, when certain things are not politically expedient, suddenly they are not included anymore in the Government's plans or they are left out for people to wonder what happened. And because of that, it has eroded the trust of people when they read these documents.

So, I think my Senate Leader eloquently outlined the concerns that many of us share in the Opposition. And I also believe that it was outlined in the Reply what we support and the certain initiatives that we support.

But what I really want to focus on here, because I do not like to rehash House debates . . . I know that some Members do have prepared talking points from the House to repeat. But for me, in this particular speech, I was looking for the big points to be addressed. And that is, how are we going to entice Bermudians to come back to the Island? How are we going to entice human capital in general to come back to the Island? And I have heard a lot of talking points from the other side that were not included in this particular document. And the motion is *consideration of the Throne Speech*.

Yet we are hearing talk of debt payments. I would have loved to see a portion of this dedicated to how we are going to finance and service that debt so that Bermudians can feel reassured. Because in all honesty, I read through this document and there are a lot of things in principle I agree with, especially when it comes to the death certificates, when it comes to the cadet programme, when it comes to the Education Authority. I should know, the Opposition was one of the first to call for that. But it is missing the word "independent." And I think it speaks to why folks look at these documents and say, *Wow, this is just more campaigning*.

And even when another Member spoke earlier regarding a civics lesson, I think that the civics lesson that needs to be addressed is, when somebody is in Government, they no longer need to act like Opposition. They no longer need to do the politicking, the deflecting to the other side, the *previous Government*. They *are* the previous Government. They have been in for six years now.

So, when will we as the people get Members from that side coming and breaking down how these particular Throne Speech initiatives are going to attract Bermudians to come back, that are going to attract human capital to our shores and fill the 8,000 worker hole that the Minister in another place has stated exists in our economy?

We right now are competing with countries and islands who are paying people to relocate to those particular places that are low in population. If we have an education system where folks do not feel confident enough to send their children and are forced to pay for

private school, who have not received the support of a portion of the teachers who have voted that they have no confidence in their Minister, that is the very first section that opens up this Throne Speech. This is what we get right at the front. And I do not mean any disrespect—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Point of information, Madam President.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** I do not accept that. I do not accept that.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Point of order, Madam President.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** That is better.

**The President:** What is your point of order?

#### POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** The point of order is that the Member is giving incorrect and false information in this place, Madam President, as the vote of no confidence was given to someone else by the Bermuda Union of Teachers and not to the Minister of Education.

Thank you, Madam President.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Well, he can dispute that all he likes. We have communicated with—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** I think he is talking about the Senator, Madam President.

**The President:** [Senator] Robinson.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Thank you.

**The President:** It was . . . It is not the Minister and you need to retract that.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Yes, yes, so . . . Yes. I will retract that.

So, the purpose for which I am bringing this up is that we have a lack of confidence in that system. I have nothing personal against the Minister of Education at all. But the point that I am making here is that this is our job as the Opposition to bring forth people's concerns constructively. And at the point that we have two pressure groups on each end of the Island who have risen up because of how this has been going, it is not feasible for us to then promote ourselves as an international competitor to fix our problems, to bring people in to assist our economy, to attract Bermudians back if we are constantly inundated with people within the community—and these are community voices. So,

you know, it is not about the Opposition. We are witnessing these community voices coming forward and sharing their concerns about these particular amendments.

And in the Throne Speech, what it does is it presents the distraction part of their tactic, which is to just present the portions that they feel competent on. But these are not the portions of changes that are needed to bring the people along to feel confident in the direction of their Island. And that is what we as politicians are here to do, to provide direction. So, when we see things missing like the casino gambling, like gaming, what is the update there? That was something that . . . and when see the . . .

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** I thought he was sitting there quietly, Madam President. See?

**The President:** Senator Robinson, you continue.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** I thought the Honourable Minister was sitting there quietly, Madam President. But we see the heckling has started again. (My apologies.)

So, what I would say to summarise this document of the Throne Speech 2023 is that it is legislating for the symptoms of a struggling economy. But it is not legislating for the causes. And what we find is that the Progressive Labour Party has been very proactive in providing support. And that is something that the Opposition has constantly supported. However, when you are providing that support you have to also look at the fact that the causes continue to persist. We have charities that are pushed to the brink right now servicing people in our community, food banks that have gone up. I know one in the Salvation Army that has seen a 25 per cent uptick in folks coming to use their services.

This is where we are as an Island. And it is not to dismiss all of the efforts of the Government. But we have to have some real finite discussion here about how we are going to fix that. And that is what is absent, because people still do not find Bermuda as a place they can retire. Seeing the age of retirement raised is basically saddling seniors with the point of waiting longer now to collect their pensions, waiting longer now to be able to put their feet up after servicing our community. These are the things that Bermudians are taking from this.

Is Bermuda a place that I can retire in? Is Bermuda a place that I can raise my children in? Are we able to survive her to work 40 hours, punch the clock, do everything you are supposed to do, and at the end of your 40 hours you cannot afford to pay your rent? You cannot afford to have another kid whom you want? You cannot afford to do these things, but you are doing everything right. And I think that is why in the Reply, it was saying, *Imagine a Bermuda where you don't have*

*to work two or three jobs to get by.* And this is a principled document of where the One Bermuda Alliance intends to take Bermuda. And the principles of it are something that we have not heard any arguments from the Government on. They just want us to do their job and to provide solutions for them.

As we see in this Throne Speech, they have run out of steam. And we have no problem providing solutions, but we will provide them to the people. When we canvass, when we speak to them, when they email us, when they bring up their solutions to us, we are taking that on and collating it. And it will come to the people of Bermuda. And they will be able to see that they have an alternative. And they will be able to see that the One Bermuda Alliance has been working on solutions and we have always put forth solutions.

We have put forth [an] amendment in this very Chamber on the first day I was back. And what happened? We had a Senator return to the Chamber just to vote it down. So, this is the type of doublespeak that we get when they say, *Collaborate! Give us solutions!* And then when you [give] solutions, *We don't want those. Oh, that amendment is not going to work.* So if we have differences of opinion, this Throne Speech here and our Reply showcase that for the people of Bermuda. We have a principled document given by our Opposition Leader, Jarion Richardson, who brought forward his vision and the party's vision for where we want to take Bermuda.

It is not the Opposition's job to lay out piece by piece a framework for the Government to follow policy. This is their debate to carry. These are their policies to defend. And it is they who are in the driver's seat who need to convince the public that they are capable of leading Bermuda into the future. And from what we have heard and what we will probably continue to hear, they are not confident that this Throne Speech allows them to do that. Because they spent—the Progressive Labour Party spent a majority of the time in another Chamber personally attacking the Leader of the Opposition, ripping apart the Reply instead of speaking on how the Throne Speech initiatives help the everyday Bermudian. And we witnessed that same tactic brought here today, where presentations should be made on fleshing out this document.

I understand that Throne Speeches and Replies are very high level. So, it is up to us as representatives of the parties to flesh out how those things will translate to the everyday Bermudian and how these policies will go into effect. But instead, we have zero answers in that regard. There is talk of various ideas which we get every year. And when these ideas, some of them do not come to pass, they will be forgotten in the next Throne Speech. And this is a list that they have yet to refute that was read out in the Reply to the Throne [Speech], and I will not read it again.

But the Opposition Leader laid out very clearly policies that have fallen through the cracks, policies that were brought forward and simply were not done.

And an economic plan was mentioned in this Throne Speech, but nothing was mentioned on how they will get the parts that have stalled—the vertical farming and other parts of that economic plan—back on track.

So, what are we actually in the Chamber for when it comes to a consideration of the Throne Speech if we are going to be treated to personal attacks, political barbs, what the Opposition did, *This is what the OBA did six years ago*? Bermudians are concerned about their future, concerned about how they can keep their children in school, concerned about how they can pay their electricity bill, worried about whether or not their food security is at risk because they see farmers protesting, fishermen protesting. And instead of speaking on those protests, what do we hear? *Why, they protested under you too. Well, you had protests as well.* Okay. Who wants a Government that is constantly looking back? Who wants a Government that is stuck in the past?

This was their opportunity, because the community has openly displayed their lack of favourability and lack of trust in this current leadership. This document was their chance to speak directly to those people and say, *[We] heard your concerns. And this is how we are going to do it.* But what we got was the PLP saying, *There will be no change of course. We are going to push forward whether you support it, whether you like it or not.* And that is the type of governance that Bermudians have become tired of.

I encourage Members in this Chamber to spend more time fleshing out how their policies in this Throne Speech are going to come into effect so that Bermudians can start to believe that they will actually achieve what they are setting out to do and spend less time [talking about] six years ago.

In my estimation, we have definitely had a few glimmers of bipartisanship. And I still believe that that is what Bermudians want—us to work together.

Now, that is going to be a hard task because there are folk who say they want that, but do not display it. And it has now come to a point in our history where Bermudians realise that we are at a precipice where the Island is looking at a cliff. And we are marching ever so fast to that cliff where people are saying, *I may not be able to be here in the next five years.*

So, what are we going to do? I will not sit here and disingenuously say that the Government has achieved nothing. I will not sit here and say that the economy has not shown signs of growth. That has never been our position. Our position is an improvement of your grade from a “D” to a “C”—it still needs to come up. So yes, we are seeing the little shoots. But Bermudians are not feeling it. And as long as they are not feeling it, the Opposition will continue to advocate for them.

And I also want to take this time to apologise to the Education Minister for misquoting and misrepresenting that vote of no confidence. That was not my intention to put forward something that was not correct.

So, I want to take that time and acknowledge that I was incorrect to say that.

But the point remains it is a lack of confidence in the leadership as a whole. And this is professional criticism. As the Opposition, it is professional criticism about the work ethic, the work results, not the individual Members, not the individual personalities, but the work produced. And if the Opposition can list out in their Reply a litany of policies that never quite made it, then it is clear that we have another politically expedient document where we can play Russian roulette with what policies will be achieved. Will the debt be serviced? Where is that coming from? Has there been any sort of movement in the population? Where is the progress report as far as in this Throne Speech to assure Bermudians that, *Hey, we have brought in 600–700 additional . . .* It is just very much aspirational. And aspirational is great. Aspiration is phenomenal. But without work, it shows a lack of leadership and a lack of direction.

So, I will close by saying to my colleagues opposite that they have an opportunity here to re-inspire Bermudians, to raise back that faith that this is the place to be, that this is where we should retire, and to pick out policies from this Throne Speech that show Bermudians that this is the path that we are going to. Because if not and we continue to sit here and do the politicking games, Bermudians will tune out. And they will continue to feel hopeless in the direction which this country is going.

So, with those comments, Madam President, I will close my remarks. Thank you very much.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Dwayne Robinson.

Would any other Senator care to speak at this time?

Senator De Couto, you have the floor.

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** Thank you, Madam President. I appreciate the opportunity to make my comments along with my colleagues. It is funny. I did think that we were going to spend most of today talking about the Government’s plans. So, I was a bit surprised by the Minister’s start to the day. But there you go.

Yesterday my colleagues and I were up at the Music Box, on top of the Music Box as the Minister likes to mention. And we were planning for today. And I had to open the window. There was a lot of hot air, much like today. And I looked out at the empty lot that is the Ottiwell Simmons casuarina and Mexican pepper nursery; aka the [Ottiwell Simmons] Arbitration Centre. And while there were some bright Bermudians poking up through the weeds, otherwise it was a junkyard. And to me, Madam President, that junkyard was an analogy for not just the Throne Speech, but in fact the Minister’s comments earlier today.

You may remember when they planned that project, there was a press conference. There was a

photo op with shovels. It makes me think about the Minister's comments about the pictures on the cover of the Throne Speech, photos. But right now, Madam President, the breeze is blowing through the casuarinas on that lot, and there is not much to show for it. That is my analogy for the Government's efforts.

Most of you in this Chamber and some who may have time to be listening in, know that I like to look at things by the numbers. So, I thought I would give you my statistics of the Throne Speech, the Government's plans, Madam President. I counted 39 actions. One of them was an OBA idea. There were two surveys and data collection and two strategies. One misleading statistic—yes, the economy has grown. But no, we have not caught up with the rest of the world since COVID-19. We have a task force and one pivot. We have four things listed that are from last year. We had one project that already failed, two buzzwords, "RegTech" [and] "AI." (Perhaps I should use some AI on my speech in the future.)

There was a lot of streamlining, which we can get behind. There was one proposal for political interference in the Information Commissioner's Office. There was one massive change with no mandate from the public, being CARICOM, which when asked, the Premier could not really explain why he wanted to do it. And I have to be honest, Madam President, it is not something I have heard about on the doorsteps, and I know my colleagues have not. Then we had a laundry list of Bill titles and amendments, but no actual explanation behind them.

So anyway, Madam President, if I have done my math right, that is 20 out of 39 initiatives that have already been done, or they came from the OBA, or they are not even real actions. Or they do not even look good on paper. I call it about half only because I know the Minister is always keen that we are precise with the numbers, 51.3 per cent as the initiatives. So, I know he will appreciate that, Madam President.

Now, there were some things in the Speech that we in the OBA do like, and we actually already heard about them from my colleagues. But there are quite a lot missing. Nothing about the cyberattack and how the Government plans to deal with the highly likely personal information breaches that will affect everyone in Bermuda. Just platitudes about cyber legislation. As my colleague Senator Robinson mentioned, nothing about the Fairmont Southampton SDO or that project, perhaps one of the most impactful topics for the Island in the past two years. And nothing really about tourism except streamlining. Nothing about air lift. Nothing about investors in hotels or tourism.

Madam President, nothing about vital local industries like farming and fishing. Never mind the protests up and down Front Street and the other protests that we heard about. Nothing about independence—aka, self-determination. I am going to guess the Government put that report in the round file, and if so that

is a rare display of good judgment by them, if perhaps a waste of the taxpayer money.

Madam President, nothing about pension reform and addressing the massive shortfall in the government pension funds, which my colleagues have also touched upon, unless you count asking older people to work longer to reduce the amount of pension payouts required. Nothing, Madam President, on gaming. Never mind the multi-million dollar costs of the Gaming Commission and nary a casino in sight. Madam President, nothing about investment from the Middle East. And here it is mid-November, and we have a \$240,000-a-year special Mid East advisor. I thought perhaps we would see some plans announced regarding that.

But Madam President . . . and Senator Robinson I think really got to the heart of this. The most important thing missing was a vision, a vision of how our diverse people can thrive, not just survive, Madam President. A vision of how our Island can maximise its natural advantages and its hard-won advantages and play to our strengths. A vision, Madam President, of how the Government can truly take care of our people from a position of care and compassion.

Madam President, what we have today is a Government of those who are leaders only by virtue of their positions, not by their actions, who govern by checklists and buzzwords in between trips to overseas conferences; a Government that seeks to control and constrain rather than collaborate and consult.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Madam President, a point of order.

**The President:** Minister Darrell, what is your point of order?

#### POINT OF ORDER

*[Misleading]*

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Individuals whether they be in this House or another House, if they have been appointed or sworn in, in specific positions, they are in fact leaders, Madam President. So, I think it is a point of order for the Member who is speaking to say that people are only called *leaders* in name. That is actually constitutionally incorrect, Madam President. Thank you.

**The President:** Your point was taken.

Minister De Couto.

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** You know, Madam President, anyone who has taken on a mantle of leadership, perhaps in a local church, a local organisation, perhaps through their work—I know you have a lot of experience in leadership in a complicated organisation—knows that that job starts, *starts* when you have the position. And at that point you are already behind, Madam President. Leadership is a series of actions and behaviours.

It is how you demonstrate and earn respect from those who have given you the opportunity to lead. It is a privilege, Madam President, a privilege.

And I think that the Minister's comment there, Madam President, is an example of my next statement, which is we have a Government that tells but does not listen. Madam President, the people of our beautiful Island deserve a Government in which they can have confidence and trust, that will support them in planning for a future in Bermuda. And my colleagues Senator Robinson and Senator Tucker talked about some of the problems in the way of people seeing a future here. We need a Government with the vision that this one lacks, including making Bermuda a destination of choice, yes, for visitors and tourists, for businesses and investors. But most importantly, how do we turn this country into the positive choice for our future generations?

Madam President, I know that the Minister and his colleagues want to hear how the One Bermuda Alliance will approach this. I guess it is not enough that they have the ministerial salaries. It is not enough that they have the GP car. It is not enough that they have a staff of technical officers. Apparently, this Government needs the Opposition to do their job for them. And we are ready, Madam President. We are ready to do that job for the people of Bermuda.

One of the most important things we would do is get a grip on our country's debt because, as Senator Wight mentioned, the massive interest costs here are strangling our budgets. We have all heard that money cannot buy happiness. But when you cannot meet your basic needs, a few extra dollars never hurt, Madam President. And when a Government cannot be trusted to make good decisions with the people's money, our resources are wasted and it would be quite natural and right for the people of Bermuda to become cynical about any Government initiatives that they learn about.

Madam President, I would like to remind you and everybody listening that when the One Bermuda Alliance became the Government in 2012, we learned that on top of the crushing debt incurred by the Progressive Labour Party, there was not even enough money to pay the civil service. So, when we hear in the Government's Throne Speech that this Government will continue to support the public service, we have to ask, *Will you? Really?* So, what is the alternative? Because I know that the Minister has asked for us to provide the alternatives. Organise the finances of this country to have the money to pay people! That is the alternative.

As another reminder, Madam President, one of the earliest actions of this Government's Finance Minister when he became Premier and Finance Minister was to give \$800,000 to a savvy scammer promising a recording studio. So, Madam President, when we hear that the Government will support creatives with makerspaces, that sounds good. But we have to ask, What will we actually get and where will the money go? What is the alternative, Madam President? Do not hang out

with and do not give money to scammers! I mean, I know that sounds stupid to have to say it. But I have been asked. We have been asked to say it, so I am saying it.

Madam President, the Throne Speech, as was mentioned again by my colleagues, [has] no mention of strategies or approaches to address our massive debt. And this is not the Budget Debate. But we do have the biggest budget ever, the biggest debt ever. And despite the Government's protestations, it is commonly accepted by the people of Bermuda that they are receiving the lowest service and support from this Government in recent memory. So, it is fair to ask, What is the Government going to do about it? It is clear something has to change.

And I know we have heard about this \$50 million of debt that is going to get paid down. And I really look forward to the details of it, because when I checked (I just had to refresh my memory), this Government budget, a \$45 million deficit on top of a budget with \$77 million deficit last year. So, if we are magically paying down the \$50 million of debt, a couple of different things happen, Madam President. Either some money fell out of the sky, that means revenue that was not planned for or expected; or the Government has not spent some money it budgeted. Perhaps it cancelled some capital projects that might have failed, or they have not been able to progress. So, while we will take it and it is a good start, it is not a strategy, Madam President. Luck and windfalls are not a strategy.

A strategy for managing the debt would have gotten laid out in the budget and the series of budgets thereafter, and the Government would have demonstrated its fiscal competence by sticking to the plan and following the plan to success.

And Madam President, the corporate income tax is not the answer. There is some potential upside there, Madam President. But given the massive uncertainty about that tax's economic impact for Bermuda, plus and minus, and the fact that we should not expect to have the first dollar of revenue available for at least three years from now, the Government needs to have plans today, Madam President, plans today.

Madam President, the OBA would operate on the basis of good governance, focusing on results for the people, not burnishing our CVs on the government dime. For example, instead of creating a committee to interfere with the Information Commissioner and PATI, we would ensure the government departments were equipped with the resources and training to actually answer PATI requests. So, I propose an alternative to the Minister. Instead of finding ways to try to hide information, do a job you can be proud of in the first place! That is my alternative, Madam President.

Madam President, the One Bermuda Alliance would create actual plans to meaningfully grow our working population and get our economy moving again across all sectors, not just international business. We would not sit on our laurels as we ride the wave of the

IB business cycle while local economic growth severely lags the rest of the world before COVID-19. Like my colleague, Senator Robinson said, *We may have gone from a D to a C, but we need to get up to the B-plus and A ranges.* So, what is my alternative? Stop pretending everything is okay! And support local businesses and the local economy.

Madam President, we would work to support and enable the creation and growth of local businesses and entrepreneurs by reducing red tape rather than competing with them and trying and failing to pick specific winners and losers. We would work to grow Bermuda's economic pie rather than more thinly slicing the dwindling portion prepared by the Progressive Labour Party.

Madam President, instead of giving massive contracts to friends and family as advisors and being dazzled by PowerPoint from overseas consultants who are chasing dollars, the One Bermuda Alliance would seek out high-quality reputable investors in Bermuda, investors with proven track records whose investment theses actually make sense, given Bermuda's strengths, and who operate with good faith and mutual respect. So again, an alternative was requested. So, the alternative is to stop dealing with sketchy hustlers and allowing Bermuda to be worked over at the negotiation table. That is my alternative, Madam President.

I will say I do give a note of congratulations for the recent Google underwater cable deal because that meets those criteria—a high-quality investor, we know why they are here, and we know what the benefits are.

Madam President, we know that young Bermudians especially are looking elsewhere for their futures because they do not see Bermuda as a thriving, dynamic place to live with accessible housing. And we will not pretend that creating a makerspace will fix that. I mean, we would like to have that. It is nice. The problem is deeper and more widespread. Our upcoming generations see a stalled economy and crumbling infrastructure.

Let us take the roads, Madam President. An asphalt plant will help. But it is not a silver bullet, and it needs to be part of a structured well-thought-out programme to address the roads problem end to end. And importantly, backed by resources like money. Again, money does not buy happiness, Madam President, but it can pave some roads. We would create realistic budgets with a realistic plan, and we will not hold a press conference every time we fill in a single pothole.

Madam President, housing . . . housing. A wide, big knowledge problem, and we have heard about some of it today. And the answer, frankly, is pretty complicated and not amenable to a soundbite in these remarks. But I can tell you [that] we plan to work closely with owners, renters and investors to tackle this problem. It needs creative and fresh ideas and probably will include things like building up in Hamilton. And overall, we need a rebooted economy to encourage investors to invest in providing housing and to create the

demand for the wide variety of housing that we need to supply. But a press conference every time a wall is painted or a window is replaced is not going to cut it.

Madam President, on banking, I think we all agree everyone needs to have a bank account. But we have to recognise that the BMA [Bermuda Monetary Authority] already tightly regulates banking in this country. And the banks are subject to many national and international regulations on things like money laundering. So, I get a little confused when I hear that the Government might want to layer more requirements on existing local banks, and I note that banks like Jewel Bank probably do not even have to open a branch. So, I look forward to seeing the details because I am a little confused about what it all means.

And seniors, Madam President. The Government has done nothing to address the looming pension crisis except seeming to ask seniors to work longer. And that was addressed in some detail by my colleagues. And the more I think about this proposed initiative, the more confused I get. Because most employers would be really happy to keep around a good employee who is experienced and knows the ropes and gets the job done rather than to have to hire and train someone new. So, I am going to say that any senior who is currently working and wants to keep working probably is.

So, this initiative, Madam President, like many others in the Throne Speech, makes me think about the *Titanic*. Problem one, the Government steered the Island into an iceberg. Problem two, the ship is now sinking. Meanwhile, this Government is picking out music for the string quartet, playing musical chairs with the deck chairs, and there are not enough lifeboats to go around.

It did occur to me that perhaps the Premier used CARICOM as his lifeboat. It is hard to know because when pressed, he did not seem to know why we should join. But what I can tell you, Madam President, is that the One Bermuda Alliance Government would carefully plot a route. We would keep a good lookout. And we would steer around the icebergs. We will fix the holes in the ship. We will pump out the water, and we will make sure there is a space on this ship for all of us, Madam President.

The One Bermuda Alliance is ready to take our country into the future, working together to make a country which works for everyone.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator De Couto.

Senators, it is now almost 12:25.

Minister, I am suggesting that we break for lunch.

So, Senators, with that we will break for lunch, and we will return at two o'clock.

**Proceedings suspended at 12:25 pm**

## Proceedings resumed at 2:02 PM

[*Sen. the Hon. Joan E. Dillas-Wright, President, presiding*]

**The President:** Good afternoon, Senators, and the listening audience . . . and for their benefit, the Senators will continue with the consideration of the Throne Speech with which Her Excellency the Governor was pleased to open the present Session of Parliament.

Senator the Honourable Minister Darrell is the [Government] Leader [of the Senate] and he is expected any moment now.

## ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

### SENATE VISITOR

**The President:** Before we continue I would just like acknowledge the presence in the Gallery of MP Jache Adams. Welcome to you, sir, good to see you.

## DEBATE ON THE 2023 THRONE SPEECH AND REPLY

[*Continuation thereof*]

**The President:** Senators, we will continue. Would any Senator care to speak at this time?

Senator Leslie Robinson, you have the floor.

**Sen. Leslie Robinson:** Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, today I sit here as a proud member of the Progressive Labour Party. Our Speech from the Throne issued on 3 November 2023, is a well-thought-out plan that speaks to how we serve the people of Bermuda and how we will continue to serve our people throughout [the] year 2023/24 and beyond.

The Bible says in the book of Proverbs 29:18 that *where there is no vision, the people perish*. One of the things that this verse makes clear is that a vision is vital for the lives of people and that without a vision people are left in fear, without hope and are left to wander in the dark down a path that can ultimately lead to destruction.

Madam President, the One Bermuda Alliance's Reply to the Throne Speech is a disappointing rebuttal. Instead of providing a solid vision and plan for Bermuda, it instead speaks about doom and gloom, suggest that those of us sitting on this side of the aisle are of questionable character and overall that this Government does not care for or about the people of Bermuda.

Additionally, as I sit here today, the OBA has not offered anything new. They have not provided any alternatives and have for the most part gone through each area of our Throne Speech document and just commented on each item.

Madam President, it would be easy for me to go through paragraph by paragraph, line by line, of the OBA's Reply to the Throne Speech to provide examples of what they are accusing this Government of. I want to ignore how the OBA is painting a picture that life in Bermuda is dark and gloomy and our economy is in turmoil and this Government does not believe in good governance in any shape or form and that we have no plan or vision to create a first-class educational system, that we have no plan for better health care in Bermuda and that overall those who sit on this side of the aisle are people of questionable and unsavoury character.

Madam President, I could take the OBA to task for all of these things that they are accusing this Government of. But I instead would rather focus on the accomplishments of this Government and tie them to our vision and plans for Bermuda as contained in the Throne Speech. First Lady Michelle Obama said at the Democratic Convention on 25 July 2016 that she taught her daughters that when people imply cruelty and untruths, you don't stoop to their levels but instead she employs the motto that *when they go low, we go high*. And so today I will stay high and speak about some of the PLP's accomplishments.

Madam President, how fitting that our Throne Speech begins with our continued focus and vision on education reform and how we as a Government are continuing to execute that plan. In particular, the Throne Speech mentions that 14 months ago, 289 S1 students entered Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge Academy as the first participants in the Signature Learning Programmes. The Signature Learning Programmes enable students to develop the skills, knowledge and relationships, to follow their passions, build on their talents and achieve their career and further educational aspirations.

Madam President, I had the unique opportunity a few months ago to work with the Association of Bermuda International Companies (ABIC) to assist in teaching educators about the insurance industry in Bermuda so that they could in turn start teaching the same to their Signature School students. The educators were fascinated with what they were learning about, the fact that Bermuda is one of the top three insurance centres in the world, is the leading offshore reinsurance centre and is the leading captive insurance domicile in terms of premium volume and capital and surplus. Sessions like these are equipping our educators so that they can equip our students with the necessary knowledge and skills around Bermuda's leading industries so that they can look at choosing careers at an early age in areas where they know they will have opportunities to have thriving careers here in Bermuda.

Madam President, as part of this Government's commitment to education reform, the Throne Speech outlines the next phase in the development of the Signature Schools where Sandys Secondary Middle School will house the next Signature Programme,

which is geared towards hospitality, tourism and education services. I live in the West End, Madam President, and I can tell you there is a buzz of excitement in the area about the development of the Sandys Secondary's Signature Programme. We thank persons like Mrs. Valerie Dill who are helping to create that excitement amongst those of us in the west.

Madam President, the Throne Speech also mentions the continued establishment of the parish schools, how in 2023 the school year began with the opening of Francis Patton and Purvis Primary schools and that the next two schools to come online will be Harrington Sound Primary and the Elliot Primary. Having a parish primary school in each parish will create a learning hub in each parish, mobilising the strength and assets of communities in support of our schools. This model will provide the much needed support for teaching and learning, improve dedicational programmes and initiatives, and create strong authentic partnerships to help students transform into places that are relevant to the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners in Bermuda. The parish schools provide a hub for community activity, centred around learning and development for our students and the community at large.

Madam President, the parish schools assist with the Government's objectives of equity, impact and resourcing, ensuring that no child is left behind and that every learner is elevated irrespective of their background or current circumstance, that each child would be provided with the necessary life skills training so that they can lead impactful personal and professional lives once they have graduated from the school system and that this Government intends to do this through better resourcing and economies of scale.

Madam President, yes, there is much to be done with education reform, but the work has started and the vision that this Government has for education reform is coming to fruition as we continue to execute the plan that is set before us.

Madam President, I would like to now turn our attention towards the economy. The Throne Speech highlights the fact that in spite of the global challenges of inflation, high interest rates, supply chain issues and continued tensions and wars in the Ukraine and the Middle East, all which translate to some local impacts in our own economy, employment in Bermuda has still increased. International business has expanded, consumer spending driven by increased household expenditure in exports is up year on year.

Madam President, economic data that has come out through the course of 2023 confirms that Bermuda's economy is growing, leading to an expansion of jobs available for Bermudians. The 2022 Labour Force Survey that was issued during 2023 highlights that Bermudian employment is up, Bermudian unemployment is down and more of our young Bermudians are now working.

Madam President, I would now like to highlight some of the headlines from that report. Firstly, Bermuda's working population has returned to near COVID-19 levels increasing from 33,496 in November 2020 to 35,438 in November 2022. Secondly, the growing confidence in the Island's strengthening economy and our future is evidenced by the addition of 1,942 jobs in Bermuda's labour market. This growing working population included both an increase in the number of Bermudians, a plus 6.0 per cent increase, and non-Bermudians plus 4.9 per cent.

Madam President, quite simply put, Bermudians are back to work. More specifically, the Bermudian unemployment rate declined from 9.6 per cent in November 2020 to 3.5 per cent in November 2022 and even lower than the 4.4 per cent Bermudian unemployment rate reported in November 2019. Not only are more people working in Bermuda, but workers are also earning more.

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** Madam President, a point of order.

#### POINT OF ORDER

*[Misleading]*

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** The Senator is misleading the Senate.

**The President:** Senator De Couto—

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** The Government's own report shows that there are fewer jobs in Bermuda now than there were three years ago.

Thank you, Madam President.

**Sen. Leslie Robinson:** Madam President, this is from—

**The President:** That is not a point of order.

**Sen. Leslie Robinson:** —the Labour report. I would ask Senator De Couto to go and look at it. It is online.

Not only are more people working in Bermuda, but workers are also earning more, with the median income increasing from \$64,033 in November 2020 to \$65,725 in November 2022, an increase of 2.7 per cent. The Progressive Labour Party Government continues to invest in the local workforce to boost the economy as it is keen to create an environment where Bermudians can flourish in the workplace.

Madam President, it is also exciting to see that more of our young people are gaining vital work experience and, as a result, our youth unemployment rate (i.e., those persons aged 16 to 24 years old) dropped from 32.1 per cent in 2020 to 11.1 per cent [in 2022]. The improved labour force is a direct result of initiatives like the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation Summer Student Entrepreneurship Programme and

the Youth Pitch competition as well as the Department of Workforce Development Summer Employment Programme, the apprenticeship scheme and training opportunities which have provided opportunities for permanent employment. These programmes implemented under this PLP Government are examples of the investment in youth-centric incentives to secure Bermuda's future.

Madam President, we are also committed to executing the youth employment strategy. This strategy will continue to leverage existing mechanisms to prepare young Bermudians for successful careers and gainful employment. In addition, this Government is executing personal employment plans which will identify barriers to employment, skills and career assessment needs and create plans to guide clients towards self-sustainability.

Madam President, this Government is also in the process of creating a National Certification and Apprenticeship Board. This Board will focus on administering national certification, developing much needed skills trades and increasing promotion and advocacy for apprenticeship schemes that benefit Bermudians. The Government's investment in the local workforce is a positive step towards boosting the economy. By creating an environment where Bermudians can flourish in the workplace, the Government is ensuring that Bermuda has a strong foundation for future growth. Focusing on the workforce development will ensure that Bermudians are equipped with the necessary tools required to remain competitive.

While there is more work to be done, these impressive employment statistics are evidence of the effectiveness of this PLP Government's economic policies and their commitment to listen and respond to the needs of Bermudians and providing increased opportunities for development and advancement. While the news of job growth is positive, this Government will continue tirelessly to ensure that Bermudians are adequately prepared for the present and future world of work. The commitment is reflected in the significant increase in government scholarships awarded to Bermudians.

Madam President, I also note that strategic priority five of the Economic Development Strategy (which is investing in people) is one of the key initiatives of the plan to execute the National Workforce Development Strategy. This will lay the foundation for a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce development system that will ensure Bermudians are prepared for and able to identify employment opportunities.

Finally, Madam President, as Junior Minister of Public Works, I must address some comments that continue to be made by the Opposition about the quality of roads and infrastructure as a whole. Madam President, firstly, I want to remind the listening public that this Ministry is responsible for sustaining Bermuda's critical resources including roads, water supplies,

parks, public lands, quangos, municipalities and services such as sewage and waste collections. I also note from a recent press conference the Minister stated that this Government recognises that much of the critical infrastructure on which the public relies requires upgrading or repairs following years of decay and dereliction. And, yes, carrying out these vital upgrades will require serious determination, substantial financial investment and commitment on the part of the Government. It is a commitment this Government has undertaken so that Bermuda can maintain its footing as a modern country.

Madam President, the Throne Speech mentioned the need to continue to prioritise the improvement of Bermuda's infrastructure. The Government will continue with its plan to provide significant infrastructure improvements including an objective over the next few years to scrutinise the Island's waste requirements. This initiative for Tynes Bay Waste-to-[Energy] management facility will see the Government invest \$22 million over the next few years to shore up the depot's most essential systems. The investment forms part of a larger refurbishment of the facility to extend its useful life by another 25 years.

Madam President, in keeping with the waste and water needs, the first phase of the water and sewage infrastructure master plan being carried out in St. George's and Southside, St. David's, will be completed by March. This phase will establish completely new systems and processes for the treatment of sewage and the production and delivery of water. In addition to new piping, it includes new reverse osmosis and sewage treatment plants.

Madam President, another primary strategy on the PLP's agenda will be to carry on with our work to merge government quangos where possible in an overarching effect to bring down the operational costs of the public service. One example is the unification of the Bermuda Land Development Company and the West End Development Corporation. The Government's efforts show the sensitivity of this Government towards the need to drive down cost while maintaining a high degree of effectiveness at the same time. During this legislative session, the public can expect legislation to this extent ensuring that we can do more with less while providing an excellent quality/price ratio. The challenge of delivering public sector services at a reasonable cost is faced by governments worldwide and is not just unique to Bermuda.

Madam President, another initiative of the Government's legislative agenda is the safeguarding of access to affordable housing, something fundamental to the Ministry and also to the people of Bermuda. We are acutely aware of the diminishing stock of affordable housing in this country along with the implications and reduced opportunities for everyday Bermudians to rent homes that fit their budget. Concentrated action on this subject is vital considering the high cost of living on the Island which ranks among the world's top-tier in terms of cost of living. The Government doesn't believe it is

reasonable nor sustainable to expect families to pay some of the rents currently being sought on the rental market. The people have rightfully turned to the Government for assistance and this PLP Government is delivering.

In this regard, the Bermuda Housing Corporation will push on with its renovation of 137 older BHC housing units over the next three-and-a-half years. While 60 of these units are currently occupied, the remaining 77 are not in use and will be brought online as new rental homes once the project is completed. This project will take the total number of rental units under the BHC's remit to 777. This work will bring back online every unit that Bermuda Housing Corporation has in its inventory. But this is not the only thing we are doing to increase the number of rental units available. Additionally, the 77 new units will be subject to the Rent Geared to Income programme where a quarter of the household income forms the rent plus a mandatory 10 per cent savings to provide families with the means to graduate to home ownership or the private sector.

Also note that this Government understands the concerns of landlords who are declining to rent their units for a variety of reasons and bring awareness to one of BHC's programmes in which the Corporation will manage a landlord's rental properties for them. This programme helps to increase the supply of affordable rental units to the public while serving as a great tool and resource for homeowners looking for the sustainability of having a long-term tenant without the hassle of rent collection and property supervision. These are responsibilities of the Bermuda Housing Corporation that are undertaken on behalf of the landlord. The key here, through the BHC, is that they will not pay market rates, but reasonable rates as we assume responsibilities of the rentals.

The key message from the Ministry of Public Works' legislative agenda is that the Ministry is listening and is taking action to meet the critical needs of our population. This Government is committed to delivering on our responsibilities.

Madam President, in conclusion, as I said earlier, it would have been easy for me to go through paragraph by paragraph, line by line of the negative comments that the OBA's Throne Speech Reply is filled with. Even today we have heard even further negative comments stating that we have provided junkyard comments on items contained in this Government's Throne Speech. Today, the Government was likened to the *Titanic* and that we are a sinking ship. Madam President, instead, I focused on the positive accomplishments that this Government has achieved and have tied them to our vision and plans for Bermuda as contained in the Throne Speech.

Our Throne Speech is about *Serving the People* of Bermuda. Our accomplishments thus far show that we are delivering and will continue to deliver as our goal is to create a better Bermuda for all.

Madam President, the OBA may have gone low with their Throne Speech Reply, but we will focus on high and continue to speak to our accomplishments as a Government.

Thank you.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Leslie Robinson.

And we have an indication that Senator Arianna Hodgson will now have the floor to speak.

Senator Hodgson, you have the floor.

**Sen. Arianna Hodgson:** Thank you, Madam President. I will be brief—

[Laughter]

**Sen. Arianna Hodgson:** But I did feel the need to contribute to today's debate.

Today we were actually supposed to come here to commence the general debate on the Government's Throne Speech, but instead I have had to listen to persons who are so out of touch speak as though they speak on behalf of the masses. To presume that one person can represent the diversity of an entire group oversimplifies the richness of voices within our community and so I actually tend to refrain from the claims of *they said* and *they feel*.

Madam President, I think it is important that we recognise that as sweet as it sounds, Bermuda is not another world. So, yes, we are not alone in our challenges. We are not immune to the geopolitical tension surrounding us, the rising cost of living, inflation or the increased cost of doing business regardless of the jurisdiction, nor are we absent from the many societal challenges that have been highlighted and, in some cases, exacerbated over the past few years.

As a Government, we are committed to entering this next season addressing all of the little things that matter to each of us and that actually came from some internal conversations we had about, *Listen, there are some basic things that haven't been addressed and need to be addressed so that we can ensure that the Bermudian public are able to access all of these programmes and initiatives that we have created just for them*. When we talk about the customer service experience, when we talk about government efficiencies, when we talk about continuing the work that has already begun in legislative sessions before, we are doing all of these things with Bermudians at heart.

Madam President, since being appointed to the Senate back in 2020, we have had one platform and three Throne Speeches. And in our 2020 platform we promised to rebuild Bermuda with Bermudians at heart. We began by acknowledging that we must continue to focus on the investment and policies needed to spread economic growth, to get Bermudians back to work, to restore hope, to spark entrepreneurship and innovation and to build a more prosperous Bermuda that provides

opportunity to all Bermudians, while also creating wealth for future generations.

Madam President, we promised education reform and we are delivering. We are delivering on the phasing out of middle schools, the introduction of parish primaries and the institution of Signature Learning Programmes that our children are actually enjoying. We promised to reform banking laws, an uncomfortable conversation that has begun and will continue, and we are going to make those promises. We are going to continue the work as it relates to the green energy revolution and we are going to continue to look for ways to partner with members of our community to ensure that we are all on the same page about why this actually does matter for us as such a small island nation.

We have always supported small and medium-sized businesses. Those are our people, and we made a pledge to provide even more support to these persons through the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation. If anybody has looked at any of their programmes, if anybody has checked the newspapers, the evidence is there. They are doing the work, and it is working. We have committed to transforming the City of Hamilton into a living city and while I would love to see us take it way down to Front Street, we are doing what needs to be done to ensure that persons may be able to own a piece of land in the city as opposed to outside of the city as we had initially hoped.

We talked about the capital projects that we would move forward, that we would support. We talked about the trenching. We talked about the building. We talked about the impacts of poor deals that have short-handed our ability to do a lot of the great things that we want to do in our community. We committed to addressing homelessness and it is still an issue, but we are doing the work. We are having the conversations and we are forming the partnerships needed to support our homeless population. And we are also further supporting women, children and families in many different capacities. We committed to creating a nation of owners and that would take form in many different ways. And the truth, Madam President, is that we have actually pushed through a lot of legislation in these past three years. I would say almost 99 per cent of that legislative change or the introduction of those legislative bits were supported by the One Bermuda Alliance.

I am often confused when we get here, and it is not always in this space, so negative, but I don't understand why it seems that we are on such totally different pages when it comes to how we move Bermuda forward. We have increased child day care allowance. And I get it. It is concerning that persons are having to pay these prices for child care. But ultimately we know that it is an investment in our future.

We introduced the transitional living programme for those who are transitioning out of foster care. We had initially gotten some pushback but we have moved ahead, and guess what? These persons have a place to call home.

We introduced the mortgage guarantee programme and we have moved from Phase 1 to Phase 2, where nearly 50 persons are now able to own a piece of the rock.

Public Works hasn't gotten it all right in terms of the roads and the trees and the shrubbery. But guess what? We are providing additional, affordable housing for Bermudians.

We know about the payroll tax relief. We have talked about that endlessly. We have talked about the increased pensions for seniors. We have talked about the changes that we are making to ensure that seniors and other persons are able to get affordable medications and we are seeing how far we can take that. Right?

We also looked at initiatives championed by Minister Hayward to make sure that persons are getting the money that is owed them in the forms of tips and gratuities. We are ensuring that persons are protected from harassment within the workplace. We have increased funding for scholarships, and I don't have to beat the head over that. We know what the other Government did.

We have increased funding for summer employment. We know what that looked like years ago. We have increased financial assistance for those looking to go to the Bermuda College and we have also made it so that anybody with a 3.0 [GPA] or above would not even think about where they have to get the money to be able to utilise our services at the Bermuda College.

We have had the youth employment strategy and we are seeing the benefits of that strategy. We have generally increased the benefits that persons receive from Financial Assistance. And I think that the Minister of Education gets a lot of flak, but it is a great feat, and I was just having this conversation for us to have undergone educational reform at such a time as this. We are way overdue. We know that. But guess what? We are making progress and the children are benefitting from it.

Madam President, the truth is that there is a lot more that we want to do, a lot more that we can do and a lot more that we will do. Minister Hayward said it last week: the *good news struggles to remain relevant* and this is why I am personally committed to exploring ways that we can better inform the public of the social supports that are available to them.

There is absolutely no reason for the Opposition to continuously allude to doom and gloom. The truth is that the economy is rebounding. The truth is that there are more Bermudians working. I can tell you that I know about 10 or 20 who have gained employment over the past year. The truth is that entrepreneurs are receiving more support. The truth is that international business feels that they are being heard and listened to. The truth is that our infrastructure needs work, and guess what? That takes money. The truth is that we will

reduce the debt and we will balance the budget for the first time in a long time, Madam President.

As I begin to wrap up, I want to make it clear that as a younger Member of the Legislature, I do recognise the importance of holding people to account and of speaking truth to power. I also recognise the stance of the Opposition and I understand our responsibility as the Government of the day. But what I cannot take, Madam President, and I actually wish we had removed a lot of this rhetoric from our conversation, is this consistent line of statements being shared that are rooted in biased, prejudiced and unfounded assumptions.

I am tired of hearing about friends and family when under the rule of another Government it was simply business. I don't have to remind anybody of Morgan's Point or an airport deal that has rerouted not only millions of dollars of profits out of our country but also the terminal fees, the landing fees, the departure fees that are not going towards helping our people in this country. I am tired of the notion that our people cannot lead, that we cannot manage finances, that we do not understand the economy or the data that speaks for itself. We cannot negotiate deals in the best interest of our people, apparently (that's the notion), and we cannot rely on the expertise that exists within and around this party.

It is disgusting. If you can speak about the disparity and performance between the public and private schools, let's talk about how we got to the space that we are in—and perhaps that is a conversation for another day.

The fact is that we have Ministers, the Leader of our party, who believe in an education system, who have to ensure that it is the best product for their children, for our children. And I often say that . . . my daughter is actually in private school, but guess what? I am now thinking about how she re-assimilates potentially into the public school system because they are doing a lot of great things that are not being done in private schools. And while we are on that point, let's look at collaboration. Why can't our private schools do more to support our public schools? Why can't private entities do more to support our young people?

Madam President, regardless of when the next election is called, I want each of us to start thinking about the Bermuda that we envision for the next 10, 15 or 20 years. Creating such a vision requires collective effort, collaboration and a commitment to *positive* change. It involves individuals, communities, businesses and governments working together to build a future that reflects shared values and aspirations. I actually think it would be a relatively easy feat if persons chose to refrain from spewing distrust in the leadership of this country. The truth is that I am one of those optimists who looks forward to the future. I look forward to the challenges and being able to witness Bermudians respond to those challenges as we have always done.

Madam President, in my day today I am thinking about the fact that my daughter may never need to

walk into a bank. That she may never go to a post office to pick up a package. That she may never have to deposit and stand in line at the bank or even walk into the Transport Control department (and we all know how that goes).

The truth, Madam President, is that in the future we are going to anticipate automation impacting various government services. Services like tax processing, online permit applications . . . and you know we haven't gotten that right, but we are working towards it, Madam President.

I love this time of year because we all start to think about the things we can do a little bit better, what we want to accomplish before our time is up and we recognise that we have the ability to tie up any last bits and to chart a new course. Let us go into this next year thinking about how we can be the change we wish to see in our homes, in our relationships, in our workplaces and our schools and wherever we find ourselves in our communities. In the year ahead I am challenging the OBA to do more, to become more. I want to see those six persons who sit in another place and the three in this room actually engage with the Minister and the Ministry of Education and really get to understand the work that is being done to reform our education system. It bothers me that for the past two years the Minister has done everything but beg for each of us to participate in this process.

I want you all to go out and engage with the students, the teachers . . . not the *Royal Gazette* or misinformed allies. Come and let us know what is working, what is not working. Let us know what challenges have been identified and bring them to a Minister who wants to see our young people succeed.

Madam President, I also want to see how the OBA will support our young people because I have yet to hear any member of the Opposition speak about their ideas for early childhood development or youth employment programmes or even additional support for mental health. These are problems that are impacting all of us and it is going to take a united effort to address.

I want to see how the OBA is working to support our seniors, but I do not expect much from a group that doesn't seem to understand why we have had to increase pension support, why we assist seniors with home improvements or why we have introduced additional measures to support seniors and other vulnerable populations as they access government services.

I want to see the One Bermuda Alliance respond to our housing crisis and they might be even encouraged to repurpose or even rent out those old buildings that were paid off years ago, thanks to *friends and family* or *business*.

Before I finish, Madam President, . . . actually, I have a few things I also wanted to share. Apologies.

[Laughter]

**Sen. Arianna Hodgson:** I also want to know how the OBA will go about curbing antisocial behaviours, Madam President. I want to really know what they actually believe a zero-tolerance for gangs looks like.

If we really understand the current challenge, we have to recognise and acknowledge that these problems were not created overnight. The stage had been set long before 1998, and that too is a conversation for another day, Madam President. I personally know the young men who had made mistakes, who were never taught their value, who were never given the opportunity to even explore their potential. I know the single mothers who are struggling. I know the seniors who are taking care of babies and toddlers. I also know many people who came from good families with what we consider a good upbringing and they have been drawn to participate in antisocial activities. The point is that they are all our people and it is time that we go out and reach them where they are. It genuinely hurts me because I know a number of young men and women who are willing and able to do the work but just need somebody to take a chance on them.

Madam President, ultimately I want to see how they, the One Bermuda Alliance, can change the horrendous picture outlined on the second page of their response to our Government's commitment to serving the people in this next legislative session.

Madam President, I have not said these things in jest because I recognise that even while in Opposition, we can serve people. Just ask the PLP, we wrote the playbook.

Regardless of where we sit, we understand the importance of reaching our people. In fact, that is what we are here to do. That is what they, the Opposition, are here to do as well. It is not a task left solely for us as the Government of the day. It is a calling on each of us as Legislators and leaders in our community.

Madam President, we the Progressive Labour Party will continue to do what we have always done and that is execute. If we were not executing the Opposition would have been even shorter in their remarks today because the truth is that we are doing things and there are things for them to criticise, but ultimately we are doing the work. The people see that. And I thank you, Madam President, for allowing me this time this afternoon.

*[Desk thumping]*

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Arianna Hodgson. Minister, Darrell, you have the floor.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, we have been here for a while now and it always brings a smile to my face when we can come to this place at this time of year for our general debate which is typically to speak and support

the Throne Speech of the Government or to offer a critique of the opposite party. It is always an opportunity to really reset the dial as to what your particular political party ideologies are. I will in my rebuttal to what we have heard and listened to repeat what I started with and that is the Progressive Labour Party's ethos of serving the people.

Before I go any further, I would like to commend my team, the Progressive Labour Party team, today for reminding the public that we are here to serve them. What I am reminded of, Madam President, is the term *servant leadership*. In turning my attention to some of the points that came from across the aisle, they accuse us of political theatre, and while I attended an amazing show a couple of weeks ago, *Sarafina*, and that was theatre . . . That was quality entertainment. But I am shocked to hear the One Bermuda Alliance refer to anything in this Throne Speech as a theatrical production.

We are dealing with serious matters, Madam President.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Madam President, point of order, please.

#### POINT OF CLARIFICATION

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** I just want to say that I was the one who made the comment about political theatre, and it was not in response to something that was in the Throne Speech. It was actually the delivery that was made by the Government Minister in his presentation.

I just wanted to make that clarification. Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you for that clarification. Continue, Minister.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Once again, the clarification that has come from across the aisle allows me to double down on the point that I am making.

What the Opposition Senate Leader may view as a show, Madam President, was a passionate plea and a passionate example of what this party is dealing with every single day to serve the needs of everyday Bermudians. It is no theatre, Madam President. This is real life issues.

The One Bermuda Alliance asked the question, *Is the Government in touch with the people?* I can speak from personal experience, Madam President. When people very close to me say, *You look tired. You look exhausted. You are everywhere.* And my response is, *I am happy to serve the people.*

Unfortunately, Madam President, I cannot say the same for individuals who wear the colour red to represent their political party. In the last two months, I have been to no less than four national football games. I have been to netball tournaments to reopen the netball season. I have been to motocross events, cricketing

events, Premier League football games at Southampton Rangers. Unfortunately, Madam President, I have not seen *anyone* at those community events from across the aisle. I think they should be very careful when they accuse the Progressive Labour Party of not being in touch with the people.

A question was asked, Madam President, once again by the One Bermuda Alliance Senate Leader, *Where is the sense of urgency?* You might have seen me almost fall out of my chair, Madam President, because what it sounded like to me was that the One Bermuda Alliance is full of walking contradictions. I have got the Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance accusing . . . sorry, of the Senate, in the Senate, accusing the Progressive Labour Party Government of not having a sense of urgency when just last sitting a Member her party, a Senator in *this* place, accused the Government of rushing through legislation and saying that the Government should *slow down*. And this was a matter concerning Financial Assistance.

I listen carefully, Madam President, service to the people is important and I will not allow contradictions of that magnitude to slide in this place, Madam President, when we are serving the people of Bermuda. The Senate Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance says that she engages with people on social media. And while that may be very—

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Madam President—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** —well and good, Madam President—

#### POINT OF ORDER

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Madam President, point of order. I did not say I engaged with people on social media. I said that I was reading things that I had learned on social media. I am not engaging with them. I have seen the instances that I read about on social media.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you for your point of order. Minister, continue.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Madam President, I started with a lesson and maybe a Senate colleague will give her a lesson on social media because when you are reading social media messages, in today's world, that is considered an engagement. Thank you, Madam President. Once again, my point has been made.

I have said this before that while I know that the OBA Senate Leader does her fair share of canvassing, I do know that the Leader in the Senate of the One Bermuda Alliance does attend community events in my neighbourhood, I wish (and I have said this before) that she would take her colleagues by the hand and lead

them to the people and show them what real community engagement looks like. Because although I do not have a lot of time to engage up and down on social media, I have a lot of friends through those community engagements. And I can tell you, I don't know where Senator De Couto finds the time, Madam President, but the amount of stuff that he likes to post on social media about me doing my job is quite a lot. I would suggest, just in my rebuttal, that the Senate Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance take Senator De Couto by the hand and show him what the inside of Harrington Workmen's Club actually looks like. Take him by the hand and bring Senator Robinson along with him and take him up to Southampton Rangers, where my grandfather was a founding member, and let them experience a full porch of revellers watching Southampton Rangers verst Paget Lions and show them what community engagement and service to the people actually looks like, Madam President. Because sitting behind a keyboard where you don't get any response is not full community engagement, Madam President.

I will not, I cannot sit here and listen to the rhetoric on the other side about how this Government is not in touch with the people. And while I am at it, after they finish with the sporting activities, take a walk down to Blue Waters Anglers Club on a Friday and experience their fish fry dinner.

*[Inaudible interjections]*

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** They got one. They got one!

*[Laughter]*

**The President:** Got one.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Got one. My mate, they got one.

*[Laughter and crosstalk]*

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** All right. Here we go.

**The President:** Carry on, Minister.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Here we go, Madam President, all of them trying to throw out their street credentials all of a sudden.

*[Laughter]*

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** It looks like I struck a nerve over there! I tell you.

Then we had to sit and listen to the newest old Senator, I don't know which one he is, *old soul*, I am not sure. I heard that on social media too, but we had to listen to the new Senator in this place . . . I am sorry, I think it was still the One Bermuda Alliance Senate

Leader. I am getting confused, there was a lot of fluff going on. But the One Bermuda Alliance Senate Leader talked about four protests in the last year. Those were the figures that she said!

I will give a little history lesson on protests. Sometime in between 2012 and 2016, somewhere in there, I was an educator, a member of the Bermuda Union of Teachers. And I remember spending five entire days marching, standing down at Cabinet Office protesting something called furlough days, something that most of us had never heard about before. The definition of that is *taking money out of your pocket*, right? And then as we are approaching the sad anniversary, we want to talk about protests? Can we talk about it Senator Robinson? It was December 2, Madam President, when one of the most recent and horrific events to take place in Bermuda coming out of a peaceful protest saw someone in Government order that *pepper spray* be deployed to move a group of protesters, many of which—it has been well documented, Madam President—were seniors.

Madam President, it is sad. I get choked up thinking about that because it would have been one thing if that would have been the end of the story. But you know this is where social media and video gets people in trouble because one Senator that sits in this place today when it came to protests thought it was okay to make a mockery of the seniors that got mashed up with pepper spray and referred to it as *pepper mist*, Madam President.

I am not going to stand here—

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Point of order, Madam President.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** —and I cannot sit here—

**The President:** Senator Robinson, what is your point—

**POINT OF ORDER**  
[*Impugning integrity*]

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** I would love—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Here we go, Madam President.

**The President:** Senators!

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** —for the Government Leader, the Minister, instead of crafting his narrative to realise that not only did I apologise for those statements, not only were they almost a decade ago, but I apologised *publicly* for those statements. I don't understand why he would bring them up to impugn my character or to elicit that I supported the pepper spraying of those seniors.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** History remains, Madam President, whether apology or not. It was said! But thank you once again for confirming.

We talk about protests, Madam President, and I am getting my point here in my rebuttal. But the One Bermuda Alliance (I said before) seems to be a walking contradiction when it comes to their memories and what the Progressive Labour Party is doing as far as servicing the people.

I heard them talk about banking and why isn't the casino gambling up and running. Maybe if individuals, and I am not calling any names, spent more time reading and researching and not whatever they do on social media, they would realise that the holdup of the casino gambling is a *banking issue*. Those are not my mates. I will leave it there.

Senator De Couto (and I have seen it before, I have heard of it) has this infatuation with salaries, cars and trips. I left here during the lunch break, Madam President, and at the request of one [member] of the National Sports Governing Body I went to be a part of a tournament that they were very excited to be having. If you listen to Senator De Couto tell the story, he thinks I should walk up there.

Madam President, the Progressive Labour Party is busy working. And while he has time to run around and take pictures of everywhere he sees a GP car, that is an indication of . . . the GP cars are everywhere, Madam President, because the Cabinet colleagues are working. We are serving the people, Madam President.

If you let Senator De Couto tell it, it goes on to a point that my colleague said a minute ago, it is those undertones that certain individuals and certain individuals of a certain party should work for free.

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** Madam President—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Oh, here we go.  
That one hit a nerve.

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** That is a mischaracterisation of my statement.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Here we go.

**The President:** Senator De Couto—

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** Point of order.

**The President:** What—

**POINT OF ORDER**

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** He is mischaracterizing my statements, Madam President.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Mm-hmm.

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** For example, if I was to see—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Madam President—

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** —a GP car parked at a political event—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Madam President—

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** —that is not the people's business, Madam President.

**The President:** Senator De Couto—

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** Thank you.

**The President:** You have made your point of order. Minister, please continue.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Again, certain people are expected for work for free.

Madam President, anybody who knows me would know I can take my own trips. Very nice ones, if I wanted to. People who know me also know that I would rather be at my daughter's dance recital. I would rather be at my son's football games. But I signed up to work on behalf of the people of this country. That, Madam President, is servant leadership, something that [the] Senator from another side could learn a lot about.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Point of order, Madam President.

Could we ask that the Minister keep his comments to the Throne Speech? He has been on a tangent for the last 15 minutes—

**The President:** Senator Robinson—

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** —including the speaker before that.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** That is not a point of order.

**Sen. Dwayne Robinson:** Keep to the motion, please.

**The President:** Minister, continue your response.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** In the words of a colleague of mine who sits in another place, he didn't say it exactly like this, but it rings true and I heard someone else say it in a speech a couple of weeks ago (and this is part of being a servant leader). *Individuals will cheer your failures while at the same time whispering your successes.* I will say it again, *they will whisper your successes while cheering your failures.*

Madam President, while we have heard from everyone in the Chamber today and the Progressive Labour Party has reiterated and given tangible proof as to what servant leadership looks like and what serving the people looks like, after four hours of debate, Madam President, it is shocking (however, unsurprising) that the Opposition who is supposed to represent an alternative has zero plan and zero clue, Madam President, how to run a Government.

Thank you.

**The President:** Thank you, Minister Owen Darrell, and Senators. This has been an opportunity for each of you to respond to the Throne Speech and I thank you for your efforts today.

I would just like to make a comment and that is that this morning I acknowledged the presence of the Senator of Education, Minister Diallo Rabain, in the Gallery. And I would like to apologise to him now and to say that he was in fact here as the Acting Premier and so we, on behalf of you all and myself, thank him for his presence this morning. Before departing he did say that if the Senators want to have a presentation on the current educational plan, he is willing to provide it. That is something to think about and you can let me know your decisions on that.

Therefore Senators, I would say that we have given consideration to the Throne Speech, and I thank you all for your comments.

We will move on now with the agenda.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**The President:** Yes, I beg your pardon. Of course, we have to move . . . Minister, I apologise. You move your motion.

## MESSAGE TO THE GOVERNOR

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Madam President, I move that the following message be sent to Her Excellency the Governor.

May it please Your Excellency:

The Senate has the Honour to thank Your Excellency for the most gracious speech with which Your Excellency was pleased to open and present session of Parliament.

**The President:** Thank you, that message will be sent. Thank you, Minister Darrell.

## MOTIONS

**The President:** There are none.

## CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

**The President:** Would any Senator care to speak?  
Yes—

**Sen. John Wight:** Madam President, I would like to—

**The President:** Senator John Wight.

**Sen. John Wight:** —offer condolences to the family of the late Colin [Reed] Young, Sr. I noticed in today's newspaper Colin Young was a former CEO of BF&M and he passed away at the ripe old age of 101 years. I saw him just about a year ago, with a smile on his face and a sharp mind and body. He was a lovely gentleman who I got to know very well over the years, so I just want to pass on my condolences to the family of Colin Young.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator John Wight. I am sure the Senators, someone who has lived as long as over 100 years, we all need to congratulate him . . . sorry, the family, and acknowledge his long life.

Would any other Senator care to speak? Yes, Senator De Couto, you have the floor.

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** Thank you, Madam President.

I would like to send my condolences to the family of David Benevides. He was a well-known architect on the Island and past commodore of the [Royal] Bermuda Yacht Club and I believe [he was] the first Portuguese Bermudian commodore of the Club. I pass my condolences to his wife Georgia and their son Ryan and the rest of their family.

I would like to turn to sporting. I would like to congratulate all of the young sailors who competed at Sandys Boat Club and the Optimist National Championships. I can see a few people in this room who had children up there. I am sure Minister Darrell would be welcome at Sandys Boat Club, should he make it up there, whether in the bar or to meet the young sailors who battled it out in extremely windy and challenging conditions. I do declare an interest because my children are in there.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Sen. Dr. Douglas De Couto:** But I specifically congratulate Miguel Power, the defending champion who also won again this year and Nina Gotfredsen who came second and is the top female. The top sailors from this event have qualified to represent Bermuda at the North American Championships in Puerto Rico next year.

I would also like to send my congratulations and best wishes to the Bermudian team at the Star Sailors League in Gran Canaria helmed by Rockal Evans, a well-known local sailor, comet sailor as well as Finn sailor. They are going through a multi-step competition, and they have advanced to the next round.

Thank you for that time, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator De Couto.  
Would any Senator care to speak?  
Senator Tucker, you have the floor.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Thank you, Madam President.  
I would like to associate myself with the condolences expressed for Mr. David Benevides.

**The President:** Mm-hmm.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** He is a constituent, and his family are constituents and [constituency] 7. Also two other families I would like to express condolences to who are also constituents of [constituency] 7 and that is the family of Mrs. June Beek as well as the family of Mr. Robert Vosper.

Another family I would like to express condolences to is the family of Gordon Ricky Woolridge. I know Ricky very well.

**The President:** Mm-hmm.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** In fact, he calls my husband his son and of course he called me his daughter. I had seen him over the summer and had a good opportunity to have a chat with him and I was quite surprised when I found out that he had passed away. I would like to, again, express condolences to his family.

I would like to express congratulations to Collie Buddz. I did read in the paper that he has been nominated for a Grammy Award which is very, very exciting.

*[Inaudible interjection]*

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Yes, thank you, Minister Darrell who tells me that his correct name (which I did know) is Colin Harper.

**The President:** Mm-hmm.

*[Laughter]*

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** Thank you for that. Yes, I think that is very exciting. Exciting news for Bermuda and certainly for him and his family and like many of us I will be tuning in on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2024 to the Grammy Awards.

I would also like to associate congratulations to Conor White who achieved a bronze medal at the Pan-Am Games.

**The President:** Mm-hmm.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** I am saving the last congratulations which is to Nikky and Marilyn Bascome. Nikky Bascome is . . . obviously we all know he is a boxer—

**The President:** Mm-hmm.

**Sen. Robin Tucker:** —in Bermuda and he and his wife, Marilyn, joined in matrimony over the recent weekend. I just wanted to . . . sorry, on Friday; Friday gone. So I just wanted to express congratulations to them.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Tucker, Opposition Leader [in the Senate].

Would any other Senator care to speak? Yes, Senator Leslie Robinson, you have the floor.

**Sen. Leslie Robinson:** Thank you, Madam President.

First of all, I do also want to associate my condolences on the passing of my cousin Gordon Ricky Woolridge. He was just a wonderful, lovable person and anybody who knew him would be captivated by him, not just his mere presence but also his super intelligence. We would like again to just remember that family.

Also, I would like to express condolences to George Morton and his family. George Morton is, as most of us may know, he is the brother of Stanley Morton. But George Morton, the passing of his wife, Yvonne Morton. She was a faithful member of at my church, Bethel AME Church and in particular she served for many decades on our Pastor's Aid Society. She was also an active member of the Eastern Lioness [Lions Club]. I know those organisations where she served will be at a loss as a result of her passing.

On some other notes, I just want to . . . and I am sure the Minister of Sport is going to mention these things, but I want to congratulate our women's national football team for their accomplishments, particularly over the September/October period where they won just about every one of their games. So, we want to just send out congratulations to them.

And then also wish to just mention, and again the Sport Minister on the cultural side of things will probably also mention about the Troika production and *Sarafina!* and just the wonderful, wonderful production, an all-Bermudian cast. It was about more than 40 performers and the fact that they had to put on encore performances just because of the popularity of the show and the excellence that they brought to it. Well done to the entire production team.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Senator Robinson.

Would any other Senator care to speak? No—

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** I do, Madam President.

**The President:** Minister.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Madam President, thank you.

I would like to send quite a bit of congratulations, and they will all be surrounding the portfolios of which I hold. Whether that be the tourism realm, whether it be in the cultural realm or whether it be in the sporting realm.

I would like to start by congratulating and celebrating all of the athletes that went to the Pan-Am Games and I did acknowledge them by name before they went. But now the Pan-Am Games have concluded, you would have noticed that the flag did fly and it flew high, Madam President.

**The President:** Mm-hmm.

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** I just want to congratulate the sailors who qualified for the Olympic Games next year. There were track athletes, there were cyclists and there were swimmers who brought home personal bests. But one young man in particular who I had the pleasure of greeting at the airport when he returned was bronze medallist in the time trial, Mr. Conor White. I want to congratulate Conor (and I have told him this in person) for his bronze medal performance as well as his entire teammates as they represented Bermuda well at the Pan-Am Games in Santiago, Chile.

I also would like to congratulate the Gombey Warriors, the football team. They have been doing quite well recently and they have an upcoming football game this Friday night. I expect to see many individuals of the community there cheering on our male football team followed by the next week our female, women's team as well.

Congratulations to Jaydon Goddard, he is a young Bermudian bodybuilder who had recently turned professional in his sport. He is a former Berkeley Institute student who I had the pleasure of knowing well while I was at Berkeley Institute, and I wish him well on his continued progress in the world of bodybuilding. And what they say in bodybuilding, he received his "Pro Card."

Congratulations to . . . they are kind of becoming the cultural rave in Bermuda right now and that is Mr. Tino Martinez and the Tino Martinez Quintet on their most recent Thursday evening series that takes place at The Deep and in encourage everyone to support the jazz movement revival in Bermuda by getting up and seeing a show if they can.

Congratulations to Ms. Katura Horton-Perinchief. You would know that she was the first Black diver in the Olympics for her incredible stint as an official at the Pan-Am Games. I did speak in the Senate I think a year ago how a year ago they recognised women in sport, and she was actually recognised for her diving official duties. She did a stellar job down in Santiago, Chile.

Finally, I would like to congratulate, as was said earlier by Senator Leslie Robinson, the incredible cast and crew of *Sarafina!* It literally brought tears to my

eyes to be sitting and watching some of my former students who I had seen act like that when they were at the Berkeley Institute, also knowing that many of my former students were up in the booth lighting the stage or dealing with the sound or helping with backstage logistics. I want to congratulate Mr. Seldon Woolridge, Ms. (I know I am going to miss the name, sorry) Shoa Bean, and . . . I think there is one other that I am missing. I am sorry. For all the work that they put in as a Troika family to put on these productions and wholesome family entertainment. That is true theatre and I want to congratulate them for putting on that show, that most of Bermuda got a chance to see last week.

Thank you, Madam President.

**The President:** Thank you, Minister Darrell.

I would just like to associate myself with the congrats that you have given to all the athletes identified, as well as the musicians and the cast of *Sarafina!*

With that said now, we will move on.

### ADJOURNMENT

**Sen. the Hon. Owen Darrell:** Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President, I now ask that the Senate do adjourn to Wednesday, November 29.

**The President:** That is taken, so November 29 is when we will next meet.

However, would any Senator care to speak on the motion to adjourn? No?

Therefore, Senators, I thank you for your attendance and input today and indicate that the Senate stands adjourned.

Thank you.

*[At 3:18 pm, the Senate stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Wednesday, 29 November 2023.]*

*[This page intentionally left blank.]*